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The Geopolitical Ramifications of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1988–2024): Challenges and Opportunities for Turkey

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Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and territorial dispute between the Armenian and Azerbaijan has implications for international stability. This paper seeks to explore the concepts of neo classical realism and Turkish involvement in the conflict particularly in context of the 2020 conflict. This is done by evaluating the historical and ethnic context as well as the strategic blueprints that shape the power struggle in the South Caucasus. Turkey's policies in this context are viewed in broader terms to understand their geopolitical objectives. Turkey's support for the Azerbaijan government is viewed as an attempt to achieve greater Turkic unity in that region and strengthen its foothold in the region. However, this unity greatly complicated foreign relations with races like Russia, the European Union and other members of the Eurasian Economic Union, presenting the risk of destabilization. The paper comprehensively and meticulously examines the rationale adopted by Turkey in Kashatagh and Naraku, coined in xenophobic fervor and enhancing its right of ascription against Armenia. The results emanated from this research portray Turkey's interventions in Nagorno-Karabakh as a potentially influential regional pivot alongside the long extending issues in its political standing.

Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh war has caused Armenia and Azerbaijan to be in conflict abandoning the two groups to control or check the section between Asia and Europe. Its collateral effects attract many regional powers such as Turkey, which has a historical influence in the area and made efforts to enhance its presence in the conflict during the escalation of the issue on the year of the 2020 war (Cornell, 2020). Its participation aligns well with Ankara's self granted ambition of sustaining its purpose of action in line with its multifaceted diplomatic and security strategies. There are disputes that have not affected the regional superpowers and the international actors. A conceptual

framework is designed in order to assist the analysis of such an interplay, with emphasis on the struggle over dominance of over Nagorno-Karabakh and the broader regional power balance (Herzig, 1999). What begun as the cause of this conflict, x4 structured ethnic, historical and regional variables expanded the violence to a point it escalated into an all out war in the late twenty hundred century. The ethnicity of Nagorno-Karabakh was once solely owned and controlled by Armenians. Within this territory, the Azerbaijan republic was formed and Nagorno- Karabakh subsequently obtained its independence. (Gültekin-Punsmann, 2020). This event then led to the expeditious war that was defined by frequent truces and escalations. The search for local control by both Armenia and Azerbaijan is paramount to this conflict, as they both seek to have power and control over key territories. This issue goes beyond just conquering borders- it targets international ambitions, energy resources, as well as relationships with global and regional players. And that includes Russia and Turkey as the external players whose interests in the region further complicate the picture. How it affect the regional dynamics and how shifts in power, coalitions, and the struggle for influence in the South Caucasus mold the Nagorno-Karabakh problem (Khalilova, 2023). It will shed light on the role of external forces, the process of negotiating peace within the framework of a reasonable deal that would satisfy the interests of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis and also ensure stability and security in the region. Turkey, on the other hand, seeks to capitalize on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a means of greater geopolitical influence in the region (Tocci, 2021). Turkey's international influence especially in Russia has challenged many actors including EU raising questions regarding its long term stability in its ambition of being regionally dominant prime influencer.

The article further investigates the energy security balance Turkey attempts to establish during the nangorno karabakh conflict by utilizing its geostrategical advancement along with its international and regional relations, by exploring Turkish energy potential, economic cooperation and regional power augmentation opportunities. The research thereby presents the sophisticated mannerism through which Turkey aims to manipulate the strategic future of South Caucasus along with a more comprehensive view of its policies towards itself. (Smolnik, 2018).

Research Questions

1. How Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 1988 to 2024 shaped its geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus region?
2. What are the implications of Turkey's military and diplomatic strategies during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for regional stability and international relations?

