Azerbaijan's Strategy to Win the Conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh Territory with Armenia in 2020

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Abstract
Decades ago, Armenia and Azerbaijan, two countries in the South Caucasus region, had disagreements over a territorial dispute called Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1921, the Government of the Soviet Union annexed the predominantly ethnic Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan. However, after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Armenian separatists seized Nagorno-Karabakh in an incident backed by the Armenian Government. Azerbaijan showed its distaste for this treatment, resulting in fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where around 30,000 people died. Before 2020, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could be frozen due to strenuous peace efforts even though various parties had intervened to find the best solution. Until November 10, 2020, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to sign an agreement to stop the fighting that had been taking place in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The ceasefire was signed after Azerbaijani military forces managed to control most of Nagorno-Karabakh. This study uses an offensive realism paradigm to analyze Azerbaijan's strategy to win the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia in 2020. The results revealed that Azerbaijan developed beneficial diplomatic relations with Turkey, Israel and Russia. These countries later assisted. One of them was the assistance of military equipment which enabled Azerbaijan to win the war against Armenia.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, 44-day war, territorial dispute, military cooperation, offensive realism paradigm

Abstrak
Azerbaijan, Türkiye committed the genocide of around 1.5 million Armenians during the reign of the Ottoman Turks during World War I.

Regarding this assumption, 30 countries also admit that the killings amounted to genocide, but Türkiye vehemently denies this. On the other hand, Russia has close ties with Armenia. Russia also leads the military alliance of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which comprises six member states of the former Soviet Union, including Armenia. Armenia counts on Russia’s support and military guarantees (Pristiandaru, 2020). In addition, apart from the involvement of Türkiye and Russia, there are indications of Israel’s participation in the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, namely the support shown by Israel to Azerbaijan.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is one of the oldest conflicts in the world. Even though the locations of these two countries are close together, the two countries have quite a lot of differences, among others, in terms of religion, culture, language, and writing. Then these two countries both have past traumas that still make an impression on the minds of their people. Armenia in World War I was genocide by Turkey. Armenia was worried that Azerbaijan would do the same thing due to its closeness to Türkiye. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan remembers the Khojaly massacre in 1992 when Armenian troops tried to carry out ethnic cleansing against them (Ibrahimov, 2015). Over the years, attempts have been made to reconcile Azerbaijan and Armenia, such as through mediation efforts. However, the results of the mediation meeting have not produced the expected results, so before 2020 the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be said to be a frozen conflict due to strenuous peace efforts despite various parties have intervened to find the best solution to this conflict (Wibawa & Firawati, 2016).

In September 2020, Azerbaijan managed to survive the 44-day war against Armenia, which later led this country to win the war.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, perebutan wilayah, perang 44 hari, kerja sama militer, paradigma realisme ofensif

Introduction

Armenia and Azerbaijan had disagreements over a territorial dispute called Nagorno-Karabakh years ago. Both countries are located in the South Caucasus region. This mountainous area is about 1,700 square miles; most of the population are Muslim Turks and Christian Armenians. In 1921, the Government of the Soviet Union annexed Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan. Officially, the international community recognized this region as part of Azerbaijan and was known by its Russian name, Nagorny Karabakh, which, when translated, became the Karabakh Mountains. But for the Armenian people and the Armenian population who lived in that region, Nagorno-Karabakh was an independent area outside the control of Azerbaijan (Blakemore, 2020).

In 1991 after the Soviet Union government collapsed, Armenian separatists seized Nagorno-Karabakh in an incident supported by the Armenian Government. Azerbaijan showed its distaste for this treatment, resulting in fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where around 30,000 people died. Hundreds of thousands of people also became victims and fled their homes. In 1994, Azerbaijan and Armenia had a ceasefire mediated by Russia, the United States and France. However, this does not necessarily reduce the existing conflict. In 2016, the violent clashes were repeated. The dispute left around 110 people dead (Pristiandaru, 2020). Also, conflicts between the two countries occur almost yearly (Haryanto, 2020).

