

ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAM

NEW GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES IN THE CAUCASUS: CASE STUDY OF KARABAKH
LIBERATION WAR

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İstanbul

2022

New Geopolitical Changes in the Caucasus: Case Study of Karabakh Liberation War

Kafkasya'da Yeni Jeopolitik Değişimler: Karabağ Kurtuluş Savaşı Örneği

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Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih : 26.10.2022
Toplam Sayfa Sayısı : 53

Keywords (Turkish)

- 1) Dağlık Karabağ
- 2) Savaş
- 3) Kafkaslar
- 4) Azerbaycan
- 5) Ermenistan

Keywords (English)

- 1) Nagorno Karabakh
- 2) War
- 3) Caucasus
- 4) Azerbaijan
- 5) Armenia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the Karabakh Liberation war has led to new geopolitical changes in the Caucasus. Caucasus has been as an important area because of its geographic position, geostrategic importance, and the wealth of natural resources and energy it contains. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the region's turmoil was on full display and provoked a number of conflicts between different countries. Even now, some of these problems remain unresolved. Deep and unsolved conflicts like the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis are common in the area. For Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Karabakh Crisis was more than simply a tense episode in the previous century. The main source of the issue goes back a long way in time. The difficulty of resolving the issue was exacerbated by the multiplicity of factors contributing to it. Azerbaijan, whose lands were occupied as a result of the crisis and conflicts, has for many years displayed an attitude in favor of solving the problem in accordance with international law and in a peaceful way. The Armenian state, on the other hand, has maintained its invasive and uncompromising stance for many years, with the tolerance of other European states, especially the United States of America and until 2020, the Russian Federation. Finally, after a short war that lasted for 44 days at the end of 2020, Azerbaijan was able to partially expel the invaders from the region. Even though Azerbaijan achieved a military victory, the conflict is still ongoing at the political and diplomatic levels. After that, it should play its own game on the chessboard in accordance with the trend and create a new strategy for each move. Research findings imply that the new period will affect the balance of power in a wider geography, including the Caucasus in particular and the countries surrounding the region in general. In this context, it is seen that Turkey-Azerbaijan cooperation has shaken the “status quo” that has been imposed in the region for 30 years. The new period has also revealed some consequences for Russia and Iran, which are influential countries in the region. As a matter of fact, it is not only the sensitivities in the Caucasus that shape the policy followed by Russia during the war. The "fragmented relationship" model that has developed in many different fields with Turkey has also been effective. In Turkey-Russia relations, where the problems have been compartmentalized recently, the issues sometimes involve cooperation and sometimes conflict. Therefore, the unique dynamics of Turkey-Russia relations, along with factors such as Azerbaijan's

relationship with Russia and the pro-Western attitude of the Pashinyan government, were influential in the process.

Key Words: Nagorno Karabakh, War, Caucasus, Geopolitics, Azerbaijan, Armenia.

Özet

Bu çalışma, Karabağ Kurtuluş Savaşı'nın Kafkasya'da nasıl yeni jeopolitik değişimlere yol açtığını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kafkasya coğrafi konumu, jeostratejik önemi ve içerdiği doğal kaynak ve enerji zenginliği nedeniyle önemli bir bölge olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra, bölgenin kargaşası tam anlamıyla ortaya çıktı ve farklı ülkeler arasında bir dizi çatışmayı kışkırttı. Şimdi bile, bu sorunlardan bazıları çözülmemiş durumda. Bölgede Dağlık Karabağ Krizi gibi derin ve çözülmemiş çatışmalar yaygın. Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan için Karabağ Krizi, geçen yüzyıldaki gergin bir olaydan daha fazlasıydı. Sorunun ana kaynağı çok eskilere dayanmaktadır. Sorunu çözmenin zorluğu, buna katkıda bulunan faktörlerin çokluğu ile daha da kötüleşti. Kriz ve çatışmalar sonucu toprakları işgal edilen Azerbaycan, uzun yıllar sorunun uluslararası hukuka uygun ve barışçıl bir şekilde çözülmesinden yana tavır sergilemiştir. Ermeni devleti ise, başta Amerika Birleşik Devletleri olmak üzere diğer Avrupa devletlerinin ve 2020 yılına kadar Rusya Federasyonu'nun hoşgörüsüyle, işgalci ve tavizsiz duruşunu uzun yıllar korumuştur. Nihayet 2020 yılının sonunda 44 gün süren kısa bir savaşın ardından Azerbaycan işgalcileri bölgeden kısmen çıkarmayı başardı. Azerbaycan askeri bir zafer elde etmiş olsa da, çatışma siyasi ve diplomatik düzeyde halen devam etmektedir. Bundan sonra, trende uygun olarak satranç tahtasında kendi oyununu oynamalı ve her hamle için yeni bir strateji oluşturmalıdır. Araştırma bulguları, yeni dönemin özelde Kafkasya ve genel olarak bölgeyi çevreleyen ülkeleri kapsayan daha geniş bir coğrafyada güç dengesini etkileyeceğini ima ediyor. Bu bağlamda Türkiye-Azerbaycan işbirliğinin bölgede 30 yıldır dayatılan “statüko”yu sarstığı görülüyor. Yeni dönem, bölgede etkili ülkeler olan Rusya ve İran için de bazı sonuçları ortaya çıkardı. Nitekim Rusya'nın savaş sırasında izlediği politikayı şekillendiren sadece Kafkasya'daki hassasiyetler değildir. Türkiye ile birçok farklı alanda gelişen "parçalı ilişki" modeli de etkili oldu. Son dönemde sorunların bölümlere ayrıldığı Türkiye-Rusya ilişkilerinde meseleler bazen işbirliği bazen de çatışmayı içeriyor. Dolayısıyla Azerbaycan'ın Rusya ile ilişkisi ve Paşinyan hükümetinin Batı yanlısı tutumu gibi faktörlerin yanı sıra Türkiye-Rusya ilişkilerinin kendine özgü dinamikleri de süreçte etkili olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dağlık Karabağ, Savaş, Kafkaslar, Jeopolitik, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan



Introduction

The Caucasus is a region that has been on the agenda for different reasons at different times in the world and has the potential to continue to be on the agenda. Problems in the Caucasus and the Caucasus region, especially after the collapse of the USSR, attracted the attention of the international environment and started to be on the agenda more intensely in the following periods (Berman, 2018). The exact borders of the region and the countries within the borders of the region have not been clarified even today. One of the most important ongoing problems in this region is the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Although it seems like a geographical problem, this situation, which includes many different problems behind it, deserves to be investigated academically. This problem concerns the neighboring countries as well as the parties. The fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem has not been resolved in accordance with international law until today, comes first because a higher authority that can restore the disturbed peace has not yet been formed in the region (Celac et al., 2019). Again, disagreements and even conflicts between international actors such as the Russian Federation, the United States of America, France, Turkey and Iran have an important role in filling the power vacuum in the region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has increased Turkey's strategic importance due to its geographical location and historical ties with the newly established states. This collapse caused issues for several nations in the area, notably Russia. Among the most important problems for Turkey are the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Armenia. The process shows that in the new situation that emerged at the end of the 20th century, Turkey is an important regional actor (Garibov, 2020). In this respect, the problems with Armenia are at the forefront of the situations that affect Turkey's role in the region. Nagorno-Karabakh impacts not just regional actors such as Turkey-Armenia, Iran-Azerbaijan ties, but also the supply of the Caspian's abundant petroleum resources to the world market. EU, US and Russian policies are directly influenced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey's ties with these nations are also affected by this conflict. As seen in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also prevents Armenia, which does not have natural resources, from benefiting from the opportunities in the region (German, 2012). For this reason, a step that Turkey will take in favor of Armenia before the problem is resolved will not only strengthen Armenia's hand but also negatively affect Turkey's

position and power in the region. Russia's long-term interests in regional security may not always align with those of local peace and stability advocates in the South Caucasus. Russia has serious mechanisms to maintain its influence on both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, are located in the South Caucasus. The fact that the South Caucasus is at the intersection of south-north and east-west energy and transportation lines is of great importance in that the Caspian Basin has energy resources. The important geopolitical position of the South Caucasus in the Asian continent has been enriched with new political, security and economic motives after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nagorno-Karabakh is located at the meeting point of the transit trade routes between the Caucasus, Asia and Europe. Since the region is in a position to control Armenia and Iran in terms of geopolitics, it has always been the center of attention of the great powers. Besides, the Karabakh region is the gateway to Anatolia. The region called “Dağlıq Qarabağ” in the Azerbaijani language is used as “Nagorno-Karabakh” in English and as “Artsakh” by Armenians.

Undoubtedly, the most important development of 2020 was the operation to liberate the occupied lands of Azerbaijan. The second Karabakh war, in which Azerbaijan removed Armenia from its lands with a 44-day operation, was not only a war between the two countries but also a milestone in the new geopolitical situation of the Caucasus. Thus, a radical change took place between the past and the future of the Caucasus. The regional power change and the new geopolitical reality in the Caucasus have been accepted by the global and regional powers. Mutual expressions of courtesy (although the intentions of the new quarterbacks were serious) were the signs that the competition would continue, including the promises made and the rules set between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia. It can be seen that the Russian-Turkish dialogue, which started in Astana and continued in Libya and the Caucasus, actually influenced the effectiveness of other global and regional players in these regions and that the double piece of the geopolitical pie had grown considerably (Celac et al., 2019). Others, who had to make do with what was left on the table after the division between Russia and Turkey, now openly declare that they are very uncomfortable with this situation, and they can no longer camouflage the ever-increasing external pressures against these two countries, on democratic grounds (Welt & Bowen, 2021). However, both in Russia and Turkey, political analysts and security experts do not observe their unease about the new Caucasus table (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). Everyone is aware that if there is no stability,

the upcoming war can lead the world to disaster. In this regard, this study aims to analyze how the Karabakh Liberation war has led to new geopolitical changes in the Caucasus.

This study is composed of six parts. In the first chapter, definitions of geopolitics are examined. In the second chapter which is called a literature review, after the characteristics of the Caucasus region in which the Nagorno-Karabakh region is located, its geopolitical importance, the socioeconomic structure of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the characteristics and historical reasons and development of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem are revealed. In addition, the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh is explained in this section. In the third part of the thesis, previous geopolitics in the South Caucasus are analyzed. In the fourth part of the thesis, the September 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Karabakh reconciliation with all its points such as the pre-Karabakh Liberation war period, the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War, the end of the Second Karabakh War, the role of third parties in Second Karabakh War and winners at the Karabakh table are examined. The fifth chapter analyzes current geopolitics in the South Caucasus including the changing geopolitics of Azerbaijan and Armenia in terms of Iran, Russia, Turkey and the Western Quadrilateral and the process of inflamed geopolitical struggle in the Caucasus with the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In the sixth chapter, the foreign policy of Azerbaijan is analyzed. It will be concluded that that the new period will affect the balance of power in a wider geography, including the Caucasus in particular and the countries surrounding the region in general.

1. Geopolitics and Nagorno Karabakh Problem

1.1 Definition and Discussions

Geopolitics, etymologically, is the combination of the terms geo and politics. Geo-place means earth. The term policy derives from the word polis, which means city and city-state. It is possible to see many different definitions of geopolitics in the scientific literature. Almost all of these definitions include theories of state, geography and politics. As the beginning of contemporary geopolitics, Ratzel's work "Political Geography" published in 1899 is accepted. Ratzel (1899) claims that in order to address the issues brought on by interactions with the geographical environment, the geopolitical state investigates its relationships with its surroundings, neighbors, and in particular the geographical environment. Ratzel (1899) characterized geopolitics as a subject that concentrates more on political situations and their study from a geographical viewpoint, and as a multidisciplinary discipline.

Kjellen, who used the term geopolitics for the first time in 1916, stated that geography had a great influence on the formation of the state. In the words of the author, the existence of the state is in the power of the state and geopolitics is a discipline that examines the relationship of the state with its environment (Tunander, 2001). According to Kjellen, Ratzel focused too much on the physical factors and geographical location in the development of the state, examined the effects of these factors on the individual, and overstated the relationship (Tunander, 2001). In this regard, states are beings with reason and consciousness like individuals, and he even said that states talk and act like individuals, envy each other and become friends or enemies with each other. According to Kjellen, the state is a living organism and can develop or cease under certain laws.

Geopolitics is the relationship of the geographical region in which it resides and the political way of life that has evolved as a result of the effects that historical events have had on the location it resides (Glosserman, 2022). Haushofer is of the opinion that a large area is necessary for the size of a state and thinks of the collapse of a state in terms of the narrowing of its field. He is of the opinion that the continuation of a state can only be possible by gaining territory, otherwise, it will be wiped out (Wolkersdorfer, 1999). Geopolitics, on the other hand, is a dynamic discipline and the political situation cannot remain constant for a long time. As a field of study, it is characterized as one that evaluates, and studies the global power centers of the day under its influence, the powers in the area, investigate, and decide the objectives, and the circumstances and

phases of accomplishing the goals. (Petta, 2019). In Petta's words (2019), geographers and political geographers prepared the birth of geopolitics, and political scientists developed it. It emerged as a result of a geopolitical necessity, and we see deep traces of geopolitical views and studies in the alliances and policies established after World War II. Today, without a geopolitical view, it will be insufficient to explain many problems in the world divided by different organizations such as companies, international organizations, military forces, social movements and terrorist groups (Petta, 2019).