Theoretical framework

The concept that seeks to provide the best historical explanation for this research is neoclassical realism, which incorporates both behavioral and structural factors to account for the foreign policy of states. In particular, neoclassical realism gives prominence to domestic factors like leadership

images, social composition, or national personality in conjunction with systemic factors due to global competition (Aslan, 2020). It is important to note this theoretical framework while studying Turkey's response to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as it seeks to explain the dialectics of Turkey's internal politics and its external-role politics. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in this regard, is one manifestation of the processes of destabilizing power relations among domestic regions under a foreign political architecture (Kösebalaban, 2022). Within this perspective, Turkey's policy in the south Caucasus can be understood as an extension of having to dominate that region with the help of global forces and domestic interests. Further, there is a global picture where Turkey is placed in a tri-polar world where both Russia and the European Union contend for important global regions (Turan, 2021). The South Caucasus remains a geo-economic target; hence, there is trade and energy pipelines to be laid in the region and as such, Turkey was drawn into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, systemic considerations alone cannot fully explain all of Turkey's policies.

Neoclassical realism can be used to examine and analyze internal factors that explain Ankara's foreign policy. The historical and cultural dimensions of Turkey's appeal to Azerbaijan in the context of Turkic unity create a compelling account of Turkey's commitment to Baku. Furthermore, the Turkish leadership of Erdoğan has adopted a rather robust foreign policy that enables Turkey's expansion in the region, all the while offering nationalist and economic explanations for their deed to the populace and foreign countries (Ulgen, 2023). This paradigm explains what could be the reasons for such set goals and the limitations Turkey faces in achieving its strategic goals. Its active involvement in the South Caucasus has drawn the ire and counterbalancing reactions from other regional actors, and particularly from Russia, which has a vested interest in the region. The EU, as a status quo actor concerned with the regional balance of power, has also objected to Turkey's behavior, thereby establishing a strategic quandary. Neoclassical realism assists in understanding how these external pressures integrate with the internal objectives of Turkey as a nation state, mainly the need to maintain patriotism for the country's foreign policy and energy security (Habibi, 2021). Furthermore, the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism reflects on neoclassical realism of its intricate components reconstructs the case in a more comprehensive sense exploring broader guarantees of Turkey's role in the conflict. Turkey's Diplomatic Interests in Nagorno-Karabakh Turkey's policies in the South Caucasus rest upon balancing the claims for regional influence in the South Caucasus from Turkey's side while countering the Russian and Iranian inputs into the Nagorno-Karabagh dispute. Such an approach demonstrates the need to comprehend how international and domestic factors interact to explain a complex set of strategies that Turkey pursues in the region including mediation, peacemaking and long-term economic gains (Roberts, 2020).

Using neoclassical realism, It focuses on the relationship between structural influences (the existence of anarchy in the state system and rivalry in the region) and other factors at the domestic level: ideas about leadership, links with the past and economic needs. With these approaches

combined, the analysis of Turkey's threats and prospects in the region becomes more complete, explaining how such relations influence the South Caucasus and the geo-political dynamics of the region.

Nagorno-Karabakh, Disputed territory

This region is located within the mountainous South Caucasus boundaries between the Caspian and Black Seas. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been a cause of rivalry between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the 1980s to the beginning of the 90s and has largely caused violence thereafter as well (International Crisis Group, 2021). The war escalated when the conflict broke down in 2020 when Azerbaijani forces blocked a vital route into the enclave and fighting ensued. Peacekeepers from Russia helped end the violence, but months before this time, tensions had been on the rise. The Lachin Corridor is the only route to from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in a shortage of essential goods and KP supplies due to the blockade (BBC, 2024). While Armenia claimed its own military intentions, Azerbaijan stated that Armenia was the cause for the blockade by encroaching on Nagorno-Karabakh with the military supplies. The accessibility provided through the Lachin corridor and Aghdam road is dependent on the provision of security by the Russian peacekeepers and their settlement in the designated area since the latter part of the year of 2020. However, after the deployment of Russia, their attention and military assistance was overextended by the war with Ukraine (Cornell, 2015). The Armenian prime minister accused Russia of having "unilaterally abandoned the region". Authorities in Karabakh said the fighting resulted in 200 deaths, while Azerbaijan reported 192 soldier deaths. On September 20 and after 24 hours of fighting Russia mediated an armistice between Azerbaijan and the ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Both parties agreed that their local Armenian detachments would be entirely disarmed and dismantled. Following this, Azerbaijan and the Karabakh authorities initiated discussions on incorporation of the enclave within AZERBAIJAN. Like Samwell Shahramanyan, the leader of this territory, who also signed an order abolishing all state structures starting from next year, thus putting an end to the region's fight for independence (United Nations Security Council, 2020).

