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# THE REALITY OF "BIG POLICY" OF GREAT POWERS AND THEIR STANCES ON THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR

(BÜYÜK GÜÇLERİN "BÜYÜK SİYASET" GERÇEĞİ VE İKİNCİ KARABAĞ SAVAŞI'NDAKİ TUTUMLARI)

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**Abstract:** *20% of Azerbaijan's territory was occupied by Armenia as a result of the First Karabakh War of 1994-1988 between Armenia and Azerbaijan. There was no commitment to peace between the two sides and the solution to the problem was entrusted to the states. But hopes for peace were dashed and no final resolution was reached since the OSCE Minsk Group started this process in 1994. The continuing occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia was increasing the likelihood of triggering a new war. The economic and military strengthening of Azerbaijan changed the balance of power in the region. Azerbaijan resorted to using military force in retaliation against Armenia's repeated military attacks in 2020, causing the breakout of the Second Karabakh War. Armenia's border violation on 27 September 2020 and its invasion attempt was the beginning of this "sudden war". The desire in Azerbaijan to get back the occupied territories both at the official level and among the public meant that Armenia's attacks were not left without a response. As a result of the war, Azerbaijan liberated important part of its territories based on its right to self-defense. Although the war ended in Azerbaijan's historic victory in the*

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*battlefield, the war nevertheless continues in the political, diplomatic and information realm.*

*In reality, the ability to act as a major power hinges on the control over sources of energy and strategic regions. From this viewpoint, the South Caucasus may be considered a geopolitical “stage for wolves” whereby all countries claiming hegemony and regional states are seeking to assert themselves. In other words, this is a scene for a power struggle among regional and global players. Thus, the great powers’ geopolitical interests have long been in contradiction on this stage. Taking this into account, Azerbaijan should outline a new strategy to repel any potential attack. Turkey’s stance on the issue will be crucial at this stage. Therefore, further strengthening of Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation, along with bilateral ties in other fields, will be pivotal in this period of history. Namely as a consequence of historical necessity, a joint declaration on allied relations was signed in Shusha on 15 June 2021 between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Taking all this into consideration, this article examines geopolitical rivalry in the South Caucasus and great powers’ stance in the Second Karabakh War.*

**Keywords:** *South Caucasus, Geopolitical Rivalry, Big Policy, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Second Karabakh War, Great Powers, Shusha Declaration*

**Öz:** *Ermenistan ile Azerbaycan arasında geçen 1988-1994 Birinci Karabağ Savaşı'nın sonucu olarak Azerbaycan topraklarının %20'si Ermenistan tarafından işgal edilmişti. Çatışan taraflar arasında uzlaşma sağlanamadığından sorunun barışçıl yollarla çözümü devletlere havale edilmiş, fakat 1994 senesinden itibaren AGİT Minsk Grubu nezdinde devam eden barış görüşmeleri beklentileri karşılayamamış ve nihai aşamaya varılamamıştı. Azerbaycan topraklarının Ermenistan tarafından işgalinin sürmesi yeni bir savaş çıkma olasılığını artırmaktaydı. Azerbaycan'ın ekonomik ve askeri olarak güçlenmesi bölgedeki güç dengelerini değiştirdi. Ermenistan'ın 2020 yılında defalarca saldırıları karşısında Azerbaycan, askeri kuvvet kullanımına başvurdu ve İkinci Karabağ Savaşı patlak verdi. Ermenistan'ın 27 Eylül 2020 tarihli sınır ihlali ve işgalci tavrı bu “ani savaşın” başlangıcı idi. Azerbaycan'da hem resmi düzeyde hem de halkta artan topraklarını geri alma isteği de Ermenistan'ın saldırılarının karşılıksız kalınmamasını sağladı. Savaş sonucunda Azerbaycan tarafı meşru müdafaa hukukuna dayanarak işgal altındaki topraklarının büyük kısmını kurtardı. Savaş muharebe meydanında Azerbaycan'ın tarihi zaferi ile sonuçlansa da politik, diplomatik ve bilgi alanında halen devam etmektedir.*

*Bilindiği gibi, büyük güç olmanın yolu stratejik bölgeleri ve enerji kaynaklarını kontrol etmekten geçer. Bu bağlamda Güney Kafkasya'yı “kurtlar sofrası”*

*olarak tanımlamak mümkündür. Bu sofrada her bir küresel veya bölgesel devlet kendi gücüne göre yer almak ister. Diğer bir ifadeyle, bu sofrada küresel veya bölgesel olmakla jeopolitik bir sofradır. Bu sofrada büyük güçlerin çıkarları çatışmaktadır. Bunu dikkate alarak Azerbaycan, gidişata uygun olarak satranç tahtasında kendi oyununu oynamalı, her hamleye karşı yeni bir strateji oluşturmalıdır. Özellikle böyle bir dönemde Türkiye'nin tutumu oldukça belirleyici olacaktır. Görünen o ki, Azerbaycan-Türkiye askeri işbirliği ve üslerin konuşlandırılması artık tarihi bir zarurete dönüşmüştür. Bu tarihi zaruretin sonucu olarak 15 Haziran 2021'de Azerbaycan ile Türkiye arasında askeri müttefikliği ihtiva eden Şuşa Beyannamesi imzalandı. Bu hususlar dikkate alınarak makalede Güney Kafkasya'da jeopolitik rekabet ve büyük güçlerin İkinci Karabağ Savaşında tutumları analiz edilmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Güney Kafkasya, Jeopolitik Rekabet, Büyük Siyaset, Ermenistan, Azerbaycan, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı, Büyük Güçler, Şuşa Beyannamesi*

## Introduction

Historically, “battles for influence” and rivalry have been underway among major forces to gain control over the world’s energy-rich regions representing strategic importance. However, the interests of the inhabitants of these contested regions are not taken into account in the process. Therefore, regional states are faced with the risk of diminishing power and sovereignty and their role waning in the international system. Simultaneously, developments weakening the central government consistently occur in the targeted states, creating the risk of plunging them into chaos.