Today, geopolitics is not only the main idea and tool in changing the world order but also the key to the strategic policies of the leading countries and to predicting the future of humanity (Granieri, 2015). Today's geopolitics includes population growth, weak and unsuccessful states, migration, the globalization effect, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global crises, environmental problems, terrorism, global governance, social instability, human rights, world models, energy policies, institutions and other similar elements. (Granieri, 2015).

Ratzel (1899) contributed to the establishment of political geography and laid the groundwork for the transition to geopolitics. According to Ratzel (1899), political geography makes excellent maps and brings new information to get to know the countries, adequately explains the effects of weather, population and climate, but remains lifeless and plain because it cannot reach a satisfactory effect on political sciences. In that case, geography will save political geography from being static by processing political sciences in its own field and will give it a new life and vitality (Ratzel, 1899). Basically, geopolitics and political geography are close concepts. Both disciplines benefit from the same source, namely the evaluation of landforms. Geopolitics, whose basic dynamics are the state, politics and geography, examines the geography in a way that presents the political action styles to the state in the time period and includes provisions for the future. What the political geography does is a situation determination (Ratzel, 1899).

Some think that geopolitics is synonymous with political geography. Actually, these two terms mean different things. Political geography examines the geographical position, shape, surface area and natural resources of states, their borders, population structure, administrative system objectively and "depictively" (Flint, 2015). It does not deal with the policy that should be implemented by the states and does not make any recommendations in this regard. Geopolitics, on the other hand, is directly concerned with the national policy of the states and examines the role of

geographical factors in the determination and implementation of the foreign policies of the states (Flint, 2015). While geopolitics represents the transition from political geography to politics and geographical politics, political geography represents the political view of geography (Flint, 2015). If the subject is to be clarified with an example, geopolitics examines the world from many perspectives and produces land policies. Political Geography, on the other hand, makes political evaluations by examining the distribution of physical, human and economic events of the world, their connections, and their causes and consequences. In the shortest way, geopolitics determines the direction that geography gives to politics. Geopolitics does not produce policy, it prepares data for policy areas (Granieri, 2015). The most important point to be noted here is that the geographical positions of the states and their geopolitical positions are different from each other. Geographical location does not change, it remains the same as long as the country borders do not change. The geopolitical position changes as a result of changes in the economic, social, political, and military power and values of the countries. At the same time, the geopolitical position may differ according to the situations before and after the great wars (Granieri, 2015). Geopolitics uses not only the political geography of geography, but also physical geography, biological geography, and human geography uses the element of time and makes judgments about the future.

If we make a generalization, geopolitics can be defined as a concrete, purposeful, subjective, scientific, ideological, theoretical and applied field of study as well as the situation of the earth (continents, regions, countries, land, sea and air space, military cosmic spaces) and the factors affecting this situation (geographic, historical). It is also regarded as a discipline that examines the triggering power and working principles of the geostrategic development of countries and their unions (political, ideological, demographic, religious, spiritual, social, economic and military). Since this study aims to analyze how the Karabakh Liberation war has led to new geopolitical changes in the Caucasus, it was firstly necessary to define geopolitics. It became clear that the geopolitics term is closely associated with the national policies of nations and investigates the role that geographical considerations play in the formulation and execution of the foreign policies of states. In this regard, the next part of the study will analyze the geopolitics of the Caucasus.

1.2 Geopolitics of the Caucasus

The Caucasus has been a geography that many states wanted to seize throughout history in order to spread to other regions because the Caucasus region, which is a bridge between the European and Asian continents, is the most suitable area to open up to the Middle and Near East regions, the Caspian, Black Sea and Mediterranean Seas, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf (Remler, 2016). Throughout history, the political powers that have dominated the Northern and Southern regions, whether in one or the whole, have always been the great states that have conquered the region from outside through invasion. This region, which has an important place in terms of its geopolitical and strategic structure, has always seemed important for the great states, they wanted to base their borders on the Caucasus mountains, which formed a natural barricade, so they planned to secure themselves (Remler, 2016). The geopolitical position and natural wealth of the region have always attracted the attention of neighboring states. Although the mountainous structure of the region provides a natural protection to the South Caucasus, the sparseness of the population and the disconnection between groups in the region prevented the formation of a power that could resist external forces in the region. Ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity increased even more with the Roman, Byzantine, and later Arab, Persian and Ottoman invasions. The occupation of the region by Russia in the 19th century affected and diversified the ethnic, linguistic, and religious structure a little more (Mankoff, 2012). Except for the Khazar Empire, which existed between the 7th and 10th centuries, a strong region-centered empire did not emerge; for this reason, Transcaucasia remained under the influence of various power centers and became a buffer zone between powerful states at the point of constant change of hands (Mankoff, 2012).

It is an extension and complement of Anatolia, which is the hinge at the meeting point of the Caucasus, Europe, Asia and Africa continents, the lock on this hinge and the key that opens the lock. The Caucasus is one of the north-south connections of the whole geography covering the continents. The Caucasus gives the opportunity to reach the interior of Europe via the Black Sea, and the interior of Asia via the Caspian Sea; thus, it creates a connection not only in the North-South direction, but also between East-West (Souleimanov, 2005). There are three passes over the Caucasus. These are the Caspian Sea coastal road, the Black Sea coastal road and the Nalchik-Tbilisi (military) road. Chechnya on the Caspian road, Abkhazia on the Black Sea coastal road, and North and South Ossetia on the Nalchik-Tbilisi road are conflictual areas. Another geopolitical feature of the Caucasus is its oil and natural gas resources (Souleimanov, 2005).

It can be argued that one of the important pillars of the historical "warm seas policy" of the Russians is Trans-Caucasus. Because there are basically three routes for the Russian Tsarist to descend to the warm seas. These are the Balkans, the Turkish Straits or Eastern Anatolia. The way to be strong in Eastern Anatolia is to be strong in Trans-Caucasia (Askerov, 2020). The dominance of the Russians in this region started in the 17th century and gradually gained momentum. The border of the Russian Empire with the Ottomans and Persia was more or less defined in the 19th century and remained virtually unchanged until the collapse of the Soviet Union; however, the North Caucasian peoples, the majority of whom were Muslims until the 1860s, did not accept the Russian domination, and the Caucasian peoples as a whole rebelled against the Russian rule whenever they had the opportunity (Celac et al., 2019).

The other global power that is interested in the Caucasus region apart from Russia is the USA in 1990s. Especially thanks to the "Velvet Revolution" in Georgia and the developing US-Georgian relations, the USA increased its sphere of influence in the South Caucasus, and this gave the USA the opportunity to squeeze the Russian Federation through the South Caucasus (ISG Report, 2020). The USA, who wanted to control this region, pursued political and geopolitical initiatives and interests in the region in order to control the exit of the Caucasus to the Black Sea. The relations of the USA with the autonomous republics in the region such as Abkhazia and Adjara will be able to provide the geographical, political and economic benefits together (Crisis Group, 2020). In addition, its view of separatist groups in Georgia and its attitude towards different ethnic groups will also enable the USA to hold on in the Caucasus through Georgia. The reflections of this can be seen in the view of the USA towards Adjara and Abkhazia. These savings of the USA are also related to its interests in the Black Sea (Celac et al., 2019).

The Black Sea, which gained importance for the connection of the Caucasus with the open seas, has become a geography that allows intervention into the interior of Europe from the east, the Russian Federation from the south, the Caucasus and Central Asia from the west, and Anatolia from the north (Berman, 2018). Along with the Caucasus region, the Black Sea has gained a different geopolitical feature with the recent enlargements of the EU and NATO. The importance of the Black Sea for Russia has increased significantly in terms of politics, military and economy. The Caucasus, as a geography where many powers come face to face in this region, causes different goals to be pursued. For example, while the Russian Federation sees the Caucasus as its backyard,

for the USA and NATO, the Caucasus is an important barrier region to block Russia (Berman, 2018).

With the collapse of the USSR, a new opportunity for European integration was created for the countries that gained independence in the South Caucasus. The countries of the region had to pay attention to every step they would take at this point because this first stage played an important role in their future. At this point, the first step was taken by Georgia and Azerbaijan, and these two countries activated their policies toward the West. For this, Azerbaijan and Georgia cooperated with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project and wanted to show their willingness (Nuriyev, 2002). In particular, Azerbaijan has assumed the role of guiding force in the region with its stable policy and has led to the economic strengthening of the South Caucasus. At the same time, Azerbaijan has approached NATO more closely with the Eastern Partnership Program and on this occasion tried to protect its security by following a more appropriate policy in terms of not giving security weakness in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan, which has an important role in maintaining the balances in the region, has somehow managed to stay away from regional conflicts due to its geopolitical and geostrategic location and has stabilized its foreign relations in this way by using its natural resources in accordance with its purpose (Nuriyev, 2002). This situation helped Azerbaijan to create a balance element among other states.

As for Armenia, this country has been besieged economically and politically because of the political path it has followed. Azerbaijan's implementation of the Asia-Europe transit route projects in cooperation with Turkey and Georgia is the main reason for the blockade of Armenia and its exclusion from the developed projects (Kakachia, 2011). The fact that the natural gas and oil transportation process exported by Azerbaijan is carried out by this country's own means and the most important point, Europe's having a large share here, makes Russia extremely uneasy. Due to this situation, the Russian Federation tried to increase its influence on these countries again and is trying to ensure that the aforementioned transport passes through the Russian region and reaches Europe. It is of the opinion that on this occasion, the dependence of the countries of the region, especially Azerbaijan, on itself will increase. Russia's renunciation of the former USSR countries, which it calls the immediate environment, is equivalent to the possibility of ditching a camel. To this end, Russia kept alive the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the artificial South Ossetia and Abkhazia Problem it created in Georgia, thereby damaging the

stability in the region and thus trying to prevent the continuity of security and make them depend on it (Kakachia, 2011).

The ongoing conflicts and divisions in some parts of the world generally prevent the establishment of a security mechanism. In this context, the South Caucasus is in the same category and stability is an urgency for the region. Each of the three countries that exist independently in the region are in a different position in terms of regional security. With its pro-European policy and geopolitical mistakes, Georgia could not be effective in organizing effectively when it comes to security in the region (Ahmedbeyli, 2022). The concept of national security is a concept that was emphasized more after World War I and became its current meaning after World War II, and its emergence is actually related to European states that entered into a new systematization with the 1648 Westphalia agreement (Markedonov, 2015).

Regional and global security actually breathes on the roots of national security. It would be meaningless to talk about the other two without national security. Because without national security, regional and global security cannot stand. The three aforementioned security dimensions function as a kind of "Maslow Triangle" (Markedonov, 2015). Thinking and applying them separately as the national-regional-global triad can be inconclusive ambiguity. In today's world, the national security triangle, which cannot be achieved in a number of regions, disrupts harmony and harms regional and global security. Thus, the risk increases on a regional and global scale. In such regions, problems cannot be solved, conflicts do not cease, and balance cannot be established. National security aims to prevent possible threats and attacks. If the exemplary type regions cannot achieve the mentioned stability, they start to give serious deficits in their national security and the danger increases (Danforth, 2022). The important point in this regard is that domestic and foreign policy cannot be carried out independently. Every intervention from outside shakes the current situation and balance deeply. Apart from this, adequate protection of human rights is also a key point in terms of national security.

The fact that the situation in question contradicts itself is undeniable. If the conditions were as they should be, the powerful states could present a less complex image by taking into account the national security of the states of the region. A chaos environment actually brings along an environment of uncertainty and thus does not compromise the existence of risk factors. The new dangers that would emerge cause the emergence of new threats. Armenia, which has a security

vulnerability in the South Caucasus, cannot provide its national security and thus cannot fulfill the security conditions. Armenia could not independently conduct domestic and foreign policy. Armenia's foreign policy is worse than its domestic affairs. Armenia has been excluded from all the projects carried out in the region and it leads this country to become more isolated in the region in general. The fact that Armenia has not been independent in foreign policy has put the country in this situation. In terms of strategic cooperation, it is not found sufficient by the other two countries in the South Caucasus. To explain in more detail, Armenia has been an enemy country for Azerbaijan because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although there are no problems in the neighborly and friendly relations with Georgia, it has been officially declared that it is not seen as a strategic partner (Shaffer, 2009). As a country that cannot reach the level of strategic partnership with the countries of the region, it should be perceived as a danger for the region.