Mr. Shahramanyan explained that the decision to abolish the state was "held on the basis of the priority of the physical security and vital interests of people". He refers to the agreement by Azerbaijan that "the residents shall be allowed to travel in and out freely without any restrictions whatsoever".

Uhiakurov explains that round about the nineteen twenties, current day Armenia and Azerbaijan became a part of the Soviet Union. The territorial unit that was named Nagorno-Karabakh was largely populated by ethnic Armenians; it, however, was vested in Azerbaijan. The regional parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh held a vote to join Armenia, which was during the Soviet Union's disintegration in late 1980s (Raufoglu, 2020). Azerbaijan attempted to suppress the separatist movements while Armenia supported them. This sparked ethnicity related violence and soon after

Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independence from Moscow, a war broke out. There were years of suffering that stemmed from bloodshed. One of the editors at BBC Azerbaijani Service, Konul Khalilova speaks about how in Armenia, ethnic Azerbaijanis had to leave, and that forced them to seek refuge in Azerbaijan (Ulgen, 2023).

Armenian forces supported by certain elements of the Russian military killed the inhabitants of the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly located in Nagorno-Karabakh in February 1992. According to the presentation made by Azerbaijan, the figure exceeds six hundred. Armenia calls into question that count as well as the number of deaths. Over the years, there have been reports of ethnic cleansing and massacre which have together resulted in the deaths of more than a million people. In addition, Khalilova acknowledges that it can be sometimes unsettling to see how little the young people in both countries know about the history of war (Balci, 2021). For instance, she notes, So, it happens young people in Armenia don't hear about mass killings of Azerbaijanis, nor do young Azerbaijanis today hear about the Armenian pogroms in the cities of Sumgayit and Baku at the end of 80s'. Instead, Azerbaijan denies the existence of such pogroms. The war for Nagorno-Karabakh which lasted from 1988 to 1994, ended with a ceasefire which was mediated by Russia, after the Armenian troops managed to capture Karabakh and surrounding territories. Azerbaijan lost most of the Armenian-controlled territories but within this agreement, Karabakh was still recognized as part of Azerbaijan, however within that period it was controlled by ethnic Armenians who were supported by the Armenian government (Herzig, 1999).

Ever since the first clash, it has felt like it has been a series of minor warfare interspersed with periods of tranquillity. Three years ago, the fiercest military engagement to occur since the beginning of the 1990s erupted, during six weeks of winter wrestling. In the most recent self-imposed warfare, signed in November 2020, Azerbaijan was able to recapture all the territories that had previously been under Armenia's control for over 26 years. This aid enabled Armenia to regain a sizable portion of the territory it had over the Aab after the winter war of 1985. According to the arrangement, Armenian combatants were required to leave these regions and have since been restricted to a reduced part of the area (Gültekin-Punsmann, 2020).

Turkey Interest

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, disputes over territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, that attracted attention from NATO, the U.S, Russia and Iran in September to issue a call for a cessation of hostilities, has once again entered a period of crisis. So Sequential Turkish response was markedly different. However, Thatcher asserted a ceasefire would be reached sooner. President Erdogan's stance has inbuilt the deep cultural, military and economic linkages between Turkey and Azerbaijan and they would support to reclaim the occupied territories (Aras & Karakaya, 2021). He has always viewed the Turkey-Azerbaijan relationship as 'one nation and two states'. The region, it is important to remember, which is located within the boundary of Azerbaijan has never been recognized by the world because of its Caucasian-Armenian separatist efforts in the

90s, which sparked a number of clashes (Gurbanov, 2021). Consistently, the Turkish side has been in support of wiping the invader with Azerbaijan discussing this issue in a larger frame of United Nations. This shows that, even geopolitically, the two countries have been in the regard to their antagonistic resolution over Nagorno Karabakh which bears close cultural and linguistic ties.