It is worth mentioning that the struggle among states for ultimate dominance is not a new concept. Geopolitical interests have always been at the core of big policies pursued by major powers in certain periods of history; meaning that there has always been attempts at the division of territories among global powerhouses, resulting in new borders being drawn up. This has triggered new conflicts of interest due to the lack of a substantial system regulating international relations and each of the states involved has sought to demonstrate its supremacy. To this day, the situation has not changed for the better. To the contrary, it has become more dangerous, and tensions have risen. Despite, the existence of an international systems and the desire of the states comprising this system to reach agreements under the same umbrella, nothing has come to fruition truly satisfying the needs of the states and international system.

There is a real notion of “a powerful state” and the “big policy” it pursues in political history. Taking this factor as a basis, a conclusion may be made that world orders based on peacemaking among states have succumbed to geopolitics throughout history.<sup>1</sup>

Propaganda, machinations, unrest, and wars show no signs of abating in several countries. A similar situation is seen in the South Caucasus region. It is no coincidence that Georgia’s territorial integrity was violated, and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict escalated. Until recently, Armenia occupied 20 percent of the territory of Azerbaijan, a much more powerful country, with significant tacit support and involvement of major powers that describe themselves as “liberal and democratic”. It is common knowledge that Russia played a major role in this occupation. Russia’s geopolitical interest in the violation of Georgia and Ukraine’s territorial integrity should be highlighted as well.

Overall, the following point may be made when studying the real situation in world politics: if a certain measure is in favor or harms major powers, the issue of its compliance with international law is placed on the back burner and those

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1 For more detailed information, see: Parag Khanna, *Yeni Dünya Düzeni: Yeni Yükselen Güçler 21. Yüzyılı Nasıl Belirliyor?* (İstanbul: Pegasus Yayınları, 2011), p. 15.

powers proceed as they deem necessary. In other words, major powers consider themselves “exceptional”, as in, international law does not truly apply to them.

There is an important point that is worth mentioning. Overall, if the developments currently happening in the world are profoundly studied, it turns out that these events are being closely followed and controlled by global powers. A double standard policy is observed regarding numerous hotspots worldwide, including the South Caucasus region, the ongoing events, and some conflicts between states. As for the South Caucasus region, global players are not interested in the solution of disputed issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the conflicts in Georgia, just like the disputes in many other regions of the world.

The established facts and an analysis of global developments lead to the conclusion that unresolved conflicts and interference with them, as well as efforts to succeed in geopolitical rivalry, are not in line with anyone serving as a mouthpiece for “peace”.

On the basis of these factors, an overall conclusion may be made that the present-day world order is experiencing comprehensive chaos and uncertainty. Undoubtedly, certain goals are pursued behind those high-toned slogans that are currently being declared, including “democracy”, “ensuring peace and well-being in the world”, and “facilitating stability in regions”. Interestingly, these principles are voiced in the slogans promoted by all world great powers. Certainly, the slogans being announced have hidden agendas. The main goal is the division of the world among the powerhouses, as has always been the case in human history. However, no common ground is in sight in this division, which is considered the reality of the current geopolitics, and there is no room left for shifting toward a balanced policy meeting mutual interests.

### **The Reality of Russia’s “Big Policy” and Evaluating the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in this Context**

Given the impact of the abovementioned global issues, an analysis of the developments that have occurred in the South Caucasus, in particular, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has a great scientific and political relevance. Overall, important points may be made when studying the developments that have happened in most of the former Soviet states, including the countries of the South Caucasus region, since the 1990s, as well as Russia’s geopolitical priorities. Russia, which is one of the five permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members, has violated or threatened the territorial integrity of the countries countering or defying it. Prof. Alexander Dugin, a well-known Russian strategist known for his Russia-centric pan-

Eurasian views, has commented on prospects for Russia's relations with other post-Soviet states, as well as the future and fate of the countries countering Moscow. On this point, Dugin said the following:

“Ensuring any former Soviet country's territorial integrity dwells upon its ties with Russia. If any of the post-Soviet states maintains good relations with Russia, it has secured its territorial integrity. But if these relations are poor, those countries' integrity is violated... The hegemony of such countries as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, which have bad relations with Russia, has already been disrupted”.<sup>2</sup>

The current situation once again reflects the reality of “powerful states” and the “big policies” they are pursuing. It is not a mere coincidence that Russia's “big politics” was observed not only in other former Soviet states, but also in the South Caucasus region and regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and the Karabakh war in particular. This reality, which remains relevant to this day, is that just like in most of the former Soviet states, complete resolution of conflicts and disputed issues in the South Caucasus and establishment of peace in the region does not comply with the long-term interests of Russia's regional security policy in any way.