Armenia has been the best ally for Russia in the region. In a way, this country, which is dependent on Russia, has good relations with Iran, but it has the fate of not being able to meet with the countries of the region from the perspective of a strategic partnership with these two countries (Danforth, 2022). While this country was a source of threat in the region, it was also the creator of the dangers and threats that may arise for itself (Shaffer, 2009). In this context, when we evaluate the UN resolutions, Armenia is actually a threat and Azerbaijan has the right of self-determination and can use this to react harshly to Armenia. For example, at the time of the April 2016 conflict, Azerbaijan regained some of its occupied territories and left this short-term war as the winner. Armenia lags a few steps behind when it comes to national security conditions. Factors such as its dependence on foreign powers and the inability of a country to show itself as a nation are not in the interests of the region. Thus, one of the regional actors casts a shadow over the security of itself and the other two countries.

1.3 Karabakh Problem and Its Features

Nagorno-Karabakh region is one of the most important and central points in the Caucasus. Due to the Armenians immigrated to the region in the XIX-XX centuries, rapid changes occurred in the demographic structure of the region, and the population density of the region was changed in favor of the Armenians. This situation after the USSR was used especially by the nationalist Armenians and the demands and pressures increased for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with

Armenia (Azvision, 2017). As the end of the USSR was approaching, the first phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began to show itself in 1987. In 1991, hot conflicts broke out between the parties. In particular, as a result of the war that started with the collapse of the USSR, around 25,000-30,000 people lost their lives in total, and over one million people became refugees (Azernews, 2022). After the creation of the regions where Armenians live in the Caucasus region, the second phase started with the establishment of an Armenian state on September 21, 1991. The first periods of the 1990s are important in terms of two aspects. The first of these issues was the support of foreign powers to the Armenian movements in the east of Turkey and in the Caucasus region in general, and the second issue was Moscow's move to weaken these movements by clashing with each other the national movements that started to get stronger against the central administration in the Caucasus (Raptis, 2018).

The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh began in 1988, shortly before the fall of the Soviet Union, and in 1991, when both Azerbaijan and Armenia gained their independence, it became a regional and interstate issue as well (Remler, 2016). In February 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet signed a decision that envisaged the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and then its full independence (Celac et al., 2019). Faced with a fait accompli, Baku openly declared that it did not accept this demand of the USSR. Although the USSR administration declared that these demands of the Armenians would not be accepted upon the developments, the Armenian members in Nagorno-Karabakh persisted and launched various attacks targeting the Azerbaijanis in Khankandi. After the events, approximately four thousand people were displaced from their places of residence, they lost control in Baku Khankandi and the attacks against Azerbaijanis continued increasingly (Remler, 2016). After these events in Karabakh, the reactions towards the Armenians increased in Sumgait and some violent incidents took place. The Kremlin organized a commission on January 12, 1989, in order to retain control over the territory and elected to link Nagorno-Karabakh directly to Moscow, despite rising tensions and hostilities (Remler, 2016). Nevertheless, after this committee's failure and the consequent return of authority over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory to Baku, the USSR Supreme Soviet in November 1989 made the decision to abandon the region once again (Pashayeva, 2009). When the Supreme Soviet and the Nagorno-Karabakh National Council resolved to merge Armenia and Yerevan in December 1989, it was a historic moment (Celac et al., 2019). Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet and that of the USSR both said that they did not respect this decision while Armenians

continued their assaults against Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh area. There was a rise in anti-Kremlin rallies and a dramatic increase in crowds in the squares when individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh arrived in Baku. To put a stop to protests, the Kremlin declared a state of emergency in Baku and sent its troops to the area (Aliyev, 2020). When the gunmen opened fire on unsuspecting bystanders, several people perished. This event is defined as "Black January" in Azerbaijan (Pashayeva, 2009). With these losses, in a sense, the process leading to the independence of Azerbaijan against the USSR began.

In February 1992, conflicts started to escalate in Karabakh and the efforts to end the conflicts by the meeting of Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Hussein Sadikov and Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisyan failed (Pashayeva, 2009). After they captured the town of Khojaly, a massacre took place here. Khojaly region has taken its place in history as the first significant lost region for Baku; thus, the road to Khankendi passed under the control of Armenians and Azerbaijan lost its dominance in Nagorno-Karabakh (Karabakh Center, 2018). The tension in the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia escalated after the claim that the Russian 366th Regiment supported the Armenians during the Khojaly massacre however, the Kremlin has never acknowledged these allegations despite many clear documents (Remler, 2016). The advance of the invading Armenian forces in the Azerbaijani lands began to increase and cause more regional problems. With the occupation of Shusha and Lachin, a direct link was established between Nagorno-Karabakh and Yerevan.

After the Armenian forces seized the city of Shusha on May 8, 1992, the conflicts started again, and after the Armenian troops took the control of the city of Shusha, one of the strategic-historical points of Azerbaijan, a large part of the Karabakh region was under the control of the Armenians (Souleimanov, 2005). Subsequently, the Armenians expanded the area of occupation and captured the city of Lachin on May 17; thus, Armenia and Karabakh were united by a land corridor (Azernews, 2022). Another turning point in the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh was the occupation of Kalbajar as a result of the attacks initiated by the Armenians on March 27, 1993 (Askerov, 2020). In the face of the Armenian occupation of the region, Ankara closed the border gate by stopping the passage of humanitarian and other aid to Armenia. After the Armenian army seized the Kalbajar and Lachin corridor, Karabakh was de facto bound to Armenia by using force. In addition, the fact that the advance of the Armenian soldiers approached the Fuzuli region and

thus the war was directed towards the Iranian border created anxiety in Tehran. When the Armenians attacked Nakhchivan in September 1993, Iranian forces warned Yerevan once again, and upon this, the Armenian Foreign Minister assured the Tehran administration that they would not attack Nakhchivan (Cornell & Starr, 2006). With the agreement between Azerbaijan and Iran, Iranian troops crossed the border and came to the Goradiz region and built a security zone at this point (Azvision, 2017). Russia, which does not want the Nagorno-Karabakh problem to gain an international dimension, which gradually attracts other countries, relaxed a little in this regard with the coming to power of Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan in 1993. At first, Aliyev acted with the intention of getting Moscow's support in the Karabakh conflict. However, Aliyev refused to accept Moscow's military presence within its borders, as well as making Azerbaijan a member of the CIS. In May 1994, under the mediation of Russia, a mutual ceasefire was signed in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, regarding Nagorno-Karabakh (Cornell & Starr, 2006).

Heydar Aliyev, who acted with the aim of conducting an active foreign policy in the region after he became the president of Azerbaijan, carried out a "balance policy" between Russia and the Western countries and tried to produce policies for the preservation of stability in the region (Souleimanov, 2005). Aliyev first showed his people that stability could be achieved by trying to resolve the conflicts within the country after he came to power, then he removed the foreign policy from the practices of the previous periods and in a sense enabled his country to produce policies that could benefit from the states of the region and the world. The Azerbaijani rulers of the period saw the Russian army as the main obstacle to the consolidation of their independence and expelled this army from the country.

In the first period, it implemented a pro-Russian policy in order to reduce the reactions of Russia and increase the national interests in foreign policy, Azerbaijan both turned its direction to the West and aimed to maintain its current relations with its neighbors without any problems. Aliyev admitted that the stable continuation of his newly established regime depends on the elimination of threats from Russia and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (Welt & Bowen, 2021). Within the framework of this policy of Aliyev and the government, the aims of the newly established state of Azerbaijan were to be recognized all over the world as soon as possible, to increase its influence in the international community, to integrate it with the world states in social-economic-political-cultural and all other fields. Receiving international backing for a solution to

the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was one of the most critical topics to be addressed by the country's diplomacy (Welt & Bowen, 2021).

In addition, Armenia established dominance in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor that connects the region to Armenia, and in a sense, gained geostrategic superiority. Not content with this, Armenians also occupied seven Azerbaijani regions surrounding the Karabakh region in order to guarantee their strategic position and create a buffer zone, which constitutes approximately 20% of Azerbaijan's lands (Celac et al., 2019). The conflicts and wars that took place at that time ended with a loss of 25,000 to 30,000 from both states, the displacement of almost 750,000 people from both Karabakh and other occupied regions, and the emergence of around 360,000 Armenian refugees in Azerbaijan (Celac et al., 2019).

Despite all the negotiations and mediation activities, a definite solution has not been reached in the solution of the problem until the second Karabakh War (2020) (Crisis Group, 2020). Later, there were deep differences between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, both in tactical matters and in the way the problem was resolved. In addition, within the framework of the agreement reached in Bonn in November 1995 to bring the attitudes of the parties to the conflict closer to each other, the parties started secret and direct talks, including the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. During the meetings held between the Chief Advisors of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, a "Declaration of Principles" was negotiated for the purpose of signing during the Yeltsin-Clinton Summit held in Moscow in April 1996, but no agreement could be reached (Pashayeva, 2009). The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a joint statement on April 21, 1996, while they were in Luxembourg to sign the partnership and cooperation agreement with the EU (European Union) together with the President of Georgia (Crisis Group, 2020). In the joint statement signed, the agreement reached on the points of confirming the ceasefire, ensuring the continuity of direct negotiations and releasing the prisoners of war was expressed. The absence of a high-level political authority between the parties to the issue regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh makes the solution process difficult.

At the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Lisbon summit held on 2-3 December 1996, upon Armenia's occupation of the region, Armenia objected to the fact that the principles adopted by 53 OSCE members were included in the Summit Declaration (Cornell & Starr, 2006). These objectionable principles are;

- Respect for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan,
- Giving the highest degree of autonomy to the Upper Karabakh Region,
- It is the provision of necessary security guarantees for the Upper Karabakh Region (Cornell & Starr, 2006).

Armenia also did not implement the resolutions (822, 853, 874 and 884) of the UN Security Council on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and rejected the proposals put forward for the settlement of the conflict many times (Raptis, 2018). Although many meetings were held to solve the problem after all these experiences, no concrete progress could be achieved in the initiatives initiated at the solution point. The effect of the peace environment to be established in the Caucasus Region will be great in other regions as well as Turkey-Armenia and Azerbaijan-Armenia relations. Therefore, it is extremely important that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan be resolved in a fair way between the parties. Even at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, this deadlock and the continuation of the problem in Nagorno-Karabakh bring heavy costs for Azerbaijan and Armenia in the economic, political and international arena. Although the problem has not been definitively resolved yet, the leaders continued to come together at the point of each other's sensitivities in the process that started in Moscow in 1999 and continued with Washington and Geneva (Cornell & Starr, 2006).

Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, the main factor in solving the problem from the beginning is the final status of the Karabakh region. Yerevan, which supports the independence of the region or its union with Armenia, and Baku, which demands that the region remain under its protection, have completely different aspirations. From a legal point of view, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the right to self-determination of the Nagorno-Karabakh region strengthen its hand (Raptis, 2018). Until 2014, four different main issues listed below were at the negotiation table (Raptis, 2018). These are;

- Specifically, the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin, respectively,
- Withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's captured territory,
- Guaranties of security for Karabakh and Armenians in the event that the seized regions are restored,
- The repatriation and resettling of Azerbaijanis who have fled their country (Raptis, 2018).

For the peace process to proceed effectively, the Minsk Group was supposed to address these four challenges. The most controversial and problematic issue for the conflicting parties is the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, International Organizations and Organizations and third countries involved in the issue accept Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan and call on Armenia to withdraw from the occupied territories. For example, one of them, UNSC/10693 dated 2008, which recognizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan by the UN, should be reminded; However, according to Armenia, when Azerbaijan declared its independence, it became the successor of the 1918-1920 Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the dominance of this Republic over Nagorno-Karabakh (Pashayeva, 2009). Again, according to Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh has never been under the sovereignty of independent Azerbaijan. Contrary to all these claims, the Azerbaijani side claims that "self-determination", that is, the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, is incompatible with the declaration of unilateral separation, and bases these arguments on the theories of various international lawyers (Pashayeva, 2009). As a result, both the claims and theses of the parties regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is the main point of the problem, and the fact that a higher political authority has not yet been found, causes the problem and the search for a solution to continue. With the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Armistice Agreement signed in 2020, it has been confirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is Azerbaijani territory, as emphasized in previous UN resolutions, and that the Armenian forces are occupying this region (Welt & Bowen, 2021).

Conflicts that turned the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in favor of Azerbaijan took place recently in October and November 2020. Both sides have reported military and civilian casualties in confrontations that erupted along the line of contact that had been re-established during the first Karabakh War (Askerov, 2020). Thereafter, Armenia proclaimed martial rule and total deployment, whereas Azerbaijan enforced a curfew and proclaimed a state of war along its border with Armenia. On November 9, 2020, Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan signed the Armistice Agreement after 44 days of tense hostilities in Shusha, Nagorno-second Karabakh's biggest city (Azernews, 2022). Russian President Vladimir Putin mediated the agreement (Askerov, 2020). On November 10, 2020, the Karabakh area was free of all hostilities. Tens of thousands of displaced Azerbaijani refugees started to return to their homes after the conflict, which culminated in Azerbaijan's military and diplomatic success. According to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Armistice Agreement, which was signed as a result of Azerbaijan's military

and diplomatic victory, the gradual withdrawal of Armenia, the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers to the conflict zone and their presence in the region for five years, direct access to Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through a corridor through Armenia. Land access is also guaranteed (Aliyev, 2020). After the ceasefire, in addition to the regions that Azerbaijan captured during the war, the article that Kelbajar, Agdam and Lachin will be returned to Azerbaijan has been added (Azernews, 2022).