In this tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia and Türkiye, major countries in the region, also involve themselves. Russia is generally seen as an ally of Armenia, while Türkiye is an ally of Azerbaijan. However, in hindsight, Armenia, Russia, and Türkiye have supported oil-rich Azerbaijan. Türkiye issued a strong statement in support of Azerbaijan’s ambition to recapture Nagorno-Karabakh (Lynch, 2010). Relations between Türkiye and Armenia are not harmonious because Armenia has a grudge against Türkiye. According to
Regarding Azerbaijan's success, on November 10, 2020, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to sign an agreement to stop the fighting that had been taking place in the Nagorno-Karabakh region (Bimo, 2020). Armenia's agreement to sign the ceasefire signifies that the Nagorno-Karabakh region has legally become part of Azerbaijan. On his official Facebook page, Nikol Pashinyan said that it was with a heavy heart that he had to make this decision. He also added that this decision was painful for the people of Armenia (Utomo, 2020).

**Theoretical Framework and Research Method**

In analyzing the factors behind Azerbaijan's victory over the territorial dispute with Armenia, the author used the theory of offensive realism, which is part of the realism paradigm. Realism studied human behavior in forming relations between countries. Humans were born with evil, selfish, greedy instincts and wanted to compete with each other for life. Also, according to this theory, humans would struggle to get what they want, even if it would lead to death on one side or both. The theory of realism in international relations placed the concept of power as the center of all nation-state behavior. This theory assumes that states act to maximize their power to achieve their goals better. There were several assumptions of the realism theory in international relations: Countries exist in a world without supreme authority to enforce law and order. Countries live in an anarchic world, and the state is the main actor in international relations. Although other actors in international relations continue to develop, their positions and roles remain secondary in world politics. States are quite rational actors who can recognize the international situation in which they determine themselves with all the risks and opportunities in the international sphere. As a result of the reality of anarchy, security is a major issue in international politics. Countries live in an international system where war and violence are always lurking, and efforts to create security are very competitive because competition and conflict are inherent in world politics and relations between countries (Waltz, 1979).

The basis of the realist approach was the Peloponnesian War. Around the 5th century BC, Thucydides, an ancient Greek historian, argued that the Peloponnesian War occurred because of the dilemma of the Spartan cities, who saw the power of the Athenian cities, thus creating a "security dilemma". Sparta felt threatened, in a state of dilemma, then decided to attack before being attacked. Thus, the "security dilemma" is the cause of the outbreak of the war. This concept of maintaining national borders for European nations continued to receive attention centuries later. The famous 16th-century Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli in his book *The Prince*, a guidebook for Italian kings at that time, wrote: "...it is better for people to fear us (kings) than they love us (kings)", which should be advised to the rulers in Italy in governing their country that includes cruelty.

Then there was the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who expressed the same ideas although he lived in different countries at different times. According to Hobbes, in this short, troubled and cruel life, it was as if all men were at war with one another. Hobbes' expression in his book *The Leviathan* described self-sacrifice for human life. These early philosophers are better known as ancient realist scholars in international relations. The like-mindedness has combined them with the pessimistic nature of "human instincts and evil ego." Those with the power of a king will do tyranny to the people as long as they can hold the power forever.

Realists reject morals and religion in political terms. Therefore, sometimes this approach is also known as real politics. Contemporary realists continue to discuss security, but not modern national security. Quoting Morgenthau, he stated that a country is vulnerable to danger because national leaders often think and act following the interests of power. This interest is also known as national interest, which aims to increase the power of a country. Power is then defined as material capability, namely military, political, and economic. Realists further argued that security could only be achieved by maintaining force, especially military power, even though this would lead to conflict and war. From a realist perspective, the most important thing is to maintain the state's survival (Baldwin, 1993).
In discussing Azerbaijan's winning strategy, the writer focused on the theory of offensive realism. Offensive realism theory is a theory expressed by John Mearsheimer. This theory said that an anarchic international system forced the state to get the highest position in the international system. Mearsheimer revealed that the state will continue to strive to achieve hegemony. Hegemony is a condition where no other country can offset the military power of a country so that it can dominate other countries in the international world. Mearsheimer also argued that with the international system being anarchic and full of uncertainty about the motives of other countries, the best way for a country to survive is to have as much as possible and continue to increase its military capacity. The military capability of a country could be a determining factor in the survival of a country. Furthermore, according to Mearsheimer, there were five factors in measuring a country's offensive behavior: an anarchic world system, other countries' military capabilities, suspicion and fear of other countries' capabilities, survival, and rationality.