If the root cause of the Karabakh problem is taken into consideration, it is clear that the Russia has historically desired to use (or abuse) the Armenian people as one of the primary tools for meeting and securing its geopolitical interests. The separatist movement aimed at realizing the idea of “greater Armenia” and acquiring “ancient historical territories” has served this purpose. Restoring stability in the South Caucasus and a real solution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan problem is undesirable from Russia's point of view. Moscow's policy is underpinned by its future objectives, namely, **keeping the parties dependent on itself and securing its leverage of influence in the region.**

It is worth mentioning that this course of Moscow that has been pursued for many years and Russia's double-faceted games are not in line with its mission as a mediating state. On the one hand, Russia had assumed the task of mediation between the conflict parties. On the other hand, it provided a significant amount of weaponry to Armenia and did not refrain from declaring that this bilateral collaboration continued. Overall, it would be more appropriate to regard the presence of the Armenian state and Armenian separatist forces in Karabakh as a guarantee of Russia's presence in the South Caucasus. The purpose of this article is not to go back to the Nagorno-

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2 AYTEK YUSIFSOY, “‘Rusya'ya karşı gelenlerin toprak bütünlüğü ihlal ediliyor – Gürcistan, Ukrayna, Moldova...’ – Aleksandr Dugin”, *YeniÇağ.info*, 4 Mayıs 2017, <https://yenicag.info/rusyaya-karsi-gelenlerin-toprak-butunlugu-ihlal-ediliyor-gurcistan-ukrayna-moldova-aleksandr-dugin/embed>

Karabakh conflict, as related issues were covered in detail in our previous research. However, we recall that the negotiated settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had been mediated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs Russia, the United States, and France. Each of these countries had its own stance on the issue, which was impeding progress in peace talks. It is clear that all the three countries are global powerhouses. It is also an accepted reality that these powers had geopolitical clout to put pressure on the invading state. The point is that the main problem regarding the settlement of any conflict is not the capabilities of major powers, but the political will required to solve it. It was the lack of a keen interest in the Karabakh conflict settlement that was preventing the Minsk Group from fulfilling its duties. Representatives of the co-chairing countries paid numerous visits to the region not to solve the conflict, but to merely defuse tension.

Thus, they were mostly engaged in “exercising control over the conflict”, not execution of the “conflict resolution mechanisms”. Therefore, it is understandable that the public in Azerbaijan regarded the co-chairs’ visits as “**tours**” lacking substance.

In the wake of the double-standard policy of international organizations, the Minsk Group member states, and other countries, the Armenian side failed to pursue a real solution of the problem and instead repeatedly violated the ceasefire. As a result, a war occurred on 2-5 April 2016 (the “Four Day War”), which indicated that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem was not in fact a frozen conflict, although the course of developments was eventually diverted to its previous state for some reason with the aid of certain facilitators, namely, Russia’s interference. Furthermore, Armenia believed that these state of affairs would be maintained indefinitely in line with its interests and continued to stage provocations. Encouraged by its foreign backers, Armenia resorted to another provocation in July 2020. Certainly, there were certain reasons for its actions:

One of them was related to the efforts of incumbent Armenian leadership to distract the public’s attention from its failures internally and externally. Azerbaijan’s economic development, increasing international stance and continuous success were threatening Armenia and its regional ambitions.

Secondly, those territories are crossed by the routes of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and Great Silk Road, which are Azerbaijan’s projects of an international scale. Armenia sought to take over relevant strategic heights to accomplish its goal in the context of these routes.

Thirdly, Armenia was trying to activate the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) members against Azerbaijan so as not to be alone. As known, Armenia is the only CSTO member in the South Caucasus. Article 4 of the CSTO Charter states: “if one of the States Parties is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, then this will be considered as aggression against all States Parties to this Treaty”, which potentially duty bounds CSTO members to protect Armenia in case the latter is attacked. Against Armenia’s expectations, however, CSTO merely confined itself to issuing a declaration calling the parties to “immediate ceasefire”.

Some commentators claim that the mentioned attacks had been incited by Russia and France.<sup>3</sup> It should also be taken into account that Armenia’s Nikol Pashinyan government, which relied on unyielding support from major powers, embarked on its attack with the slogan of a “new war for new territories”. Armenia, which bound its hopes with the seemingly everlasting support of major powers, continued to violate the Line of Contact, attempting to deal a psychological blow to Azerbaijan and resorting to provocative methods. Defiant and strongly worded statements from Pashinyan, such as “**Karabakh is Armenia. Period**”, which were erroneously adventurous steps that countered international law, served as a precursor of a new war. Prior to Pashinyan’s governance, Armenian leaders and officials sought to convey to the world community that Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh were the main parties to the conflict, saying that the warring sides were accordingly Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. They alleged that Armenia was seeking to put forward a constructive stance in peace talks and tried to convince the international community that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were merely pursuing ethnic self-determination and that no territorial claims were on the agenda. However, Pashinyan’s phrase “**Karabakh is Armenia. Period**” essentially amounted to admitting to the policy of an invading state in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and unavoidably exposed Armenia’s true intentions as a state to the rest of the world.

On 27 September 2020, Armenia violated the ceasefire, launching an attack on Azerbaijani territory, which sparked an “instantaneous war”. It is noteworthy that the firm resolve of both the government and people in Azerbaijan to regain their territories was also a precursor of these developments. The Azerbaijani side launched a counter-offensive, regaining significant areas, historical land and strategic territories and heights that had been under occupation.