In this section of the study, Karabakh problem and its features were analyzed. The Karabakh problem is considered one of the factors that has a direct impact on the geopolitics of the Caucasus. In the next sections of the study, subsequent developments in the Nagorno Karabakh problem and their impact on the geopolitics of Caucasus will be analyzed.

2. Karabakh War

2.1 Pre-Karabakh Liberation War Period

Nagorno-Karabakh has continued as a problem that has led to violent conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the Soviet Union (USSR) era. The problem, which was suppressed by the central government during the USSR period, broke out with the weakening and disappearance of the existing authority and turned into an international conflict between two independent states (Azvision, 2017). While Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region affiliated to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic during the USSR period, after Azerbaijan gained its independence on November 26, 1991, when the region abolished its autonomy status, it was directly connected to the central government (Kazimirov, 2004). In the face of this situation, the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians announced that they had taken the decision of independence on 10 December 1991 (Kazimirov, 2004). The withdrawal of the Russian Federation (RF) troops from Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992 caused the conflict to turn into a war due to the fact that both sides claimed that the other came to Nagorno-Karabakh after them and that their existence on these lands was legitimate (Yoshimura, 2018). With the establishment of the Minsk Group with 11+1 members in order to find a solution to the conflict with a decision taken on March 24, 1992 within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Karabakh conflict has gained an international character, out of the monopoly of the Russian Federation. Despite the numerous attempts of the Minsk Group during the first half of the 1990s (Yoshimura, 2018), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has remained unresolved until today, has been described as a frozen conflict in this context. In 1993, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) took resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884 regarding the conflict and demanded that Armenia immediately withdraw its troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories (Yoshimura, 2018). Armenia did not comply with the said resolutions and clashes continued between the two sides. The ceasefire agreement reached between the two sides in May 1994, through the Minsk Group and Russia, significantly stopped the conflicts, but until today, the agreement has been violated and conflicts have occurred in the border regions (Karabakh Center, 2018).

To date, the Minsk Group has made three recommendations to the parties regarding the settlement of the conflict. The "wholesale solution" draft, which was first presented in June 1997, envisaged a peace agreement between the parties and the simultaneous resolution of the new

situations of Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories (Bagheri, 2020). In the "staged solution" draft submitted in October 1997, it was stated that the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied regions should be resolved separately, and the final situation of the immigrants was decided (Azernews, 2022). The last one is the "Common State" proposal put forward by Russia in November 1998. Accordingly, it was envisaged that Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh would establish a joint state. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh government will have its own constitution and army, and it will have the power to veto the decisions to be taken by the Azerbaijani Parliament. The first two of these proposals were not accepted by Armenia and the third by Azerbaijan, and this attempt was also inconclusive (Azvision, 2017).

In 2007, the Minsk Group proposed the "Madrid Principles" as a roadmap to which both Azerbaijan and Armenia approached positively. In this framework, leaving seven districts around Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan; Opinions were put forward to grant an interim status to Nagorno-Karabakh and to negotiate its final status within the framework of the right to self-determination, to open a corridor for transportation between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, to return the displaced to their lands, and to send a peacekeeping force to the region within the OSCE (Aliyev, 2020). Although the negotiations have continued since this date, no steps could be taken to implement the Madrid principles and there were conflicts between the two sides from time to time. As a matter of fact, on April 2-5, 2016 (Four-Day War), the two countries came to the brink of a hot war and the conflicts caused the death of approximately 200 people (Bagheri, 2020). As a result of this war, also known as the April War, Azerbaijan took control of 6 important hills and for the first time in years, a change was experienced in favor of Azerbaijan on the front line (Bagheri, 2020).

The 2020 Karabakh War, which started with the spread of the fighting that took place around Tovuz as a result of the Armenian attack, to include all sectors of the contact line after a short pause, gave Azerbaijan the opportunity to take back its occupied lands for many years (Garibov, 2020). As a matter of fact, Azerbaijan took advantage of this opportunity and succeeded in liberating most of its occupied lands. The 2020 Karabakh War, which resulted in the decisive military victory of Azerbaijan, ended with the ceasefire agreement signed under the mediation of Russia.

2.2 Outbreak of Second Karabakh War

The conflicts that broke out in the Tovuz region on the north of the Armenia-Azerbaijan state border on 12 July 2020 and continued for a few days showed that the Karabakh conflict, although generally defined as a frozen conflict in the international arena, is actually a protracted conflict that is ready to explode at any moment (Garibov, 2020). In this context, the examination of the conflict that took place on 12-16 July and its causes is also important in terms of revealing the process leading to the 27 September war (Askerov, 2020). At a time when hopes for a new dialogue process would start between the two sides in 2019, Armenian Defense Minister Tonoyan stated on 30 March 2019 that he adopted the "new war for new lands" doctrine instead of the "land against peace" formulation (Askerov, 2020). In his speech, the Armenian Minister of Defense made statements that they would increase the number of units that can carry operations to enemy territory by giving up on the state of constant defense; however, Pashinyan claimed that he no longer acknowledges the Madrid Principles and that the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Armenia (Garibov, 2020). This separatist allegation is against the aim and manner of international discussions under the supervision of the Minsk Group Co-chairs and the standards of international conventions. (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020). Upon the reactions, Pashinyan said at a meeting held in Berlin on February 13, 2020 that they would accept an attack of Azerbaijan against Karabakh as an attack on Armenia, that Karabakh is under the guarantor of Armenia and nothing more needs to be said. tried to clarify with his statements (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020).

Considering this general framework, tensions between the two states continued to escalate between April 2016 and July 2020. Considering the conflict that broke out on 12 July, some issues need to be underlined (Jafarova, 2020). First of all, this conflict took place not on the Karabakh front line, but in the Tovuz region, north of the border line of the two states. Therefore, this conflict is not a conflict on the existing front, and a new front has emerged between the two sides (Jafarova, 2020). The area where the clashes took place is very close to the route where the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline (BTC), the South Caucasus Natural Gas Pipeline connected to TANAP and TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway (BTK) pass (Jafarova, 2020). In this context, it can be thought that the speculations that Russia is behind Armenia, which is seen as the party initiating the conflict, emerged with this connection. As it is known, maintaining and increasing Russia's share in the European energy market is among the most basic strategic goals (Askerov, 2020). There is a steady decrease in Russian gas consumption in EU and Turkish gas

usage due to alternative sources of energy and a COVID-19 epidemic that restricts energy use and extra gas supplies in terms of LNG from the Middle East (Jafarova, 2020). EU nations' reliance on Russian gas will be reduced even more when Azerbaijani gas enters the Bulgarian, Italian and Greek markets. Russia's direct delivery of natural gas to Turkey through the Blue Stream pipeline was suspended in May 2020 as Turkey expanded its gas supply by switching to LNG, thereby lessening its dependency on Russian natural gas, at the same time Turkey's need for oil from Azerbaijan has grown, while Russia's has been steadily decreasing. During this time period, Azerbaijan shipped 6.36 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey (23 percent of the total gas purchase), making it the leading supplier of gas to Turkey in this time period (Jafarova, 2020). Armenian attacks on Azerbaijan in the Tovuz area, which is not in the heart of Karabakh but near to pipeline routes, were seen as an attempt by Armenia to thwart Russia's plans for Caspian Sea energy transmission lines that might compete with its own pipeline projects (Askerov, 2020).

Although there are reports of ceasefire violations at some points, it is possible to say that the general situation on the contact line is stable as of December 2020. Putting aside the fighting in Tovuz, the 2020 Karabakh War lasted a total of 44 days. During this period, Azerbaijan, acting with the aim of reclaiming its occupied lands, carried out offensive operations at both strategic and operative and tactical levels. On the other hand, the Armenian side, which aims not to lose its current gains, mainly made strategic defense. It's true to assume that the 2020 Karabakh War is a pretty localized conflict involving a relatively limited territory. Since most recent armed conflicts have at least one non-state player, the practice of Karabakh may help us better comprehend interstate warfare in today's world. Certain strategies and weapon systems employed by the Azerbaijani military throughout the conflict may provide light on how warfare would evolve in the twenty-first century.

2.3 End of Second Karabakh War

The 2020 Karabakh War started with the clashes on the line of contact on the morning of 27 September 2020, and after a series of 44 days of battle, it was signed under the mediation of Russia and ended with the ceasefire agreement that entered into force on 10 November 2020 at 00.00 Moscow time (Urcosta, 2020). At this point, before moving on to the general course of the war, it would be appropriate to study the operation area in terms of military geography. First of all,

it should be started by stating that Karabakh is a very narrow operation area. Considering that approximately 20% of the Azerbaijani lands were occupied, it can be assumed that the width of the operation area is approximately 20,000 km², and the main battles took place in a much narrower area (Askerov, 2020). Apart from this, the most characteristic feature of both Karabakh and other occupied regions in terms of topographic conditions is that it has high mountain ranges that are fragmented by streams and deep valleys, and that there are almost no flat areas. From an operational point of view, two mountain ranges extending in the region are of critical importance. The first of these is Murovdagh in the north of Karabakh. Murovdagh, which stretches for about 70 km and the highest peak is Gamisdagh at 3,724 meters, functions as a natural barrier between Karabakh and other parts of Azerbaijan (Azernews, 2022). The second is the Karabakh Mountain Range, which extends from north to southeast in the form of an arc and its highest peak is 2,725 meters. In addition, it is necessary to consider the Karabakh Plateau, which is located in the south of Murovdagh, between the Karabakh Ranges and Zangazur, and the highest peak is Dalidagh with a height of 3,616 meters (Azernews, 2022). Finally, it should be noted that the transportation between Armenia and Karabakh is provided through the Lachin Corridor and the land section between Karabakh and the Iranian border is the flattest area of the entire operation area. It was agreed that Azerbaijan would preserve the towns of Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, and Gubadl that it had freed from occupation, and that Armenia accepted the departure from Aghdam, Lachin, and Kalbacar (Askerov, 2020). Azerbaijan preserved seven regions from occupation, and it was able to reclaim part of the territory it had lost in the First Karabakh War, both via military action and diplomatic means (Urcosta, 2020).

The agreement signed on November 10 ended the war and paved the way for diplomacy, but it is thought that there will be difficulties in the implementation of some articles in the text of the agreement, where there are many uncertainties (Hedenskog, 2020). The presence of Russian soldiers in the region will continue to cause concern. However, the statements of Turkey and Russia regarding the execution of the peacekeeping force to be sent to the region contradict each other. The Russian side states that the Russian-Turkish observation center to be established to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire in Karabakh will operate with unmanned aerial vehicles, that Turkish observers will not enter Nagorno-Karabakh, and that this point is clearly stated in the memorandum of understanding signed by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia (Hedenskog, 2020). In addition, it states that the Observers from Turkey will be confined

in their movements to the Russian-Turkish observation center to be established in Azerbaijan's territory, far from the zone of war in Nagorno-Karabakh (Kurt & Tuysuzoghlu, 2022). Turkey, on the other hand, states that the leaders of the two sides discussed the continuity of the ceasefire and signed a memorandum of understanding on the Turkish-Russian Joint Observation Center to be established to monitor the ceasefire in the region, and in this context, Turkey will take part in the joint peacekeeping force. Although there is an agreement on the creation of a Joint Peacekeeping Force in the Observation Center, it is understood that the Turkish military will carry out its surveillance and control duty via UAVs from the observation center to be established in Azerbaijan, without entering the Nagorno-Karabakh region (Huseynov & Yavuz, 2021). The peacekeeping force, consisting of Russian soldiers, took its place at the observation points of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan Nakhchivan and Armenia-Nagorno-Karabakh corridors (Huseynov & Yavuz, 2021).

On the other hand, the issue of how the article regarding the transportation corridor to be opened from Karabakh to Nakhchivan will be implemented remains unclear. There are many questions waiting to be answered, such as what will be the status of the corridor that will pass through the territory of Armenia, how the Iran-Armenia connection will be established. The establishment, protection and continuity of this line may create a red line for Russia in the medium and long term (Ozgen, 2021). Another point that is not clear in the agreement is that there is no statement about the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, except for Shusha. In his evaluations on this matter, President Aliyev states that the status of the region was not included in the agreement on purpose, and that this is a diplomatic success. One of the most objectionable issues by the Armenian side is what the status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be. Despite all the objections of Armenia, Azerbaijan has stated very firmly that the region will not be given a status. However, the presence of the Armenian population in the region and the presence of the Russian Peacekeeping Force seem likely to cause administrative problems. How the decision-making mechanisms will work in the newly emerged equation in Karabakh may raise some issues related to the status issue (Kurt & Tuysuzoghlu, 2022).