Nonetheless, relations between Armenia and Turkey have been turbulent historically, most notably because of the events of 1915 when Ottoman Empire armories murdered Armenians, an event which Turkey sees as a crime against humanity while Armenia does not. Through these disagreements, Turkey has been increasingly accused of siding with one party, in this case Armenia, which has further complicated the already tense situation in the region (Tchilingirian, 2019). With civilian casualties on both sides, more than 1000 people are reported dead as of now in the controversy. Turkey's direct involvement in the most recent pepper spray over the region which ignited in the 1990's has only fueled the fires of discontent further.

Turkey has not only stood in support of Azerbaijan's claims of sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh appearing but it also participated in the previous conflict that existed between Armenia and Azerbaijan, primarily during their years of haggling with Armenia over conciliatory terms in 2008 (Raufoglu, 2020). But these plans for diplomacy have failed, which deeply incentivized Turkey to maintain close ties with Azerbaijan. According to Sinan Ulgen who served as the Turkish diplomat, the enhancement of the military forces between Turkey and Azerbaijan has been of utmost importance. The military resources available have heightened with Azerbaijan taking advantage over Armenia, which has a minor size and is less economically developed. The combination of officers from Azerbaijan being trained as well as post Israel and Russia, Turkey has spearheaded as the mainstream supplier of military equipment. Despite the defense pact signed with Armenia, Arms have continued to be shipped to both Azerbaijan and Armenia, making the situation of regional security more tense (Hunter, 2021). In more recent times, there has been some evolution in Turkey's political scene as the ruling party- the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has decided to lean towards a more aggressive foreign policy, And this particular shift can be partially attributed to nations within the party itself, who are more invested in the nationalistic policies of the Caucus region and the Black Sea basin (Mirzoyan, 2021). As a result, Turkey has resorted to a more stringent foreign policy which can be observed through its military actions in Syria, Libya and even in northern Iraq, along with diverging tensions with Greece and Cyprus over energy policies in the Mediterranean sea. Moreover, with Turkey showing sufficient support towards Azerbaijan such as inwhen Turkey provided unrestricted support to Azerbaijan in July 2020, during the time Azerbaijani and Armenian forces clashed against each other near some vital gas pipelines, Turkey has increased its involvement within the Caucasian Region. Disputes of energy pipelines led to increased militaristic support involving joint army exercises alongside the deployment of Turkish F-16 fighter jets to the Azerbaijan territory. Also, Turkey's export of military grade arms, primarily advanced drones, to Azerbaijan has dramatically increased which marks a pivotal entry to Turkish involvement (Gurbanov, 2021).

In the beginning of the century, the War waged between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which lasted for more than 30 years, over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, entered a new phase as Turkey aided Azerbaijan with advanced military drones – mainly Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones. The Turkish drone technology outperformed Armenia's outdated Russian air force and combined with Azerbaijan's strategy of symmetric warfare, the drones reshaped the conflict altogether (Souleimanov & Siroky, 2020; Raufoglu, 2020). Traditional defense techniques implemented by Armenia, such as trench warfare, fell short when they were confronted with drones. In addition to regaining essential regions along the border with Iran, Azerbaijan secured key strategic gains during the battle. But previously, when Armenia accused Turkey of deploying military personnel and Syrian mercenaries to Azerbaijan, Turkey and Azerbaijan denied those allegations. However, experts propose that military expertise transfer from Turkey added to Azerbaijan's victory ambitions (Ulgen, 2023; Balci, 2021). This range of military, diplomatic, and telecommunication support, confirms Turkey's intention of deepening its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, while simultaneously expanding its influence in the south caucasus. This participation transforms not only the regional power dynamics but also indicates a greater role envisioned by Turkey in the geopolitics of the larger region.