Mearsheimer described the international system as a bleak world filled with states constantly seeking hegemony, a status they cannot attain. This continual movement towards hegemonic ambitions eventually led countries to enter the war. He argues that the pursuit of power will stop only when hegemony is achieved, which is impossible in the current system. Offensive realism showed that great powers were in a constant search for power. The causal mechanism for this action is the lack of central authority. The ultimate goal of a state is to prevent state failure, and the only way to do that is through the maximization of power. Mearsheimer argues that when states have offensive capabilities, they tend to use them (Valeriano, 2009).

Based on several experts' explanations, the realist paradigm is the view that states live in an anarchic world and no system regulates it, thus making them compete to increase their strength and power to ensure their country's security. Meanwhile, offensive realism means countries try to achieve hegemony in this anarchic world by increasing their military power.

In this offensive realism, Azerbaijan believed that to be secure, the state must build up its armed forces for national security to defend the country's borders from enemy military threats. In the case of the dispute over territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azerbaijan was trying to defend the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which they believe is part of their territory, by strengthening their military to gain full control over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The authors used qualitative methods with data collection techniques through Library Research in this study. Where the data collected is secondary data sourced from libraries, journals, articles, print media, electronic media, and websites. Furthermore, the descriptive method is another method that the author will use to help answer the formulation of the problem in this paper. This method clearly described the strategy used by the Azerbaijani side in winning the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region against Armenia in 2020. The data that has been obtained through qualitative methods will be classified, summarized, analyzed, and concluded to be able to describe the conditions related to the issues involved previously described.

**Result and Discussion**

Some of the existing literature has succeeded in providing a detailed description of the history and detailed conditions of the conflict over territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, none of those studies have specifically analyzed the strategies implemented by Azerbaijan, which ultimately won its victory over its conflict with Armenia. So that the following research will conduct an in-depth exploration of the things that have led Azerbaijan to victory using the theory of offensive realism.

**44-Day of War**

For decades efforts to reconcile Azerbaijan and Armenia have been made, such as mediation efforts. However, the results of the mediation meeting have not produced results, so before 2020 the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be said to be a frozen conflict because peace efforts are difficult even though various parties have intervened to find the best solution to this conflict (Wibawa & Firawati, 2016). Until September 2020, Azerbaijan survived the 44-
day war against Armenia, bringing its country to victory. This 44-day war is also known as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (Mirovalev, 2020). The 44-day war took place from September 27 to November 10, 2020. This war was a major escalation of the unresolved conflict between the two countries in the region. Fighting began on the morning of September 27, with the Azerbaijani offensive along the contact lines that followed the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Clashes were especially intense in the less mountainous districts south of Nagorno-Karabakh. Türkiye is said to have provided military support to Azerbaijan in this attack. Drones, sensors, long-range heavy artillery and missile attacks, state propaganda, and official social media accounts in online information warfare characterize this war. In particular, the widespread use of Azerbaijani drones is seen as important in determining the outcome of the conflict. However, on the other hand, many countries and the United Nations strongly condemned the fighting and called on both sides to reduce tensions and continue negotiations (Kofman, 2020). However, neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia paid attention to this request and continued launching attacks against each other.

Subsequently, the war was again marked by an Azerbaijani ground offensive that included armored formations supported by artillery and drones, including loitering ammunition. Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh troops were forced back from their first line of defense in the southeastern and northern areas of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, they inflicted significant losses on Azerbaijani armored formations with guided missiles and anti-tank artillery, destroying dozens of vehicles. Azerbaijan heavily used drones in attacks against Armenian air defenses, turning off 13 short-range surface-to-air missile systems (Cheterian, 2022). Azerbaijani troops used drones to isolate and destroy Armenian positions systematically. Reconnaissance drones would locate frontline military positions and reserve troop deployments, after which they would be shelled along with roads and bridges that reserves could use to reach those positions. Once the Armenian positions are extensively shelled and removed from reinforcements, Azerbaijan will move with superior force to seize them. This tactic was repeatedly used to gradually overrun Armenian positions (Gressel, 2020). Azerbaijani forces gained limited gains in the south in the first three days of the conflict. Over the next three days, the two sides exchanged fire from fixed positions. To the north, Armenian forces counterattacked, managing to retake some territory. Their biggest counterattack occurred on the fourth day. However, at the same time, the Armenians also suffered heavy losses when their armored and artillery units were hit by Azerbaijani attacking drones (Kofman & Nersisyan, 2020).