The Azerbaijani General Staff has established its weight center here, taking into account that the most suitable land section for the operation is the south of Karabakh (Hedenskog, 2020). It seems that in the first phase, while the secondary forces in other sectors of the contact line carried out a frontal attack to detect and keep the enemy in position, the main forces in the south made a

breakthrough attack. After the success of the split, the main attack advanced in the direction of Fuzuli-Jabrayil-Gubadli, and after the Iranian border was completely taken under control, it was directed to the north, towards the Shusha direction, which was chosen as the final target (Hedenskog, 2020). As expected, after the capture of Shusha, the situation of the Armenian forces in other sectors of the contact line became critical and the Yerevan administration had to consent to the ceasefire.

On the other hand, it has been witnessed that the relatively slow progress of the Azerbaijani offensive initially led to some discussions and even criticisms. So much so that the opinions of some experts, who acted on the assumption that Azerbaijan would not have enough time due to ceasefire pressures from the world, that the targets set should be captured within 72 hours with a "lightning operation" were also covered in the media (Marcu, 2021). Of course, it is among the options to perform the splitting and siege maneuvers at a faster pace. However, the General Staff of Azerbaijan applied a different course of action, and the main purpose here was to reduce the losses by softening the targets. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that after the Azerbaijani offensive, the cover forces at the first level of the Armenian defense retreated to the resistance points behind with distraction battles and made every effort to preserve the positional integrity of the main battlefield units, which were organized in depth (Marcu, 2021).

One of the most discussed topics during the war was whether Russia would side with Armenia or not. Undoubtedly, Armenia's CSTO membership and messages from Russia in the past periods have been effective in making the discussions, especially in an interview given by 102nd Military Base Commander Colonel Andrey Ruzinsky in 2013, Azerbaijan's attempt to solve the problem in Karabakh by using military force. It should be reminded of his statement that they will take sides with Yerevan in case of emergency (Kucera, 2013). The Baku administration announced that after the clashes that took place around Tovuz in July 2020, Russia started to send weapons to Armenia intensively (Marcu, 2021). However, contrary to the predictions of many experts, Russia did not directly side with Armenia in the war, and even while the discussions about its stance against the developments were going on, Kremlin Spokesperson Peskov himself made a statement that its obligations under the CSTO do not apply to Karabakh (Marcu, 2021). On the other hand, the Yerevan administration, which saw that Moscow's position would not change if the war was

limited to Karabakh, carried out attacks targeting Azerbaijani cities with ballistic missiles launched directly from its own territory (Hedenskog, 2020).

2.4 The Role of Third Parties in Second Karabakh War

One of the most crucial causes that led to the end of the war with a military triumph was Turkey's backing for Azerbaijan from the initial assault on Tovuz, an important energy facility for Armenian troops, which Turkey is a strategic partner of (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020). In 2010, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement, pledging to help each other in the event of an attack on one of their respective nations (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020). With regard to this war, Turkey has backed Azerbaijan from the start to the finish with political, military and diplomatic backing. When Azerbaijan began using Turkish-made unmanned aerial vehicles, it substantially altered the course of the conflict and gave it a military advantage that is tough to overcome on the battlefield (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020).

Turkey's role in the war should also be clarified, as it is one of the subjects on which there is much speculation. Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, in his address to the nation, claimed that 150 high-ranking officers from the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) took part in the management and administration of the operation, and that the personnel of the Special Forces Command and terrorists brought from Syria were actually fighting in the field (Vzglyad, 2020). Armenian Ministry of Defense Press Spokesperson Shushan Stepanyan also claimed that a Su-25 type warplane was shot down by a Turkish F-16 taking off from Ganja Air Base (Vzglyad, 2020). Likewise, similar issues were covered in the Russian media, and moreover, it was claimed that three active Turkish generals -by giving their names- took an active role in the planning and execution of the operation (Kinik, & Chelik, 2021). In fact, it is not a secret that Turkey supports Azerbaijan in the 2020 Karabakh War, leaving aside the allegations that are undoubtedly made for propaganda purposes such as the presence of terrorists brought from Syria or the downing of a Turkish F-16 (Kinik & Chelik, 2021). There are strong indications that all kinds of military-technical assistance are provided to the Azerbaijan Armed Forces, especially the transfer of experience in the use of UAVs. It is considered that these groups, on the one hand, erode the military victory of Azerbaijan, on the other hand, they aim to present Turkey as an actor that destabilizes the region.

By September 27, Azerbaijan had found quite suitable ground to launch an operation to liberate its lands from occupation. The factors behind the launch of the operation and its victory thirty-two years later can be considered from many perspectives. Due to the fact that all attempts at peace negotiations have ended in failure, Azerbaijan has recently begun to raise the possibility of war rather often. Since the early 1990s, Azerbaijan's political stature has been bolstered, and the Azerbaijani army has become more well-equipped, skilled, disciplined, and sophisticated. Azerbaijan's military dominance over Armenia was a key element in its triumph in Karabakh. Obviously, this advantage is evident when comparing the two nations' military and armament systems. For example, Azerbaijan ranks 64th and Armenia 100th in the list of the world's strongest armies in 2020 by the US-based research organization Global Fire Power (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020). As the Minsk Group, co-chaired by the United States, France, and Russia, failed to execute UN Security Council resolutions affirming Azerbaijan's territorial sovereignty, it lost trust in the international community.

The fact that the parties both give different figures on casualties and make accusatory and defamatory allegations point out that the struggle was not only lived at the front for 44 days. In this context, it has been observed that both sides in the war attach great importance to psychological warfare and especially heavily resort to propaganda techniques in order to "control information" and "prove its vindication" (Kinik & Celik, 2021). As a matter of fact, this situation has become such that there are even media organizations that convey the events to their readers with the title of "propaganda war". Although traditional media tools have also been used in carrying out activities for propaganda purposes, digital media has come to the fore. In particular, social media channels have made it possible for photos and images to be delivered to large masses very quickly. The importance of the function of guiding the national and international public opinion of the psychological warfare targeting the mind and conscience is known; however, at least as important as its function is its effect on the soldiers who are actually fighting in the battlefield, and in this context, it is considered that the footage of the drone attack, which Azerbaijan puts into circulation, plays a serious role in breaking the morale and fighting determination of the Armenian forces (Kinik & Celik, 2021).

The 2020 Karabakh War, which lasted 44 days, resulted in a decisive military victory for Azerbaijan. From a military-strategic point of view, it is seen that the turning point of the war was

the capture of the city of Shusha by the Azerbaijani forces. After the loss of Shusha, the main supply and withdrawal routes of the Armenian forces in other sectors of the contact line were cut off, and the Yerevan administration, which was threatened with the destruction of its troops, had no choice but to consent to the ceasefire under these conditions. Among the remarkable developments of the 2020 Karabakh War are the prominence of firepower rather than maneuver, the secondary roles of the air force and armored units, the organization of ballistic missile attacks and the emphasis on propaganda activities; however, there is no doubt that the most striking development of the war is the performance of UAV systems (Kinik & Celik, 2021). In fact, these systems have already proven themselves in asymmetrical and hybrid warfare environments where they have been used in the last 20 years. What distinguishes the Karabakh practice here is that it was used so intensely and effectively in an interstate war for the first time. It seems that the military applications of robotic technologies, which include not only UAVs but also unmanned land and sea vehicles, will increase in the future (Ozgen, 2021).

Russian backing for Armenia was withdrawn following Pashinyan's pro-Western declarations and a passive approach was pursued throughout the clashes. This is a major problem. because of their differences with the Pashinyan administration, Russia sought to penalize and wear down the Armenian government (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020). In this regard, Moscow has begun to invest time on the settlement of the issue by underlining that it should leave Azerbaijan's Pashinyan government five of the seven districts, since it worries that the unresolved problem would lead to Western involvement in the long term. In part, Azerbaijan's success in this operation can be attributed to the United States' inaction and preoccupation with domestic issues ahead of the 2020 presidential elections, rather than international developments. This inattention prevented the United States from providing political and military support to Armenia (Ergun & Aliyev, 2020).

2.5 Russia's Strategy during the Karabakh Liberation War, Its Position and Influence on the War

As it is known, the South Caucasus has always been a priority region in Russian foreign policy. During the Tsarist period, Russia, which continued its existence in the region, especially in Georgia, chose Armenia as a partner in regional policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In order not to stray away from the geography it sees as its "zone of influence", Moscow not only

kept quiet about Armenia's aggressive attitude towards Azerbaijan in the 1990s, but also gave an opportunity to its occupation activities with the de facto support it provided from time to time. As a matter of fact, the Karabakh issue has also turned into an important tool for Russia in order to maintain its effectiveness in the South Caucasus. In the period from the July clashes to the start of the Second Karabakh War on September 27, it was seen that Russia did not leave Armenia without support despite everything. As a matter of fact, in this context, the support of the Armenian army in terms of military equipment and training continued at full speed. In fact, in the July conflicts, the Armenian government realized that Azerbaijan was weak in the face of the latest technology developed UAVs (Racz, 2021). After the conflicts, Russian experts gave trainings to the Armenian army on the fight against UAVs. On the other hand, Russia started to send aid to Yerevan with military transport planes. The shipments made repeatedly disturbed Azerbaijan. Therefore, President Aliyev called the President of the Russian Federation Putin on August 12 and openly expressed his discomfort however, despite this, Russia did not stop and continued the shipment (Tuncel, 2020). Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, who paid a visit to Baku on August 25, answered the question about the shipment that the cargo on the planes was "construction materials", not weapons and ammunition. However, his statement was refuted a few days later by the words of Zatulin, Deputy Chairman of the Commonwealth of Independent States Committee of the Russian State Duma because, while making a statement that Georgia does not allow weapons sent to Armenia by land, Zatulin stated that the shipments sent by air are not "construction materials" but military ammunition (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). A week before the start of the Second Karabakh War, the Caucasus-2020 International Exercise was held in Russia. Soldiers and experts from the Armenian army also participated in the exercise (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). Within the scope of the exercise, some meetings were held between the Armenian Defense Minister and Russian officials. The exercise ended on September 26, and the next day, the Armenian army started the Second Karabakh War by attacking Azerbaijan's military positions and civilian settlements in Karabakh (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). With Azerbaijan's response, conflicts engulfed the entire front. Upon the start of the conflicts, Russia took action, as it was both a regional power and the co-chairman of the Minsk Group. As a matter of fact, on the day the war started, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the parties to stop the fire. Then, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had a telephone conversation, first with his Armenian and Turkish counterparts, and then with the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister (Guler, 2020). Emphasizing that the

fire should be stopped immediately in his meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Chavushoghlu, Lavrov stated that he was deeply saddened by the events in his meeting with Armenian and Azerbaijani ministers, and said that they, as his country, are in favor of a ceasefire and that they will try to mediate with the other co-chairs of the Minsk Group (Guler, 2020). On September 30, Lavrov talked to his Armenian and then Azerbaijani counterpart on the phone once, demanding that the firing be stopped and stated that they could establish a negotiation platform in Moscow so that the parties would not lose contact (Guler, 2020). In the meantime, after the Armenian minister made a phone call to Lavrov that "foreign armed groups" were fighting on the Azerbaijani side in Karabakh, the Russian Foreign Ministry made a statement on the same day, stating that armed groups from Syria and Libya had been taken to the region. However, the fact that the discourse, which was not based on any source and was only expressed as a propaganda claim of the Armenian side, was brought to the agenda by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while raising doubts about the neutral stance of Moscow, which is a regional power, also meant putting Azerbaijan under suspicion (Guler, 2020).