Article References

Turkey's Evolving Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict by Shiriye (2021)

This paper focuses on Turkey's proactive engagement in the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh conflict and Turkey's military and diplomatic aid for Azerbaijan. At the same time, what shows is Turkey's expanding regional influence, more thanks to the use of drone technology and its geopolitical pacts. The challenges that Turkey will have in balancing its regional ambitions with other global powers (Russia, European Union) is also examined by the article.

Energy Security and Geopolitical Rivalries in the South Caucasus by Habibi (2021)

This thesis represents a research of the South Caucasus as a region with a geostrategic importance, especially in terms of energy security. It views the effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on regional stability and energy corridors that connect the Caspian Sea to Europe. It describes Turkey's interest in securing its energy routes and forming an alliance with Azerbaijan to curb Russian influence in the area.

Gurbanov, I. (2021). Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations in the Context of Nagorno-Karabakh

This article focuses on the Turkey – Azerbaijan strong bilateral relation specially the effect of this relation on Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Gurbanov also speaks about Turkey's military and material assistance to Azerbaijan, from the provision of advanced drones, such as the Bayraktar TB2, that have proven decisive for Azerbaijan's military successes in the 2020 conflict. Indeed, this military partnership has strengthened the political and cultural connection between the two countries and

Turkey has presented itself as a protector of Turkic solidarity. But Gurbanov also cautions that this alliance comes with problems bringing the balance of power between the regional powers, especially Russia and Iran. This article argues that Turkey's increasing influence in the South Caucasus could alter the regional security landscape, but carry the risk of exacerbating Turkish–Armenian tensions and with other external actors.

Pashayan, A. (2019). Nagorno-Karabakh and Regional Security Dynamics.

The author focuses on diagnosing the influence of the external actors (Russia, Turkey, Iran) on the complex security dynamics of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Turkey's increasingly strong role in Azerbaijan has radically altered the security environment in the South Caucasus. But Pashayan says that Turkey's active backing of Azerbaijan, most notably during the 2020 conflict, has strengthened Baku's military muscle and given it the confidence to lay territorial claims. It has however raised tensions with Armenia and made negotiating peace more difficult. Competing interests of major regional players make it difficult to achieve a sustainable resolution to the conflict, the author says. Turkey's role in the conflict is 'part of its grand strategy to project its power in the region but this could set the region back centuries if this is not managed in a more sophisticated way.

Shiriyev, Z. (2021). Turkey's Evolving Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Turkey's evolving foreign policy strategy in the South Caucasus and Turkey's active support for Azerbaijan during the escalation of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in 2020 are analyzed by Shiriyev's article. The author suggests that it is motivated by a combination of strategic interests, like securing energy corridors and expanding regional leverage, and domestic political calculations, like raising nationalist frenzy at home. Turkey provided the military support, from drones to military training, which helped Azerbaijan militarily, Shiriyev notes. It also addresses the diplomatic problems that Turkey suffers under, that is, Russia and the European Union that have voiced their concerns over Ankara's increasing power in the area. Therefore, Shiriyev concludes that Turkey's role in the conflict has confirmed its role as the key player of the South Caucasus, but has also brought with them the dangers of doing too much and suffering diplomatic isolation if tensions continue to rise.

Regional Dominance and External Influence

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a result of spill overs due to multidimensional roots such as history, ethnicity and politics with Armenia and Azerbaijan at the center of it all. Primarily comprised of Armenians, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh was under Lithuania, however it proclaimed independence during the 90's and the two nations began waging war. These historical discrepancies alongside ethnic differences have ensured the survival of this conflict as well as those in South Caucasus (Cornell, 2020; Roberts, 2020). The on going war for Nagorno-Karabakh is heavily impacted by international players seeking to expand their influence in the region which

allots room to view the war from a power dynamic perspective as well. This all goes hand in hand with the history of the region where the two nations have struggled with sovereignty and dominance alongside deep rooted ethnic tensions after the collapse of the Soviet Union during the late 20th century where more Armenians began settling in the Lithuania controlled region. It is no surprise that this provided the spark for violence as both Armenia and Lithuania were trying to expand their influence in the region (Hunter, 2021; Khalilova, 2023).