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3 Mehmet Koçak, “Ermeni saldırılarının arkasında kimler var?”, *HyeTert.org*, 29 Temmuz 2020, <https://hyetert.org/2020/07/29/ermeni-saldirilarinin-arkasinda-kimler-var/> ; Suinbay Suyundikov, “Ermeni saldırılarının arka planı ve Türk Dünyası”, *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü*, 20 Temmuz 2020, <https://www.21yyte.org/tr/fikir-tanki/ermeni-saldirisinin-arka-planı-ve-turk-dunyasi>



Azerbaijan, which attained a clear victory in the ensuing war against the invading Armenia, had the upper hand over the Armenian armed forces, combining years of intense training and military reorganization with high-tech weapon systems such as unmanned aerial vehicles purchased from Turkey. Despite calls from Russia and Western countries, as well as international organizations, to immediately halt the fighting and resume peace talks, Turkey, Pakistan, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Ukraine, Israel and other countries either explicitly or implicitly expressed strong support for Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan, who had previously claimed that “Karabakh is part of Armenia”, engaged in provocative acts in Shusha (a culturally significant Azerbaijani town), arranged for the establishment of settlements, and stationed armed separatist troops in the occupied territories, faced a deplorable situation during the war. As the situation on the battlefield turned increasingly against Armenia, Pashinyan was forced to ask world leaders for assistance. It is worthy of note that Armenia, which faced a dire predicament, followed its usual pattern of behavior, releasing false reports regarding an alleged presence of Syrian mercenaries and Jihadist groups in Azerbaijan in hopes of capitalizing on rising Islamophobic, xenophobic and anti-Turkish sentiments in Western countries.

The main goal of these fake news was to draw the attention of the world’s Christian majority countries, in particular, Western countries and major powers, to this matter by framing Armenia as a victimized Christian country under the merciless attack of Muslim aggressors (Azerbaijan and Turkey). The hope was to prompt Christian-majority countries to adopt a crusader-like mentality and enact sanctions against Azerbaijan in the name of Christian solidarity. There is a significant point that should be made in this regard. A threat is posed by the fact that the killings and beheadings, committing “Jihadist” acts while exclaiming “Allahu Akbar” (“Allah [God] is the greatest”) is the primary aspiration of terrorists, who act under the pretext of religion. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no premise of unfair and groundless killing in Islam. These deliberate actions merely facilitate the campaign aimed at sullyng Islam at the international stage. Thus, spreading rumors that “beheading terrorists are fighting Christian Armenians on the frontline” on the Azerbaijani side may be regarded as an attempt at re-igniting centuries-old, religion-based anti-Muslim reflexes in Western countries. Therefore, “Jihadist groups” was a dangerous phrase used as part of an anti-Azerbaijan campaign. It is not a coincidence that French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized the importance of putting the issue into the agenda of the Council of Europe by stating “the issue of Syrian jihadists in Nagorno-Karabakh is a serious and game-changing reality”.<sup>4</sup>

4 “Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron: cihatçılar Gaziantep üzerinden Karabağ’a gitti, elimizde kanıtlar var”, *Euronews*, 1 Ekim 2020, <https://tr.euronews.com/2020/10/01/fransa-cumhurbaskan-macron-cihatc-lar-gaziantep-uzerinden-karabag-a-gitti-elimizde-kan-tla>

On the contrary, there are plenty of reports stating that PKK fighters and other terrorists had been brought to Armenia from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and further sent by the Armenian side to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Information is also available regarding the activity of mercenaries in the region.<sup>5</sup> However, France and like-minded countries and officials turned a blind eye to Armenia's close ties with such to terror groups. France, which is one of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, should have put forward a neutral stance on the issue, to say the least.

At the same time, Armenia sought to exaggerate the involvement of Turkish armed forces in the war, releasing false reports through media outlets around the world. However, a substantial response was delivered to the allegations with due arguments by Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev. Aliyev went to great lengths to expose Armenia's propaganda on the state-run TV channels of numerous countries regarding to both the "Jihadist" issue and the contribution of Turkish armed forces to warfare, as well as strongly criticized those making such claims.<sup>6</sup>

The point that should be kept in mind is that it was Armenia and Azerbaijan who were in the battlefield during the Second Karabakh War, which meant that it was them who could truly know what was going on in terms of the actors involved in the war. However, while Armenia's propaganda was taken at face value by the Western public, Azerbaijan's rebuttals were met with automatic skepticism and dismissals, revealing disturbing biases and unfair treatment in Western countries.<sup>7</sup>

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5 "Ermenistan PKK'lı teröristleri Azərbaycan cephə hattında kullanıyor", *TRT Haber*, 24 Eylül 2020, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/ermenistan-pkkli-teroristleri-azerbaycan-cephe-hattinda-kullaniyor-518306.html> ; Nikolai Korsakov, "Активизация Армении на Ближнем Востоке: чем это грозит России", *Gazeta.ru*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/09/19/13256293.shtml>

6 "Prezident İlham Əliyev 'Rossiya-1' telekanalının '60 dəqiqə' proqramında sualları cavablandırıb", *ARB24 – YouTube kanalı*, 29 Eylül 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhVDFekmoDY> ; "Prezident İlham Əliyevin 'Rossiya-1' kanalına müsahibəsi", *Xeberoxu.az*, <https://xeberoxu.az/Prezident-Ilham-Əliyevin-Rossiya-1-kanalina-musahibesi-20200929203710932>, accessed September 28, 2020.