After the statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry, both Vladimir Putin and the Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, Narishkin, made statements (Zahidgizi, 2020). While Russian leader Putin expressed his deep concern about the transfer of armed groups from Syria and Libya to Karabakh, Narishkin mentioned the existence of both Kurdish armed groups fighting on the side of the Armenians and different organizations supporting the Azerbaijani army in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). In general, when the Russian side said "foreign armed groups" during the war, it mostly tried to imply the existence of some illegal people who supported the Azerbaijani army in the region. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, accepted these rhetoric as slander and officially denied the allegations many times, stating that no evidence of the "existence of foreign armed groups" with its army could be presented to them (Azertag, 2021). However, the fact that Russia, both a Minsk group co-chairman and a regional power, repeated the same allegations without any evidence, led to the questioning of Moscow's approach to the warring parties. Meanwhile, the Kremlin administration's attitude towards Armenia and Azerbaijan at the very beginning of the war did not escape the attention of the Russian media. It was especially emphasized that Vladimir Putin had met with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan 4 times after the war started, but he had not met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev yet (Zahidgizi, 2020). Meanwhile, the Russian media showed interest in what Putin would say

about the conflicts. About 10 days later, Russian leader Putin described the war as a "great tragedy" and said that he hoped the conflict would stop as soon as possible, saying that there were serious casualties on both sides (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

The presidential elections in the US gave Russia the opportunity to take more initiative in the region. After 7 October, Russia started to take more initiatives to stop the conflict by trying to maintain its position as a regional power and "main actor" (SWP, 2020). First, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu held a phone call with the ministers of both countries. Then, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mishustin called the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Ali Asadov and talked about the need to establish a peace table. On October 9, Russian leader Putin once again announced that the clashes should stop and invited the foreign ministers of the two countries to Moscow (Zolyan, 2022). Baku and Yerevan accepted the invitation, and in the evening of the same day, a ceasefire was negotiated in Moscow with the participation of three foreign ministers. From the negotiations, it was decided to stop the fighting at the front, effective from October 10; however, just a few hours after the decision, the Armenian Armed Forces violated the ceasefire and hit civilian points in Azerbaijan. On October 11, missiles were launched on the city of Ganja (Miholjic, 2020). As a result, 11 civilians lost their lives and 35 people were injured (Miholjic, 2020). Despite the initial ceasefire reached in Moscow, the shooting of Ganja with a missile meant a great disrespect to Russia's initiatives by Armenia. But interestingly, the attack was not condemned by other regional powers other than Turkey, which led to their stance being questioned.

During the war, the fact that the Russian media and the press, mostly close to the Kremlin, made publications in favor of the occupier, did not go unnoticed. On the other hand, some Russian journalists who went to Khankandi tried to disparage the Azerbaijani army by trying to portray the operation against the invader as if it were an "operation against the civilian population" living in the region, thus they made publications far from objectivity (Muradov, 2020). Another handicap of the Russian media was that the Armenian side clings to the propaganda product of Turkey's initiation of the war. Meanwhile, Sputnik's Armenia office, which draws attention with its close proximity to the Kremlin, almost assumed the spokespersonship of the so-called separatists, using expressions such as "Karabakh Republic", "Karabakh president", "Karabakh's capital" in almost every news and article (Azertag, 2021). In the news and articles published by Russia's world-renowned state news agency TASS during the conflict, it was not overlooked that the Armenian

side's statements were clearly given more priority (Aliyev, 2020). As a matter of fact, when we look at the broadcast flow of the agency about the war between September 28 and November 1, it was observed that it included 40 news and statements from Armenia and 28 from Azerbaijan (Muradov, 2020).

Another important issue that gave information about Russia's attitude during the war was the discussions on the deployment of peacekeeping forces to the region. At the end of the process, Russian peacekeepers were indeed deployed to the region. However, it was the Russian press that brought this issue to the fore for the first time, and Russian journalists, who questioned the Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan on September 30, talked about the Russian peacekeeping force out of the blue. In response to the question, Pashinyan said that the possibility of placing a foreign peacekeeping force in Karabakh is not on their agenda. However, successive defeats on the fronts changed the Armenian prime minister's view of the issue within a few days. As a matter of fact, Pashinyan, in his statement to Al-Jazeera on October 3, mentioned that the deployment of peacekeepers, especially Russian peacekeepers, to Nagorno-Karabakh could be discussed (Azernews, 2022). Upon these statements, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that the issue of peacekeeping is possible if the two conflicting parties approve. A few days later, there was a response to the peacekeeping dispute from Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, in an interview with SKY News on 9 October, the President of Azerbaijan declared that the issue of peacekeeping is still early (Muradov, 2020).

But the Russian side continued to keep the issue on the agenda. As a matter of fact, on October 14, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that it would be possible to send Russian military observers to Karabakh (Racz, 2021). The next day, Kremlin spokesman Peskov, repeating his previous words, stated that Azerbaijan and Armenia should decide on the issue. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, clarified the issue of peacekeeping again on October 16 and said it was too early (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Towards the end of October, when the war on the front developed against Armenia, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan began to establish closer contact with Russia. Foreseeing that the situation would worsen if Moscow does not intervene, the Armenian prime minister said on October 21 that Russia is doing everything possible for Armenia (Aliyev, 2020). The next day, Russian President Putin emphasized that they have close relations with both warring states and said that no country has made more effort to solve the problem than

Russia. The statement pointed out that the Kremlin administration was watching the developments carefully. On the other hand, Putin said in his statement that he made phone calls with the Armenian prime minister many times a day in order to find a compromise. The Armenian prime minister, who probably understood the Kremlin's statements to mean that “the situation would be much worse without Russia”, gave the message that they openly welcome the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in Karabakh. Pashinyan also spoke about the Russian-language channel WION on 25 October and said that peacekeepers should settle in the region (Racz, 2021). Thus, after Armenia officially accepted the placement of only Russian peacekeepers in the region, the eyes were turned to Azerbaijan. However, there was no statement from Azerbaijan for a while. Pashinyan's words were evaluated by the Kremlin on October 30 (Azertag, 2021). Spokesperson Peskov stated that if both sides approve, Russian peacekeepers can be deployed to the region. Meanwhile, as the Armenian army lost more and more positions on the fronts with each passing hour, the Armenian administration began to demand urgent intervention from Russia. Basing its request on the second article of the friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance agreement signed between the two states in 1997, Armenia was assured that Russia would intervene in case the conflicts spread to the country's territory (Azertag, 2021). While these developments were taking place between Russia and Armenia, on October 30, US Deputy Head of National Security O'Brien announced that his country had started a peacekeeping force from Scandinavian states to Karabakh (Aliyev, 2020). Following the statement from the USA, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Rudenko replied that no peacekeeping force can be deployed in the region without the consent of the conflicting parties (Racz, 2021). The statement was interpreted as dissatisfaction with the US initiative and that Russia had no other thought than to place its own peacekeeping force in the region.

Since the first days of November, the Azerbaijani army achieved significant successes at the front, while the clashes in front of Shusha accelerated the communication between Russia and Armenia. On November 7, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan stated to the German ARD television that they received the expected support from Russia (Askerov, 2021). Although it is not clear what Pashinyan means by expected support, it has been evaluated by political experts that Russia has done serious work to stop the war. In the same interview, Pashinyan once again stated that only Russian peacekeepers should be placed in Karabakh, since he knows the region well. After the liberation of Shusha, the arrival of the Azerbaijani army in front of Khankendi aroused

great concern in the Armenian government. Pashinyan said, "After Shusha fell, Khankendi was left defenseless," and he saw that up to 30,000 Armenian soldiers could fall under siege if the clashes continued (Azernews, 2022). Just when a Russian helicopter was shot down on the Nakhchivan border on the night of November 9, a statement came from Armenia regarding its surrender; thus, Pashinyan said that his country had surrendered and signed the ceasefire agreement (Azertag, 2021). When the statement made by the parties regarding the articles of the agreement was read at midnight, it was understood that Azerbaijan also approved the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in Karabakh. Thereupon, 1960 Russian peacekeepers from the Russian Ministry of Defense began to settle in Karabakh in order to monitor the ceasefire and implement the agreement as of November 10 (Askerov, 2021). The deployment of peacekeepers in Karabakh was interpreted even by the so-called separatist authorities and some Russian experts as the liberation of the rest of Karabakh by Russia.

3. Regional Geopolitics and Azerbaijan

3.1 Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan

Examining the internal and external aspects of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is essential in order to see that the national interests of Azerbaijan are realized in the direction desired by the state. This can be seen in Azerbaijan's relations with both separate states and international institutions operating at various scales. Strengthening the country's international position, the solution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on fair and international norms, establishing relations with the desired country on the international level based on the realization of mutual interests, and contributing to the establishment of an international stability and security environment are among the main priorities of Azerbaijan (Habibbeyli, 2016). It has been concluded that Azerbaijan's foreign policy is based on the following factors: First of all, the natural-geographical and geopolitical characteristics of the region where Azerbaijan is located are important. The second factor is that the country has rich energy resources, transportation and logistics facilities. Third is the need for a balanced and multipolar foreign policy. The fourth factor is historical and political reality and its consequences. It covers the military aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan and the occupation of 20 percent of its territory. The fifth factor is the fact that Azerbaijan has strong human resources and economic potential. The sixth factor is due to the rich culture and multicultural traditions of the Azerbaijani people. As a result of these factors, it is important that Azerbaijan supports the creation of a security environment in the South Caucasus, which is one of the important achievements in foreign policy in the last 31 years (Valiyev, 2020). Azerbaijan has reached this level thanks to its versatile and balanced foreign policy. In other words, there are both "soft power" and "hard power" elements here.

In this process, active diplomatic activities in international institutions and credible international measures take a special place. Azerbaijan shows an example of effective multilateral diplomacy in the international relations system. Since 1993, Azerbaijan's activity at the UN has risen to a new level. The Presidents of the countries who spoke at the meetings of this organization succeeded in taking decisions in favor of Azerbaijan and this process continued in the following years (Mazziotti et al., 2013). As a result, a large number of documents were adopted in a short time confirming and condemning the state of aggression by Armenia. Energy policies, on the other

hand, envisage the creation of globally important oil-gas and transportation-transport projects and cooperation corridors as one of the factors that ensure national security. Azerbaijan is an important country that carries out such a systematic, comprehensive, creative and diplomatic foreign policy in the South Caucasus. In recent years, Azerbaijan has given serious importance to relations not only with the UN, but also with the European Union, NATO, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and others (Kuchins et al., 2016). At the same time, cooperation with OSCE, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of Economic Cooperation, Turkic Council, Commonwealth of Independent States, GUAM, Council of Europe, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and other institutions has been dynamically developed in the past period. Azerbaijan's relations with its listed institutions have been carried out in accordance with the demands of a fair and secure international relations system (Valiyev 2020). As it is known, the promotion of intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue and multiculturalism has a special place during the basic principles of shaping a just and safe international environment. Azerbaijan has its own experience and model of activity in these fields. It is within the framework of this model that the First European Games, the Baku Forum of the UN Wedding Ring of Civilizations, the Intercultural Dialogue Forum and the "Baku Process" as a whole, the IV Islamic Homeland Games were held. This is openly accepted by high-level circles around the world (Valiyev, 2020).

In the context highlighted above, the place and role of the "Baku Process" in foreign policy should also be noted. Baku Process is an initiative put forward by the President of Azerbaijan in 2008 (Makili-Aliyev, 2013). The Baku Process has been in operation for 12 years and its main idea is to provide real content to civilizations and interfaith dialogue mechanisms. In concrete terms, it is a step that serves to establish links between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe (Valiyev, 2020). In a broader sense, this will serve to ensure a rational dialogue between the Islamic world and Europe. As a result, Azerbaijan provides exceptional services for international relations by incorporating three-way and multilateral cooperation models in foreign policy into a dialogue platform. Experts should thoroughly examine this important dimension of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in a geopolitical-theoretical context.

As an example, we can show the results of Azerbaijan-Russia-Iran cooperation. For the first time in the history of the Azerbaijani state, the presidents of Russia and Iran met with their Azerbaijani counterpart in Baku to discuss regional issues (Abbasov, 2015). The parties have taken

important decisions in many aspects. Likewise, they expressed a definite position regarding the security of the South Caucasus and the realization of the North-South corridor. The tripartite format of cooperation has opened wide opportunities to develop beneficial relations with other states as well (Abbasov, 2015). It should be emphasized that the successful use of the energy factor in foreign policy in the last 31 years. In this process, Azerbaijan both put forward new projects and created a form of international cooperation. TAP, TANAP, Southern Gas Corridor are initiatives of the Azerbaijan government (Valiyev, 2020). The West is very optimistic about the implementation of these projects and they are called projects that can change the European energy map. The European Investment Bank has provided substantial funds for the Southern Gas Corridor. Azerbaijan has created international cooperation for the realization of this project and ensured that the issue is constantly discussed at the ministerial level. This success should be considered as one of the bright examples of foreign policy. However, the steps taken are not limited to these projects. Thanks to the active diplomatic steps of the President, Azerbaijan has become one of the main participants of the "One Belt, One Road" ("New Silk Road") project. Now, Azerbaijan is included in the traffic carried out within the scope of this project (Valiyev, 2020). In addition, a strategic step was taken in the same direction with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line being put into use (Mazziotti et al., 2013). With this, Azerbaijan has turned into an important transportation junction of a wide area from the Far East to Europe.

As a result, the main priorities of Azerbaijan in the new period can be formulated as follows:

- First, the fair resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and the resolutions of the UN Security Council. Here, the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country and ensuring its sovereignty are expressed as the main condition.
- The second is to protect the country from external threats, as the main threats occur outside of Azerbaijan. This is one of the most important factors in ensuring safety at this stage.
- Third, supporting interstate relations that do not accept foreign interference. This issue has become a current issue recently, with some great powers starting to interfere more in the internal affairs of other countries. The developments observed in some parts of the world confirm this thesis. Azerbaijan has always followed an independent foreign policy.