From an ethnical perspective, the conflict can also be seen as a fight for self identity. The Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region claim it to be historically theirs while Azerbaijan regards this territory as an inseparable part of the nation. This ethnic discord has contributed to the war, where each nation pursues its nationalism, leading to further violence and forced dislocation of civilians. Additionally, the region further developed into a source of patriotism for Armenia and Azerbaijan, making conflict resolution much more difficult (Smolnik, 2018; Shiryev, 2021).

Geopolitically, the conflict has become more complex as southern Caucasus garnered foreign interests. Turkey, Iran and Russia and their geopolitical undertakings have altered the trajectory of this conflict. While Russia has historically been allied with Armenia and has a defense treaty with Yerevan, Turkey has continuously endorsed the territorial claims of Baku because of cultural, historical and military influences over Azerbaijan. The engagement of these external actors indicates the existence of arms races among the great powers over the South Caucasus region, as they wish to secure a foothold in an area blessed with energy resources and vital trade routes (Hunter, 2021; Khalilova, 2023). For Turkey, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is a divergence of prospects and risks. The Turkish support for Azerbaijan stems from ethnic, cultural and historical affinities as well as from the aspiration to promote Turkic nationalism. Also, active involvement in this particular conflict enables Turkey to increase its geopolitical sway in the South Caucasus undermining other regional actors' power over the situation in the conflict. This aspect, however, was not without implications for Turkey. Turkey's undivided allegiance to Azerbaijan has been at the forefront of criticism by Russia and the EU, especially during the period of the conflict in 2020, due to the fact that it worsened the already existing tension in the region. This demonstrates a wider challenge of Turkey wherein it has to exercise moderation with respect to its regional desire in order to avoid offending other global actors (Cornell, 2020; Roberts, 2020). Further, the involvement of external actors such as Russia and Iran affects Turkey's stance in the region. Russia has presence in the region as a historical ally of Armenia and has continuously acted as a bulwark to the expanding influence of Turkey. The enmity between Turkey and Russia in the region of South Caucasus also complicates the situation since both countries camouflage their strategic goals while maintaining the overall geopolitical spectrum. In the end, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not merely a territorial issue of dispute between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis but it is also a struggle for geopolitical control of the South of the Caucasus region. Global actors such as Turkey, Russia and Iran, all faithful to different prisons of eight countries, continue to influence the direction of the conflict and adjust the equilibrium in the region. For

Turkey, the circumstance offers an opportunity to position itself as a regional power but great dangers are also emerging especially in its relations with other international players and stability of the region for a longer period of time (Smolnik, 2018; Shiriyev, 2021).

The factors of history, ethnicity and geopolitics influence the struggle for power over the South Caucasus and such external interventions do not seem to be resolving anytime soon.

Geopolitical Importance of Nagorno Karabakh

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict serves as a nexus of competitive interests for both the local and international players in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. It is important due to historical, ethnic, and political aspects alongside other factors more pertinent to strategy such as energy, transport, and security considerations (Roberts, 2020; Cornell, 2020). Because the disputed region is located between Europe and Asia, it serves as a crucial center of energy pipelines, transport corridors, and military bases. The conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh is about much more than just its borders because it is a conflict zone in itself for the South Caucasian region between Russia, Turkey, and the United States (Balci, 2021; Habibi, 2021).

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict arose as a result of deep-seated historical, ethnic, and territorial issues and has gained geo-political importance. In particular, the quest of the territorial integrity in Azerbaijan region along with the violence in the context of extreme nationalism has fuelled tensions between the two countries i.e Armenia and Azerbaijan. For both nations, external intervention has altered the local dispute, turning it into a source of national feeling, with the region becoming a national embodiment (Rumer, 2022; Tocci, 2021). For Turkey, this region is precious for it facilitates increasing the degree of cooperation with Azerbaijan, with which it shares ethnic and linguistic bonds. On the other hand, the historical relationship of Russia with Armenia and the need to have a presence in the South Caucasus always positively stimulated the active participation of Moscow (Turan, 2021; Yanik, 2021). One of the reasons of the geopolitical significance of Nagorno-Karabakh is its location in the midst of significant energy routes and resources. The South Caucasus is a vital route for oil and gas pipes for Europe from the Caspian Sea circumventing Russia and Iran. This energy dimension has drawn worldwide attention such as that of the United States which considers the area key to diversifying against overreliance on Russian energy and aiding Europe's energy supply (Gurbanov, 2021; Souleimanov & Siroky, 2020).