7 For more detailed information, see: Carlotta Gall, "Turkey Jump Into Another Foreign Conflict, This Time in the Caucasus", *The New York Times*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/world/middleeast/turkey-azerbaijan-armenia-war.html> ; "İlham Aliyev was interviewed by Russian TASS news agency", *Presidency of the of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, October 19, 2020, <https://en.president.az/articles/43547> ; "President İlham Aliyev gave interview to US Fox News TV channel", *Trend News Agency*, October 25, 2020, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3323234.html>.

### **France's Stance on the Second Karabakh War and Behind-the-Scenes Issues: Clash of Interests Between France and Turkey**

France's position on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and the Second Karabakh war is particularly worth mentioning. As mentioned earlier, Armenia, which faced a predicament, followed its conventional methods by issuing false reports regarding an alleged presence of Syrian mercenaries and Jihadist groups in Azerbaijan. Having failed to scrutinize the fake news aimed at blackmail or unwilling to do so, France unconditionally supported Armenia's propaganda. It put forward an openly pro-Armenian stance by adding a religious slant to the issue, stressing its alleged gravity and the importance of bringing the issue to the attention of the Council of Europe. Apparently, France wanted trigger a crusades-like reflex in the whole of Europe against Azerbaijan and Turkey.

This approach completely ran counter to France's commitment to impartiality as a mediator in the Karabakh conflict settlement. According to our subjective reasoning, one of the main causes of France openly backing Armenia in the latter's conflict with Azerbaijan is the clash of its geopolitical interests in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Africa with those of Turkey. France's activity in the Mediterranean region has a long history. Currently, France continues striving to realize its goals concerning Libya and to have a say in the ongoing struggle for power in the Mediterranean Sea.

In reality, the ability to act as a major power hinges on the control over sources of energy. In any case, the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves as well as oil and gas fields worth trillions of dollars in the eastern Mediterranean sparked differences among major powers. From this viewpoint, the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean regions may be considered a geopolitical "stage for wolves" whereby all countries claiming hegemony and regional states are seeking to assert themselves. In other words, this is a scene for a power struggle among regional and global players. Thus, the French and Turkish geopolitical interests have long been in contradiction on this stage. France, which lacks international support in the projects in the Mediterranean region and has also been gradually sidelined from the Middle East, sees Turkey as the biggest obstacle to its policies on Libya. Gas exploration in the vicinity of Cyprus continues to heighten tension between France and Turkey. Since Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus were not included in the activities on operating the reserves of natural gas discovered near the island, Turkey, in turn, launched drilling in eastern Mediterranean, in accordance with its maritime border delineation deal with Libya. The issue increased tensions between Athens and Ankara, while France threw its weight behind Greece. Following the outset of the Second Karabakh War, France immediately called for a ceasefire, expressing utmost concern over Turkey's alleged moves aimed at encouraging Azerbaijan to regain Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the

statement was made under the influence of the Armenian community of France, its actual reason was France's rivalry and struggle with Turkey in Libya and eastern Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup>

More profound comprehension and analysis of the Turkish-French tensions requires considering this crisis not in the context of the Libyan issue alone, but as part of an overall struggle and competition on the scale of the entire African continent. In fact, the stand-off over Libya is only the tip of the iceberg in the rivalry between Turkey and France. As for the unseen part of the iceberg, it entails a clash of Ankara's policy on Africa with France's strategic interests. As is known, this continent is of great political, economic, social, and cultural importance for France. Just like the "**Great Game**" reflecting rivalry for control over Asia between Russia and Britain in the 19th century, such major powers as France, Britain and Germany sought to establish supremacy over Africa.<sup>9</sup> In accordance with the General Act of the 1885 Berlin Conference, which sought to discuss the partitioning of Africa, France emerged as a major colonial power on the continent.<sup>10</sup> The decolonization policies that started after World War II certainly affected this continent. However, France sought to retain its political, economic, and cultural dominance in the territories that were under its control, though most of the colonial areas had gained independence, and even managed to increase its influence. From 1961, France exercised control over the national reserves of 14 African countries. These included **Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.**<sup>11</sup>

African countries had to place their national currency reserves in France's central bank. Since France's treasury was receiving revenues to the tune of 500 billion dollars a year from Africa, the country was reluctant to give up the benefits of the colonial currency system. A number of African leaders opposing the system were either assassinated or removed from office through coups (a convenient development for France), while the compliant ones received French awards on many occasions. France, which was receiving significant revenues from Africa, was doing its utmost to sideline all countries opposing its endeavors. The remarks of Jacques Chirac, a former French president, regarding the French colonies in Africa, are definitely food for thought.

8 Okan Yeşilot, "Fransa-Türkiye ilişkilerinde Dağlık Karabağ gerginliği", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 1 Aralık 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/fransa-turkiye-iliskilerinde-daglik-karabag-gerginligi/2061558>.

9 Cemil Ömer Kızıllhan, "Afrika ekseninde Türkiye-Fransa ilişkileri", *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü*, 11 Eylül 2020, <https://21yyte.org/tr/merkezler/bolgesel-arastirma-merkezleri/avrupa-birligi-arastirmalari-merkezi/afrika-ekseninde-turkiye-fransa-i-liskileri>.

10 Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl siyasi tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu basımevi, 1997), p. 420.