- Fourth, raising politics in the national interest to a new level. Protecting the national independent state is now a strategic task. Such fine steps should be taken in foreign policy, especially in the international arena, in order not to harm the national state. For this, without a doubt, it is necessary to use new diplomatic methods by acting in accordance with national interests.
- Fifth, to further develop cooperation with international organizations in the context of expanding multilateral diplomacy. This point highlights the need for success at international levels. Here, it is possible to observe the continuity of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in line with the principles of international law.
- Sixth, the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism. In this process, the necessity of relying mainly on historical traditions and national-spiritual values is emphasized.
- Seventh, to increase the competitiveness of the national economy. This step will, on the one hand, ensure that the country does not suffer from the global financial-economic crisis, and on the other hand, it will expand exports and gain access to new markets. Thus, Azerbaijan's foreign policy is carried out in accordance with the new conditions on the basis of these fundamental principles.

As can be understood from the above points, in the new phase, Azerbaijan has declared the restoration of territorial integrity and the maintenance of sovereignty as the basic necessity. To achieve this, they must continue to actively cooperate with international organizations, implement new forms of cooperation, complete energy projects, expand their participation in international projects, fully realize their current potential in the transport sector and achieve goals in the East-West and North-South directions. From this, it is seen that the head of state takes into account the systematicity, continuity, consistency and reality in foreign policy, but also attaches great importance to factors such as justice and full compliance with international law norms. As a secular, democratic and just state, Azerbaijan is determined to raise its activity in the international arena to a new level. This means that new achievements await Azerbaijan in foreign policy.

3.2 Regional Geopolitics after the Current Settlement in Nagorno Karabakh

The South Caucasus is one of the most critical geopolitical regions in the world. Perhaps the situation in the Middle East is more dire, but according to the degree of complexity of the situation, it does not lag behind others. The countries of the region did not have their own territorial integrity for a long time (about 30 years). Azerbaijan and Armenia got their own state borders after the 44-day war in 2020, while Georgia still does not fully dominate its territory (Marcu, 2021). In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the territory of Georgia, there is Russia on one side of the line and Georgia on the other. In the Karabakh incident, there was a trio of Azerbaijan on one side and Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Diaspora on the other side of the barricade. The second important detail is in the background of the international approach (Welt & Bowen, 2021). In the case of Georgia, if we see significant foreign support for the country that has lost its integrity, we see a completely opposite picture in the Armenia-Azerbaijan case. World public opinion almost unanimously sided with the country that annexed the territory of a neighboring state. The end of the Karabakh War and the tripartite agreement on 10 November 2020 (Russian President, Azerbaijani President and Armenian Prime Minister) is very beneficial for the region. For example, Armenia will integrate the country into the Eurasian geography by using the Megri corridor and the country will come out of its isolation; undoubtedly, the event in question will increase the importance of Armenia and the country will take an active role in the geopolitics and geoeconomics of Eurasia more independently and raise its own status (Marcu, 2021). However, the Republic of Armenia is not so willing to establish contact with its direct neighbors. However, this situation prevents Armenia's integration with a wide geography, especially its close surroundings.

In the context of multipolarization, the geopolitical transformation of Georgia is also valid for Azerbaijan. Similar to Georgia, Azerbaijan is often portrayed in the region as an outpost of the West against Iran and Russia. Naturally, the entry of Azerbaijan under Russian influence will lead to the separation of the USA from Central Asia and the energy resources of the Caspian Sea (Ozgen, 2021). The support of Western investors against Russia in the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline and Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO are also important in this context (German, 2012). However, upon closer inspection, it will be seen that despite all the ups and downs between the two countries, Azerbaijan has followed a strategic balancing policy against Russia, rather than hostility from the front. As a matter of fact, Armenia, considered a traditional ally of

Russia, did not hesitate to cooperate with NATO itself. Therefore, "cooperation with NATO" does not mean anything by itself. Similarly, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan avoided opposing Russia directly. In fact, Azerbaijan joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011 and hosted the 2019 summit of this movement, which should be considered in the context of multipolarization and the country's will for independence from the West (balanced foreign policy) (Ozgen, 2021). The Non-Aligned Movement openly expressed its "strong support" for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020; however, Azerbaijan-Russia cooperation in the fields of diplomacy and energy has shown remarkable progress in the 2000s (Ozgen, 2021). In addition, Russia is among the most important arms suppliers of Azerbaijan.

A similar situation exists for Putin's Russia, although not Yeltsin. In the process of multipolarization of world politics, Russia, far from excluding Azerbaijan, insisted that this country join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Ergun & Valiyev, 2020). At the same time, Russia has become the third most important trade partner of Azerbaijan. In fact, Azerbaijan is Russia's largest trading partner in the South Caucasus. At this point, it is useful to note: In the first five months of 2020, Italy, Turkey, Russia and China were at the top of the list in their trade partnership with Azerbaijan (Ergun & Valiyev, 2020).

The Chinese factor, just like in Georgia, has the potential to enable Azerbaijan to find its place in the multipolar world. A report published by the World Bank in 2020 admits that both China and Azerbaijan attach great importance to the Belt and Road Initiative and that these countries make long-term commitments to each other (Garibov, 2020). The same report mentions that China sees Azerbaijan as a bridge connecting Europe with oil and natural gas lines as well as railway, sea and land routes. It is also stated in the World Bank report that Azerbaijan has given more weight to infrastructural development in recent years and that China has given importance to its contributions in this direction (Garibov, 2020).

In the context of the Turkish world, the geo-cultural importance of Azerbaijan for Turkey is indisputable. Geopolitically, Azerbaijan acts as Turkey's exit point to Central Asia and has a vital importance in terms of energy security. Turkey's close attitude to the West, which it held until 2016, has complicated the relations of powers such as Russia and Iran with Azerbaijan in many aspects (Welt & Bowen, 2021). Iran, for example, during this period focused on strengthening its influence in the former Soviet sphere under the grip of the West, but perceived Turkey and its

natural ally Azerbaijan's close relations with the West as a threat (Welt & Bowen, 2021). For this reason, he was worried that Turkey, which the USA saw as an outpost to increase its influence, would create a Turkish strip in the region. Although Iran often contradicts Azerbaijan in the use of natural resources in the Caspian Sea, it feared that the Turkish strip would spread to its own borders.

Finally, Iran is ethnically heterogeneous, with Azerbaijanis leading the way with 16% (Welt & Bowen, 2021). Under these conditions, Iran stood by Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, put pressure on its Azerbaijani population, made historical territorial claims to Azerbaijan, and provided support to Islamist parties in Azerbaijan. On the other hand, due to the ongoing conflicts with Armenia, Azerbaijan's connection with Nakhchivan is through Iran, and Iran has cooperated with Nakhchivan in the fields of oil, natural gas, electricity, agriculture and infrastructure. Similarly, it can be said that the intensification of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus is against Iran, which may face both a new mass refugee wave and ethnic conflicts within its borders. Perhaps more importantly, it can be said that Iran is the shortest route for Azerbaijan to reach the high seas. In terms of Azerbaijan and Iran, Turkey's geostrategic guidance in the spirit of Astana can contribute to activating this potential (Welt & Bowen, 2021).

Finally, when it comes to Armenia, this country had occupied 20% of Azerbaijan's territory until 2020, and the occupation of Armenia is a vital threat to Azerbaijan due to its proximity to energy lines. It has a position that cuts off Turkey's connection with the Turkic World and Central Asia by being stuck like a "dagger" between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Despite its population of approximately 3 million, Armenia has been able to exert a strong international influence through its diaspora in the USA and Russia; however, it could not become an important energy and trade route due to its aggressive attitude and weak economy (Garibov, 2020). Armenia does not have the potential to capture the strategic importance of Azerbaijan within the Belt and Road Initiative.

Russia and Iran provide energy to Armenia under favorable conditions. The energy and private sectors are predominantly in the hands of Russia. Russia also has two different military bases in Armenia. Armenia is protected by the Russian air defense system. In addition, Armenia has a membership in the CSTO operating under the leadership of Russia, and this membership provides it with military protection. However, Armenia, which some call a traditional Russian ally, is among the states that have stabbed the biggest dagger in the back of Russia. Armenia joined the

NATO Cooperation Council in 1992 and its relations with NATO gained momentum in the 2000s. The process that Armenia has been going through since the 1990s brought it to the Velvet Revolution that broke out in 2018 with the support of the USA and Soros (Marcu, 2021). As a result of the revolution, Pashinyan came to power and Pashinyan's cabinet was filled with the founders of Soros-linked non-governmental organizations. Many Russian organizations operating in Armenia, including the Russian Railway, have been subjected to various lawsuits under Pashinyan's administration, which deeply pursued policies against Russia. In fact, it was claimed that many Armenian officers, who were considered pro-Russian, were purged on the pretext of war in 2020 (Welt & Bowen, 2021). Under these conditions, Russia, on the other hand, approached Azerbaijan more sympathetically as a neutral actor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020, although its control over the Southern Gas Corridor and energy routes weakened with Azerbaijan. For the USA, the ideas of deepening the color revolution process by alienating Armenia from Russia, undermining the rapprochement process of Russia and Turkey, and destabilizing China's access to the region are extremely tempting. In the current conjuncture, Armenia, which has the aim of cutting off the transportation and energy routes connecting to Turkey by escalating the conflict, has obviously moved hundreds of PKK elements and families from Syria to Nagorno-Karabakh, together with mercenaries and war volunteers, who have close relations with the USA (Marcu, 2021). This worries Russia (and Iran), whose territorial integrity may be threatened by ethnic tensions. Regarding the energy issue, it is significant that the conflict coincided with the projected opening of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline towards the end of the year. It cannot be said that Georgia, of which 90% of its natural gas imports depend on Azerbaijan, is not very satisfied with the current situation (Garibov, 2020).

3.3 Nagorno Karabakh in the New Period

Karabakh turned into a construction site for modern projects in a year. While the foundations of new infrastructure and superstructure projects are being laid, the completed projects are put into service. The Azerbaijani government started working in the region, which lost no time since the end of the 2nd Karabakh War on November 10, 2020 (Gafarli, 2021). The region, which was destroyed and idled by Armenians for 30 years during the occupation period, and where violent conflicts took place a year ago, has now become a region where "smart city" and "smart

village" settlement units, airports and roads have been built, and agricultural areas have started to be cultivated (PMD, 2022).

The recovered items resemble a large construction site. The reclaimed territories seem like an enormous building site where frantic work has been going on for the last calendar year. Tanks, which travelled over the ancient highways of the area a year ago, have already ceded their place to construction equipment and vehicles. On the one hand, the foundations of new infrastructure and superstructure projects are laid, and on the other hand, the projects that have been completed are put into service. The first major project implemented in the region was Fuzuli International Airport. The airport, whose foundation was laid by President Ilham Aliyev on January 14, 2021, was built in 8 months in accordance with the highest international standards (Nesirova, 2022). Described as "Karabakh's gateway to the world", the airport was inaugurated on October 26, 2021 with the participation of President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. President Erdogan became the first head of state to land at Fuzuli International Airport (Gafarli, 2021). Construction work continues at Zangilan and Lachin airports, the foundations of which were laid during the year (Gafarli, 2021).

The return of refugees to their homes and the revival of life in Karabakh are among the priorities of the Azerbaijani government. In Azerbaijan, the activities carried out for the "Great Return", which is the process of returning the immigrants to their ancestral homeland, are carried out with the instructions and supervision of President Aliyev himself. For the purpose of funding the rehabilitation of the territories that were recently freed, the state budget for 2021 included 1.29 billion dollars (PMD, 2022). If this amount is not enough, the state will allocate additional funds (PMD, 2022). Aghdam's master plan was prepared and construction work began. Since all the settlements in the region were completely destroyed during the occupation period, cities and cities need to be rebuilt. The Azerbaijani administration is planning the re-establishment of Aghdam on a city basis. The master plan of Agdam, which was transformed into a "ghost city" during the occupation and described as "Hiroshima of the Caucasus", was prepared and the construction work began. Aghdam will be a modern city where more than 50 thousand people will live in about 3 years (Gafarli, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the most important development of 2020 in terms of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is the operation to liberate the occupied lands of Azerbaijan, which started on September

27 and lasted for 44 days. The 2nd Karabakh war, which took place between 27 September and 10 November 2020, is the result of a problem that has not been resolved with diplomacy for nearly 30 years and resulted in the outstanding success of the Azerbaijani army. The agreement signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia on November 10, 2020 brought a radical change to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The articles in the said memorandum have different results and mean different meanings for the states parties. As a matter of fact, while the agreement is considered a success for Russia and Azerbaijan, it is stated that the opposite is true for Armenia (Valiyev, 2020). Prime Minister of Armenia, Pashinyan, who signed the agreement, faced various insults and violent reactions from the people of Armenia. According to the articles of the agreement, Azerbaijan will establish its sovereignty in the occupied Karabakh region, the presence of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh will continue, Russian peacekeepers will be deployed in the Lachin corridor and Nakhchivan, and a corridor will be established to connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenia, and in the agreement reached after the hot war in which approximately 5 thousand people lost their lives, there is no statement about what the status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be (Garibov, 2020).