On November 9, 2020, following the occupation of Shusha by Azerbaijan, a ceasefire agreement was signed by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, ending all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone from November 10, 2020, 00:00 Moscow time. The President of Nagorno-Karabakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, also agreed to end hostilities. Related to this, Ilham Aliyev also confirmed it through a speech broadcast on television on the same day. Aliyev conveyed a sense of pride and happiness for the liberation of Shusha from the Armenians (Iswara, 2020). Times after the broadcast of the speech, on November 10, 2020, to be precise, Nikol Pashinyan also opened his voice in public. Via his official Facebook page, Pashinyan wrote that he had signed an agreement with the President of Azerbaijan and Russia. He also added that the decision that had been taken was painful not only for him but also for the entire Armenian people. According to Pashinyan, the decision was taken after an in-depth analysis of the situation faced by the military at that time. He further explained that the truce was the best solution for his people, even though it was painful. The statement made by Pashinyan officially ended the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh (Utomo, 2020).

The Analysis of Azerbaijan's Strategy to Win the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict against Armenia

From the perspective of offensive realism, the state is constantly trying to increase its military power to achieve hegemony. This view is in line with the strategy adopted by Azerbaijan against Armenia. Azerbaijan
maintains diplomacy with several countries, such as Israel, Türkiye and Russia, to strengthen its military forces.

Azerbaijan’s diplomacy with Israel

Two decades of relations between Azerbaijan and Israel have proven that the ties between the two countries have strong pragmatic roots because, despite the rapidly changing geopolitical conditions of the region, the relations between the two countries have developed and become stronger than before (Ismayilov, 2015). When the first contacts were established in 1992, no one could have foreseen how Azerbaijan and Israel relations would quickly develop into a strong strategic partnership which today includes intense cooperation in the intelligence and economic fields (Souleimanov, Ehrmann, & Aliyev, 2014). The rapid development of Azerbaijan-Israel relations into a partnership in a very short time can only be explained by the presence of strong ties between both parties. The reason behind the partnership is usually linked to the issue of national security and the interdependence of Azerbaijan and Israel. Economic interdependence is based on the different needs of the two countries, which match each other. Israel's interests are focused on importing oil and natural gas from Azerbaijan. At the same time, Azerbaijan aims to achieve the transfer of military, industrial and agricultural technology and expertise from Israel in addition to directly buying high-tech military equipment to build a strong and modern Azerbaijani army that can tip Azerbaijan in its long conflict with Armenia. Israel's high technology and weapons quality convinced Azerbaijan's policymakers of the benefits of strategic ties with Israel (Parsi, 2005). Since the mid-1990s, Israel has reportedly sold surface-to-air missiles, rocket launchers, military communications equipment, drones and military satellites and upgraded Azerbaijan's Soviet-made T-72 tank capabilities. In February 2012, Israeli officials confirmed a new arms deal between Israel and Azerbaijan worth $1.6 billion, including anti-aircraft, missile defense systems and drones. In early 2012, an Israeli-Azerbaijani joint venture established in Azerbaijan began producing drones for military use (Göksel, 2015).

Azerbaijan’s Diplomacy with Türkiye

Apart from Israel, Türkiye also plays a vital role in the South Caucasus region. Türkiye maintains good relations with Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is Türkiye's only and most reliable partner. But on the other hand, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a security threat to Türkiye as a country receiving oil and gas supplies from Azerbaijan. The reason for energy security affected by the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is Türkiye's reason for supporting Azerbaijan in the conflict (Kinki & Çelik, 2021). The first military support can be seen from the data on the increase in sales of Türkiye's high-tech military to Azerbaijan. Based on information reported by Reuters in 2020, there has been an increase in Türkiye's military exports to its ally Azerbaijan. This export data increased sixfold in 2020. Sales of drones and other military equipment worth USD 77 million were sent by Türkiye to Azerbaijan a month before the fighting began in Nagorno-Karabakh. Türkiye's arms sales to Azerbaijan jumped from 278,880 USD in July 2020 to 36 million USD in August and 77.1 million USD in September. The increase in arms purchases saw Azerbaijan jump to the top of Türkiye's list of arms buyers, followed by Oman and the United States with USD 63 million each. The weapons purchases include the state-of-the-art armed drone, the Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2. The Turkish export assembly released data that, when added up, in the first nine months of 2020, Azerbaijan purchased defense and aviation equipment with a total value of 123 million USD from Türkiye. This amount even reached USD 256 million in November 2020. This amount is much increased compared to Türkiye's military exports to Azerbaijan in the first nine months of 2019, which only reached USD 20.7 million (Middle East Monitor, 2020). Türkiye's military support also includes providing training and military tactics to Azerbaijan. Military exercises involving ground troops were held from August 1 to 5 in Baku and Nakhchivan, while exercises involving military aviation were held on July 29 and August 10 in Baku, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Kurdamir and Yevlakh. According to The Jamestown Foundation, he also mentioned that the military exercises between Türkiye and Azerbaijan within 2 weeks were the largest in
the history of Azerbaijan and Türkiye's military cooperation. Türkiye also left two F-16 fighter jets in Ganja, Azerbaijan (Huseynov, 2020).