11 Mustafa Efe, "Afrika'da Fransa kâbusu - II: Yeni sömürgecilik", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 6 Şubat 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/afrika-da-fransa-kabusu-ii-yeni-somurgecilik/1726100>

“Without Africa, France will slide down into the rank of a third [world] power,” he said. Remarkably, his predecessor, Francois Mitterrand, admitted the truth by saying in 1957 that “France will have no history in the 21st century without Africa”.<sup>12</sup>

Currently, African countries must still pay colonial debt to France. Though this unfair system has been repeatedly condemned by the European Union, it is evident that France would not be able to stay afloat without this colonial system, which provides it with around 500 billion dollars annually. Therefore, France deems the strengthening of such a geopolitical player as Turkey in the regions it exerts influence upon historically, politically, economically, and culturally as a serious threat to its interests. Evidently, the policy pursued by Turkey on Africa and the Middle East contradicts France’s strategic and economic interests. Therefore, France did not refrain from openly supporting Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan, which is backed by Turkey and is one of the states representing the Turkic world. Both chambers of the French parliament went so far as to adopt resolutions recognizing the self-proclaimed “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” of the Armenian separatists.

### Ceasefires, Interference, and Geopolitical Attacks

In addition to the above-mentioned conclusions, another important point is worth mentioning. It concerns the ceasefire in the Second Karabakh War. Azerbaijan’s advances and regaining of its territories that had been occupied by Armenia occurred amid relevant political conditions that emerged following a 26-year-long ceasefire. Meanwhile, questions arose for many regarding changes in the position of Russia, which held “the key to the lock” in the region. It is not a coincidence that when the dominance of either side in any clash or short-term military conflict did not trample upon the overall Russian policy in the past, Moscow remained silent in this regard for some time or opted to assert its presence instead. This was the case during the Four-Day War in April 2016. Nearly two weeks after intense clashes broke out on 27 September 2020, Russia sought to interfere with the matter again, inviting the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers to Moscow. The parties agreed at the meeting held with Russia’s mediation to observe a humanitarian ceasefire from 10 October 2020 to exchange prisoners of war, other detainees, and the dead bodies.<sup>13</sup> Reaching a ceasefire was extremely important for Russia, which considered the South Caucasus as its “backyard”. Exerting its influence and

12 Mavis Enyan, “South Africa to build nuclear power for security and energy purposes”, *ThePeoplesNewsAfrica.com*, <https://thepeoplesnewsafrica.com>, accessed November 12, 2020.

13 “Azərbaycan, Rusiya və Ermənistanın XİN başçıları bəyanat qəbul ediblər”, *Report.az*, 10 Ekim 2020, <https://report.az/dagliq-qarabag-munaqiseshi/azerbaycan-ve-ermenistan-xin-bascilarinin-ucterefli-gorusu-basa-catdi/>



forces in the battlefield, targeted civilians again. On 28 October 2020, Armenian forces launched a strike on Barda using Smerch multiple rocket launchers, killing 21 people and severely wounding over 70 others. Despite repeated ceasefire violations, attacks on civilians, including children, with the use of ballistic missiles and mass killings, Armenia's criminal acts were not condemned by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, major world powers, or influential international organizations. Instead, conventional international calls were made to put an end to the war, lay down the weapons and immediately start talks. If international organizations and involved countries were indeed deeply concerned over the ongoing military action and human casualties and were seeking justice, they should have ensured an immediate pullout of the invading Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories in line with relevant UN resolutions. If necessary, they could have put pressure on Armenia in this regard. However, they failed to do so.

The Armenians' fate was determined in the early 20th century and a state called Armenia came into existence. Establishing a second Armenian state (the so-called Nagorno Karabakh Republic) in Azerbaijan's territory is impossible as it would be a flagrant violation of international law. Furthermore, such an attempt would risk starting another war with an Azerbaijan that has clearly become much more powerful than Armenia, as its victory in the Second War has shown. If ethnic Armenians try to promote the self-determination issue in every region they reside in, numerous Armenian states would emerge around the world, leading to a nonsensical international situation.

Failure of the mediators to fairly differentiate between an invading state and a country affected by occupation of its territory and their moves supporting the invader had resulted in further exacerbation of Armenia's aggressive policy. Regardless of the political convictions of any government that came to power in Armenia, including anti-Russian and anti-Western ones, Russia, France, and the US would never leave Armenia out of their policies. The interests of these states may confront on different geopolitical issues, but the Armenian issue and hostility against Turkic nations are the main factors uniting them. We will not touch again the problems related with the Armenian Question in this article, which was put forward by the Great Powers as an extension of the deep-rooted hatred against the Turks, as had been discussed in our article "The Armenian Question in the Context of the Clash of Civilization and Geopolitical Interests, Its Impact on Armenia-Azerbaijani Relations and Vision of the Near Future" published in *Review of Armenian Studies* in 2013.<sup>17</sup>

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17 For more detailed information, see: Emin Şihaliyev, "The Armenian Question in the Context of the Clash of Civilizations and Geopolitical Interests, Its Impact on Armenia-Azerbaijani Relations and Vision of the Near Future", *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 27 (2013): 89-129.