It is an indisputable fact that another winner of the Karabakh war is Turkey. Turkey's UAV warfare has proven its effectiveness before (Urcosta, 2020). It showed its effectiveness against the regular army-level military forces in Syria and Libya. However, the training and war tactics that Turkey gave to the Azerbaijani army in the Karabakh war demonstrated the success of Turkey in the war between the two regular armies. A more effective promotion of Turkey's defense industry in the global market could not be imagined. Turkey, which has increased its geopolitical weight in Eurasia, has now begun to be perceived as an independent actor on a global scale, not just a power in the region where it is geographically located or a power affiliated with the West within NATO. Without a nuclear weapon, Turkey entered the nuclear-armed superpowers club. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Turkey strengthens its position as the protector of the Islamic world (Urcosta, 2020). The message that Turkey can ensure the security of logistics and energy lines stretching from east to west was also given clearly over Karabakh. It has been shown to the world that Armenia paid a heavy price for its moves towards energy lines in April 2020, and that Turkey will pay heavy prices to those who try to harm its national interests (Hedenskog, 2020). Thus, the new Turkey's new position as a global actor was accepted by both the West and the East. As a result of Turkey's globalization in this way and the world's being "bigger than five", it is safe to

say that the quintuple structure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will also change in the future, and that the new global order cannot be established without Turkey (Urcosta, 2020).

While Russia was going to lose the region completely in the conflict with the West for the South Caucasus, it strengthened its regional presence. It is possible to say that the legitimacy of this strengthening is indisputable. In fact, in Nagorno-Karabakh, as in Crimea, Russia achieved a geopolitical success without firing a bullet. While achieving this success, Russia shared the South Caucasus with Turkey, not with the West. Putin also showed the Armenians through the armed forces of Azerbaijan that Westernization would come at a heavy price (Ozgen, 2021).

Trying to use global powers in regional fights by cunning, Armenia was left without support in its most critical period. While it had to learn from this situation and re-establish its relations with its neighbors according to the new facts, Armenia was both dragged into a political crisis and caught in a revanchist current. Being able to turn the clearly lost war into a national success, Armenia is advancing towards a national disaster with the political forces trying to come to power with revanchist rhetoric. In fact, it should be underlined that this defeat is an opportunity for Pashinyan. After the defeat, Pashinyan, who did not think of straying from power and every step he took was perceived negatively by his people, could put the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian problem under Russia's responsibility, and could enter the process of reconciliation with Turkey and Azerbaijan quickly (Kinik & Celik, 2021). If it takes these steps and opens the borders, Pashinyan will have the opportunity to gain power for another term by winning new elections thanks to the rapidly improving economy. This opportunity also offers Pashinyan the opportunity to make the reforms he desires, and he can go down in history as a reformer and savior instead of a cursed ruler who lost the war (Kinik & Celik, 2021). Russia and former rulers, together with the opposition against Pashinyan, with the effect of the lost war, will also have to transform Pashinyan into a political refugee, like the former President of Georgia, Saakashvili. Underlining that the existence of Armenia as a state is only possible through a policy reconciling with its neighbors, it should be said that it is possible for Armenia, which lost the war, to turn the current situation in its favor and move to the winning side by following the Karabakh ceasefire agreement (Garibov, 2020).

In general, it can be said that that the stabilization of the region is both a gain for the four countries involved in the conflict (Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan). It can be said that

the stability of the region is also positive for Georgia and Iran; but it is certain that Russia's strong settling in the South Caucasus will be worrying for Georgia. While Turkey's being a balancing factor in this regard will benefit Georgia, it seems to cause concern for Iran. A policy follow-up of these two states towards Turkey and Russia at the new Caucasus table, not with global actors, will have positive results in terms of their national interests. Regional states that will try to play games based on non-regional actors (USA, France or other global powers) in the South Caucasus need to analyze what Armenia is going through well.

Nagorno Karabakh crisis, which has not turned into a hot conflict for many years, has escalated again, caused an environment of war, and caused the death of many soldiers and civilians. The Armenian administration was disturbed by this attitude of Russia, and Pashinyan openly expressed this discomfort. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, maintained its neutral stance until an agreement was reached. In the background of Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia, it is an undeniable fact that the self-confidence and courage given by Russia's neutrality, as well as the military and diplomatic support it received from Turkey, played a major role (Valiyev, 2020).

In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has a larger population than the Shia population in the region, has either remained neutral or has taken a side with Armenia since the beginning of the crisis. Iran provided weapons and logistic support to the Armenians during the Karabakh crisis. The biggest reason why Iran is against Azerbaijan during this crisis is the excess population of Azerbaijani Turks in its territory and the potential of Azerbaijan to threaten its territorial integrity. In addition, the wide cooperation between Russia and Armenia and the bilateral relations between Iran and the Armenians have made Armenia an intermediary country in many issues between Iran and Russia. Thus, in a sense, Armenia and Iran have established good and strong relations in almost every field, both because of their common strategic interests and against the countries they see as a common threat to them.

The Republic of Turkey, one of the strongest states in the region and closely following every stage of the crisis, has openly emphasized that it has been with the Azerbaijan State since the beginning of the problem and has defended its territorial integrity. The Caucasus geography has preserved its feature of being a region that Turkey attaches importance from past to present. Especially with the collapse of the USSR, which affected the future of the whole region and the whole world, the power vacuum that emerged in the region had positive results in terms of Turkey's

bilateral relations with the Caucasian states. There is no doubt that the importance of Turkey having a common past and historical close ties with its neighboring states is invaluable in the emergence of these positive results. Azerbaijan, one of the Turkic Republics that gained its independence after the collapse of the USSR, has always received great and important support from Turkey. The discourse of "One Nation, Two States" used between the two countries in the past has continued until today with the support of the two countries to each other (Ozgen, 2021). Both in the beginning of the crisis and in the hot conflicts in 2020, Turkey has openly expressed its support to Azerbaijan, and it has been stated that it is ready for all kinds of support. Until the end of the ongoing crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Turkey will continue to stand by the friendly and brotherly country Azerbaijan. On the other hand, although Turkey took steps to normalize its relations with the occupying Armenia, it did not find a response. As long as the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is not resolved, normalization of relations between the two countries does not seem possible.

Conclusion

The Caucasus is a region that has been on the agenda for different reasons at different times in the world and has the potential to continue to be on the agenda. Problems in the Caucasus and the Caucasus Region, especially after the collapse of the USSR, attracted the attention of the international environment and started to be on the agenda more intensely in the following periods. The exact borders of the region and the countries within the borders of the region have not been clarified even today. The most important reason for this sensitivity and fragility, which is the biggest disadvantage of the region, also originates from within the region. Different ethnic, religious and political variables in the countries in the region have been the most important reason for the crisis in the region to continue until today. The Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis, which lasted between Azerbaijan and Armenia until 2020 and which has not yet been fully resolved and has reached the size of a hot conflict again, is the most serious, causing the greatest massacres in the Caucasus Region, the longest lasting crisis and attracting the attention of many countries around the world to the region.

From the first day of the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis to this day, although the Russian Federation has tried to appear and act impartially just like the Islamic Republic of Iran, it has not refrained from providing military, economic and logistical support to the Armenian State, as in the painful Khojaly Massacre. However, the support given by the Russian Federation to Armenia was not repeated in the environment of conflict and war that started again in 2020. The clashes that started on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in July 2020 turned into a war on September 27. The war, which emerged because of controlling Nagorno-Karabakh, lasted for about a month and a half and ended with the agreement announced on 10 November 2020. Following Azerbaijan's seizure of Shusha, the Yerevan government had to concede defeat and depart from Karabakh. Pashinyan acknowledged that the arrangement was terrible for his people, but that he made it at the army's request as a consequence of the war's progress. The 28-year-old status quo in the South Caucasus has been redefined thanks to Russia's intervention and the deal signed by Russian President Putin, Azerbaijan President Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan.

Azerbaijan, whose lands were occupied as a result of the crisis and conflicts, has for many years displayed an attitude in favor of solving the problem in accordance with international law and in a peaceful way. The Armenian state, on the other hand, has maintained its invasive and

uncompromising stance for many years, with the support of other European states, especially the United States of America and until 2020, the Russian Federation. Finally, after a short war that lasted for 44 days at the end of 2020, Azerbaijan was able to partially expel the invaders from the region. Turkey approached the crisis on the basis of the "common identity" phenomenon and national feelings, sensitivities and Turkish nationalism and supported unconditionally leaving the lands belonging to Azerbaijan to Azerbaijan. Considering its interests, despite its religious and sectarian partnerships with Azerbaijan, it left all these similar identities aside and carried out policies that would mostly side with the Armenian State. While the State of the Republic of Turkey has repeatedly condemned the provocative and aggressive attitudes of the Armenian State in the Region with the participation of the parties that have groups in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, which is the legislative body, it has not been possible to see such a condemnation or attitude in the Assemblies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In general, a number of issues emerge when analyzing the real situation in international politics or the South Caucasus. If any attitude or action is in the interests of the superpowers or not, then whether it is in line with international law or not comes into the background and these powers take action in their own interest. This is the "world order" of great powers, and this order is determined not by international law, institutions or institutes, but by the proportion of power potentials of key geopolitical actors. The problems in the South Caucasus, especially the Karabakh issue, should be looked at in the same context. In this context, given this, it is clear that Russia has no interest in seeing the "Karabakh issue" resolved in its entirety. Moscow hopes to maintain its sway over both nations' foreign operations and regional policy by taking advantage of the situation. As in other post-Soviet states, Russia's long-term interests in regional security may not always align with those of local peace and stability advocates in the South Caucasus. Russia has serious mechanisms to maintain its influence on both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, of course, took advantage of all the opportunities that it could, as much as it could, in this matter. Even though Azerbaijan achieved a military victory, the conflict is still ongoing at the political and diplomatic levels. After that, it should play its own game on the chessboard in accordance with the trend and create a new strategy for each move. As a result of this geopolitical reality, Azerbaijan is developing its own policy toward the situation. The Turkish stance is crucial at this juncture in particular. It seems that Azerbaijan-Turkey military cooperation and the deployment of bases have now turned into a historical necessity.

It can be said that the new period will affect the balance of power in a wider geography, including the Caucasus in particular and the countries surrounding the region in general. In this context, it is seen that Turkey-Azerbaijan cooperation has shaken the “status quo” that has been imposed in the region for 30 years. This tremor is primarily concerned with Armenia. The occupation policy, which Armenia tried to maintain in a foreign-dependent manner, collapsed despite all the military, political and diplomatic support it received. Although the Yerevan administration is not aware of it yet, it has become clear that in the new period, despite Turkey and Azerbaijan, it cannot continue this policy and should not rely on the support it receives.

The new period has also revealed some consequences for Russia and Iran, which are influential countries in the region. As a matter of fact, it is not only the sensitivities in the Caucasus that shape the policy followed by Russia during the war. The "fragmented relationship" model that has developed in many different fields with Turkey has also been effective. In Turkey-Russia relations, where the problems have been compartmentalized recently, the issues sometimes involve cooperation and sometimes conflict. Therefore, the unique dynamics of Turkey-Russia relations, along with factors such as Azerbaijan's relationship with Russia and the pro-Western attitude of the Pashinyan government, were influential in the process.

Russia is aware of the increasing Turkish influence in the Caucasus in the new period and does not want this situation. However, he is also aware of the cost – at this stage – of taking action to reverse this situation. For this reason, although he did not want Turkey to take part in the ceasefire observation mission at the first stage, he did not object to the establishment of the Turkish-Russian joint observation mission. He seems to have tacitly accepted that Turkey will be a more effective actor in the region in the new period than before. Iran, on the other hand, was less engaged during the Second Karabakh War compared to previous periods. In the new period, it is seen that Iran will carefully follow Turkey-Azerbaijan relations in its policy towards the region. The extreme reactions of Iran to the poem that President Erdogan recited at the victory ceremony give clues to Tehran's cautious attitude in the new period and beyond that, its anxiety. In this context, it is seen that the room for maneuver has narrowed considerably in order for Iran to implement its old policies towards the Karabakh problem in the new period as well. It can be said that the same is true for regional policies beyond the Karabakh problem. On the other hand, the “Six Platforms” proposal, which was voiced by President Erdogan and Aliyev and which covers

all the countries in the region, was a move that revealed the regional perspective of the Turkey-Azerbaijan duo for the new period. The Six Platform, proposed to ensure permanent stability in the region, is important as it shows that the two countries do not have any revisionist claims in the region, but only aim for sustainable stability. In order for this mechanism to take shape and produce an effective result, Armenia must first give up its aggressive policies. It is essential for Russia and Iran to abandon the policy of increasing or protecting their regional influence by using conflicts and tensions in the region, for the Six Platform proposal to produce effective results.



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