Thus, the United States has been involved in promoting stability and development in the South Caucasus region while exercising restraint in the conflict so as not to upset close allies such as Turkey.

Implication and challenges for Turkey over Nagorno Karabakh conflict

Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh is intricate. It poses an array of difficulties that reveal the nuances of Ankara's geopolitical ambitions. As a country that has deep historical, cultural, and

military connections with Azerbaijan, Ankara's active participation during the conflict has maximized its presence in the South Caucasus (Aras & Karakaya, 2021; Tocci, 2021). However, this involvement has ramifications that complicate Turkey's perception internationally and regionally. Turkey not only enhanced its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan but rather cemented it, something that sits proudly at the core of Ankara's regional strategy. Providing military aid in the form of armaments such as the Bayraktar TB2 drones and participation in joint military drills made Turkey a crucial ally in the Azerbaijan theater. Such a development consolidates Ankara's approach with respect to Turkic unity, "one people, two countries." Concurrently, the expansion of this partnership also creates avenues for Ankara to take advantage of energy security and economic growth. This is because Azerbaijan plays a critical role in providing Europe with energy through pipelines that do not pass through Moscow and Tehran. Turkey's involvement in aiding Azerbaijan in peripheral consolidation also guarantees its importance in energy transit networks in the region (Ulgen, 2023; Balci, 2021). However, Turkey's over-ambitious stance has attracted foreign policy complications, and provoked criticism against the country. Ankara's actions during the recent hostilities, including their military and rhetorical backing of Azerbaijan, were met with stern condemnation. Actors such as the European Union and the United States consider these actions as destabilizing. This criticism is consolidated by ensuring that Turkey's involvement in other disputes serves to undermine peace - rather than establish it and thus renders Turkey's credibility as a mediator or peace builder questionable. The Armenian Genocide is one of many history-based grievances that Turkey's endorsement of Azerbaijan has escalated with respect to the already frayed ties with Armenia (Raufoglu, 2020; Souleimanov & Siroky, 2020).

A major difficulty facing Turkey is how to deal with Russia, which is a country that has an important stake in the South Caucasus region and seeks to preserve its presence in the territory. The Turkish and the Russian cooperation in respect to Syria and Libya, for instance, shows the broader dimensions of convergence within the two countries (Aras, 2021; Tocci, 2021). Their mutual competition in Nagorno-Karabakh is, however, illustrative of the limitations of such partnership. Turkey's capacity to control the region is curtailed by Russia's role as a peace broker and the introduction of peacekeeping forces after the war. This situation does not allow Turkey to be aggressive with Russia. Rather it has to be clip its wings and be restrained like a tantalizing bird wishing to explore and expand its territory but unwilling to be overtly aggressive with Moscow (Ulgen, 2023; Balci, 2021).

Turkey's role in Nagorno-Karabakh is a double-edged sword as it comes with opportunities and a set of challenges. First, Turkey's support to Azerbaijan aligns with the nationalistic aims of the nationalist elites in Turkey and helps in consolidating political support for the regime, but simultaneously exposes Turkey to risks such as economic or diplomatic costs. Second, Turkey's military spending and potential alienation of key trade and political partners, such as the European Union, compounding the costs of implementing an assertive foreign policy in a complex region. Third, Turkey's participation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Sovereign Republic of Artasakh changes

that extend beyond the narrow boundaries of the conflict in question and contribute to the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy (Raufoglu, 2020; Souleimanov & Siroky, 2020). So, on one side, Ankara has managed to gather regional support from abroad and successfully gained influence in South Caucasus by strengthening its military and economic links with one of the players; Azerbaijan. So, progress from that quarter in the last five years, has enabled Turkey to become a significant player. Much of this – as has been noted – remains ambiguous, as the Turkish activity has also attracted antagonism and opposition from other controlling modes and the power parity-making helix (Balci, 2021). However, the main problem for Turkey has been to attain the equilibrium between its coarse-grained expansionist tendencies or aspirations and the maintenance of stability in the region and interaction with other actors as needed. In confronting these challenges, Turkey should be careful, and marginalize its role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict so as not to overexert its influence or illegitimately impede the attainment of its economic strategic meaningful goals (Ulgen, 2023).