It is no coincidence that all three mediating states demonstrated their real position on this issue at a closed-door meeting of the UN Security Council on 19 October 2020. Following the meeting, Minsk Group co-chairs Russia and France drew up a draft statement. However, the circulated document, which was to be further agreed upon by the member states, had no reference to the four well-known UN resolutions. Thus, the statement disregarded territorial integrity, which is one of the most significant principles of international law, as well as UNSC decisions. The objective of this move was to leave behind and obfuscate UN Resolutions No. 822, 853, 874 and 884, pass new pro-Armenian decisions and derail efforts aimed at ending the occupation of Azerbaijani territory. However, seven Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) members represented in the UNSC, namely, **Indonesia, Niger, Vietnam, Tunisia, South Africa, the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, suggested that a reference to the UN resolutions be included in the statement draft. Though the co-chairing countries deemed the proposal as unacceptable, the statement was eventually withdrawn due to an insistent and principled stance of the Non-Aligned Movement member states.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently, the fact that the permanent UNSC members remain unchanged shows that this organization merely serves political interests and violates international law instead of enforcing it. As before, the co-chairing states set aside the impartiality principle and continued to take sides in conflicts, openly supporting Armenia. To the contrary, NAM member states displayed commitment to the organization's principles and values to the whole world, honoring international law. At the same time, this is a clear example of NAM being a major player in the system of international relations.

Azerbaijan continued a struggle for its cause in the war and diplomacy until the end and sought to avail of the emerging opportunities. Strides were taken in this direction. Azerbaijani President Aliyev demanded setting a timetable for an Armenian pullout from the occupied land. Until 10 November 2020, Armenia resisted its withdrawal and repeatedly sustained significant losses. On 8 November, the city of Shusha, which is of great symbolic importance for the Azerbaijani people as stated earlier, was liberated after 28 years of occupation. On 9 November, Aliyev informed the Azerbaijani people that the Azerbaijani forces had liberated 71 more villages, a settlement, and eight strategic hills from Armenian occupation. Surrendering was now the only way out for Armenia. On 10 November, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia and Armenia's Prime Minister signed a trilateral statement on cessation of hostilities in the conflict zone. Armenia assumed a commitment to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijan's occupied Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin districts

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18 Elçin Ehmedov, "Azərbaycanın diplomatik, hərbi uğurları və böyük güclərin ermənipərəst siyasəti", *NewTimes.az*, 25 Ekim 2020, <http://newtimes.az/az/organisations/6883/>



stage by stage by 1 December 2020.<sup>19</sup> According to the statement, a limited contingent of Russian peacekeepers was to be stationed in the region. Immediately after the statement was signed, a Russian peacekeeping force was sent to Karabakh. However, there has been deep concern in Azerbaijan over its pro-Armenian actions that cannot be explained as legitimate actions for a peacekeeping mission.

About two months after the ceasefire was reached, on 11 January 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who met in Moscow to discuss the Karabakh problem and other important issues, signed a statement. The document, signed behind closed doors, was of crucial importance for specifying the 10 November 2020 trilateral statement. However, there are some uncertain points in this regard. A decision was passed at the meeting to draw up specific outlines on the development of transport infrastructure and the regional economy and establish a trilateral taskforce comprised of deputy prime ministers and working groups consisting of experts for the purpose. The goal of these exchanges was to restore the deadlocked economic and transport relations. Moreover, Azerbaijan will be connected to its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through the transport links crossing Armenian territory, while Armenia, in turn, will have a railway link to Russia and Iran via Azerbaijani territory. In addition, Azerbaijan will gain access to the Turkish market through Nakhchivan, while the Turkish and Russian railway hubs will be connected. Another detail regarding the statement is that it has no reference to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Overall, there were not many points that would allow the Azerbaijani side to rest assured completely, but there was not a significant number of points of concern either. One of the most important outcomes of the 11 January meeting was that the mediating OSCE Minsk Group's activity in the peace process was essentially rendered useless.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the way further developments will unfold will be clear over the course of time.

### **Outcome: The Parties That Benefitted or Sustained Loss in The Second Karabakh War**

Overall, the following point may be made once the real situation in world politics has been studied: if a certain measure or move is in favor or harms major powers, the issue of its compliance with international law is placed on

19 "İlham Əliyev xalqa müraciət edib", *Azərbaycan Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı*, 10 Kasım 2020, <https://president.az/articles/45924>.

20 Araz Aslanlı, "Moskva görüşünün neticesi: rahatlıq da var, narahatlıq da", *Ayna.az*, <https://ayna.az/news/23152>, erişim tarihi: 12 Ocak 2021; Kürşat Zorlu, "Karabağ zirvesinin en önemli neticesi ne oldu?", *HaberTürk*, 12 Ocak 2021, <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/prof-dr-kursad-zorlu/2934124-karabag-zirvesinin-en-onemli-neticesi-ne-oldu>.

the back burner and those powers act in accordance with their interests. In other words, major powers consider themselves “exceptional”. This is the “**world order**” of major powers and it is determined by a correlation of power capacities of major geopolitical players, not international law and institutions. Challenges facing the South Caucasus region, in particular, the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, should be considered in the same context. The Second Karabakh War, which ended in resounding victory for Azerbaijan and crushing defeat for Armenia, could be considered as an integral part of the conflicting or compliant issues related to the major powers’ geopolitical interests in the region. Therefore, the most significant matter in this regard that comes to the forefront concerns those who either benefitted or sustained loss because of the conflict.

**Russia:** An analysis of the developments that have occurred leads to a conclusion that a complete solution of the Karabakh issue is not in line with Russia’s current interests in the first place, given that Moscow’s main objective is to capitalize on the problem and keep international activities and regional policies of both countries involved under its influence. Russia’s disapproval of Nikol Pashinyan, who pursues a pro-Western policy, could be deemed normal. However, Russia defines its policy in the Caucasus in line with its geostrategic interests, not on the basis of certain governments. Just like in some other former Soviet states, an immediate solution to all outstanding differences and conflicts in the South Caucasus republics and restoring sustainable peace in the region contradicts the long-term goals of Russia’s regional security policy. In other words, Russia possesses significant leverage of influence upon both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, Russia bolstered its presence and gained geopolitical dominance in the region in the course of its rivalry with the West over the South Caucasus. At the same time, Russia demonstrated to Armenia the bitter consequences of a pro-Western political slant. On the other hand, Moscow’s using its weight in ending the war paved the way for sidelining France and the US, the other two Minsk Group co-chairs, from the political rivalry game.