**Azerbaijan's diplomacy with Russia**

Although they are known to support Armenia, relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have not always been bad. The end of 2019, for example, saw an increase in diplomatic activity between Azerbaijan and Russia when it was seen that Russia wanted to strengthen its profile in Azerbaijan and bring the country closer to the multilateral initiatives promoted by Russia due to Azerbaijan's growing geopolitical importance to the West and China, being a key participant in the Southern Gas Corridor and an important candidate in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Russia also wants Azerbaijan to offset its traditional South Caucasus ally, Armenia, while Azerbaijan expects Russia's assistance resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Konarzewska, 2020). Even in the last few years before 2015, Russia-Azerbaijan relations generally improved thanks to intensive political dialogue and the growth of bilateral trade.

Although Russia claims to be the main mediator in the conflict between the two countries, in 2011–2020, apart from supporting 94 percent of the main arms exports to Armenia, Russia is also the exporting country of 60 percent of the main arms imports to Azerbaijan. Russia's supply of military equipment to Azerbaijan includes armored vehicles, air defense systems, transport and combat helicopters, artillery, multiple rocket launchers and tanks. These weapons were used during the 2020 war over Nagorno-Karabakh (Strategic Comments, 2010). For example, there are reports that several Russian-supplied Azerbaijani armored vehicles were damaged or destroyed by Armenian anti-tank missile systems and Russian-supplied artillery. Russia supplied several Smerch rocket launchers in 2013, and it was reported that Azerbaijan used Smerch rockets to attack populated targets in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 (Wezeman, Kuimova, & Smith, 2021).

Through the diplomacy it carries out with the countries previously described, Azerbaijan gains a much more stable military power than its rival, Armenia. The data obtained from Al Jazeera in 2020 reported that the combat equipment owned by Azerbaijan is more than the combat equipment belonging to Armenia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of military combat equipment</th>
<th>Azerbaijan</th>
<th>Armenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armored vehicles</td>
<td>1,637</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total artillery</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-propelled artillery</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket artillery</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of vessels</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of aircraft</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighter aircraft</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack aircraft</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The comparison of the combat equipment owned by Azerbaijan and Armenia.
Source: (Keddie, 2020).

**Conclusion**

From the previous explanation, the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is one of the oldest conflicts in the world. Starting in 1921, when the Soviet Union Government incorporated Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, the international community officially recognized this region as part of Azerbaijan. Its Russian name, Nagorny Karabakh, knew it. However, for the Armenian people and the Armenian population inhabiting
this region, Nagorno-Karabakh is an independent region that has been outside the control of Azerbaijan. The conflict between the two countries has yet to end in the following years. The two countries continue to attack each other to control the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which they believe is part of their territory. Until the end of 2020, the two countries were fighting again in a war known as the 44-day war. During that war, Azerbaijan succeeded in fighting the opposing side, namely Armenia, and controlled most of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In this study, the strategy used by Azerbaijan to win the conflict is analyzed using the offensive realism paradigm. Offensive realism explains that to become a hegemon state. The state will continue to strive to strengthen its military. In this regard, Azerbaijan has a diplomatic strategy with other countries such as Israel, Türkiye and Russia. From the diplomatic relations that were successfully established, Azerbaijan received military assistance in sophisticated and qualified weapons and military training to strengthen its forces.

Bibliography

Book

Journal

Website