Conclusion

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict encompasses several dimensions from historic, ethnic and strategic perspectives which in turn, affects the global balance of power and stability within the region. The roots of this conflict go back to the disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan and their respective territories and interests over the land and area, and such growing regional as well as global interests over the region have turned it into a hotbed of international engagement. The ongoing conflict depicts Turkey's unrelenting desire to innovate and transfigure the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus that is evolving alongside modern-day challenges. Above all, one of the most significant results that stem from the ongoing conflict is the growth and solidification of Turkey's cozyayyede strategic partnership with Azerbaijan. During the 2020 escalation Ankara provided military aid, advanced weaponry, and diplomatic support to Baku which strengthened the alliance between the two as well as cemented the turko unity. Turkey's rapprochement with Azerbaijan strengthened Turkey's in the South-C Caucasus in large measure due to this building coalition, gaining even greater Turkish leverage through crucial energy transit routes, economic cooperation and eventually security enhancement. The interplay between Turkish drones and Azeri military also proved how big of a game changer Turkish military technology will be in the battlefield aiding and cementing Turkey's role in the region. Nonetheless, Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh still received criticism and presented some difficulties. Although Ankara's conduct reinforced its reputation of being a rising power within the region, it also unveiled the perils of such overreach. Most international observers, including the European Union and the United States, regarded Turkey's backing for Azerbaijan as worsening rather than helping to settle the dispute. This has affected Turkey's relations with important global partners which has

also affected its wider global aspirations and clearly the pathway it needs to walk where its influence in the region does not come into conflict with diplomacy. Moreover, Turkey's engagement has shown, in turn, Turkey's relations with other regional players, including Russia, are complicated. All other countries have managed to collaborate in other geopolitical 'verticals' but competition between Turkish and Russian influence in the South Caucasus makes their relationship quite tenuous. After the conflict, Turkey was not able to use its influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh region because of the peacekeepers that Russia placed and mediation that it exercised in the conflict. This configuration makes it necessary for Turkey to seek a balance where it does not completely lose Russia while still pushing its agenda. The geopolitical complexity of this region has made it a focal point for international energy and trade and the ongoing conflict has further accentuated its relevance. This competition in the geopolitical arena has the potential to present opportunities to Turkey lest it endangers the current balance in the region. The role of Turkey as an overbearing force in the Nagorno-Karabakh has fostered nationalism in the country and strengthened support for its leadership, but at the cost of increased scrutiny from international observers along severe economic and diplomatic price involving Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in alignment with Turkey's aggressive foreign policy goals and its aim for economic integration has provided it with leverage to exercise its influence in the South Caucasus, however it has become the root cause of imbalances and tension in the South Caucasus. Now, Turkey is forced to exhibit a great level of restraint while trying to fulfill its regional ambitions as it must first resolve the imbalances in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey currently has a number of issues to account for and attempting to achieve all of them with an expansive and aggressive foreign policy will only exaggerate the existing issues. In order to adhere to their national interests, the South Caucasian countries would have to tolerate an assertive Turkey, however such a foreign policy approach lacks a sustainable approach and places all the countries in the region in a deleterious position. Turkey's participation in identified conflicts serves to illustrate the dual nature of Turkey's geopolitical strategy; on the one hand, it brings considerable benefits, but on the other, it brings an enduring set of challenges. In order for Turkey to achieve its regional and global objectives, the ability to cope with such challenges would be paramount, as it attempts to deal with the evolving multi-polar nature of the South Caucasus.

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