**OSCE Minsk Group:** The Minsk Group’s mediating efforts have been essentially rendered null and void; and France and the US have been left outside the peace process at this stage.

**Turkey:** Turkey is one of the benefitting parties. First of all, this pertains to the training provided to the Azerbaijani armed forces by Turkey in the Second Karabakh War, along with military tactics and weaponry. Turkey also attained further recognition for its defense industry in world markets. At the same time, Turkey asserted its presence in the South Caucasus before the international community for decades to come. This should be considered a great benefit and success both for Azerbaijan and Turkey. The presence of the Turkish army in

Azerbaijan to offset Russian presence is a significant factor for ensuring stability. Russia has to admit Turkey's presence in Azerbaijan, but it actually opposes this country's playing a major role in the region. Azerbaijan, for its part, has always stressed the importance of Ankara's presence at the negotiating table.

**Azerbaijan:** Azerbaijan, which is the main winner in the mentioned war, used every opportunity at hand and appears that it will continue to do so. In addition, Azerbaijan proved to be the most powerful state in the South Caucasus militarily, politically, and economically through the Second Karabakh War. Undoubtedly, becoming a key transit state in the region will provide a considerable advantage to Azerbaijan in the future. The significant benefits include suitability of the land liberated from the Armenian occupation for agriculture, as well as gold mines and regained control over hydropower capacities. Moreover, regional rehabilitation efforts and infrastructure projects will give an impetus to economic development. On the other hand, launching a transport corridor between Nakhchivan and other western Azerbaijani regions following Armenia's formal surrender will provide for uninterrupted transportation capacities between Turkey and Azerbaijan. The success achieved by Turkey and Azerbaijan will give the Turkic world a psychological edge with the opening of the Nakhchivan corridor. Nevertheless, Russia's entry to the region, which occurred in the form of a peacekeeping mission, certainly poses a significant risk from Azerbaijan's viewpoint. Although the war ended in Azerbaijan's historic victory in the battlefield, it continues in the political, diplomatic, and information realm. From now onward, Azerbaijan should outline a new strategy to repel any potential attack. Turkey's stance on the issue will be crucial at this stage. Therefore, further strengthening of Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation, along with bilateral ties in other fields, will be pivotal in this period of history.

As a consequence of historical necessity, a joint declaration on allied relations was signed in Shusha on 15 June 2021, between Azerbaijan and Turkey. The Shusha Declaration outlines joint efforts to reorganize and modernize the Azerbaijani armed forces, and compels joint action in the event of third-party aggression against the independence or sovereignty of either of the parties. Another important item that will contribute to closer bilateral military cooperation is the pledge to hold regular joint meetings of the two countries' security councils. From Azerbaijan's perspective, the Shusha Declaration aims to foster relations with its natural ally Turkey, strengthen Baku's geopolitical position regionally, as well as ensure additional security guarantees in the volatile South Caucasus. As for Turkey, the outcome of the Second Karabakh War has contributed to Ankara assuming the role of one of the main stakeholders in the new regional order. Finally, strengthened relations with Baku are enabling Turkish private and state-owned companies to enter

Azerbaijan, mostly in the Karabakh region, thus creating an important counterbalance to the Russian presence in this war-ravaged part of the world.<sup>21</sup>

The Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 1 February 2022 and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on 3 February 2022 ratified the Shusha Declaration “On allied relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey”.<sup>22</sup> This has formally cemented the allied relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey, signaling the formation of an important Turkic bloc in the region.

**Armenia:** Armenia is the main defeated party in the Second Karabakh War. Armenia, which believed it was taking a prudent measure regarding the conflict, sought Russian and Western pressure against Azerbaijan. However, Armenia itself ultimately turned into an unwitting instrument in the hands of these powers and lost most of its support at a critical time. No matter how persistently Armenia attempted to pursue a Western-leaning policy under the Pashinyan administration, it fell under the Kremlin’s influence again following a bitter defeat and Russia’s interference with the conflict. At the same time, Yerevan had to admit Azerbaijan’s victory and the fact that it has very limited capabilities. Russia, for its part, showed Armenia that the West’s promises and guarantees had no merit and could not turn the tide in the war whatsoever.

Azerbaijan carried out a 44-day operation that was called the “Iron Fist” during the Second Karabakh War. It was not just a war fought between the two countries and lost by Armenia. The war served as a deciding factor for a new situation that has emerged in the South Caucasus. This new geopolitical reality in the region has been acknowledged by both regional and global actors, meriting detailed analyses of its outcomes.

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21 Fuad Shahbazov, “Shusha Declaration cements Azerbaijani-Turkish alliance”, *The Jamestown Foundation*, Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 18, Issue: 100, <https://jamestown.org/program/shusha-declaration-cements-azerbaijani-turkish-alliance/>

22 “Turkish Parliament ratifies bill on Shusha Declaration”, *Azerbaijan 24*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.azerbaycan24.com/en/turkish-parliament-ratifies-bill-on-shusha-declaration/>.



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