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The Consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the Undeniable Reality of Khojaly Massacre: A View from Azerbaijan

Abstract: This article seeks to study the consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh war for Azerbaijan: thus analyzes findings on occupied territories, casualties, and damages of the war from economic, political, and social perspectives. The utmost brutality and atrocity of the overall conflict is memorized with Khojaly Massacre committed against Azerbaijani civilians on 26 February 1992. Hence, the article unveils evidences through the scrutiny of secondary data from academic sources, publications, and news materials published by international media. The particular focus of the study is concentrated on to what extent special plan was prepared deliberately for ethnic cleansing in Khojaly during the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Keywords: *The Nagorno-Karabakh War; Khojaly Massacre; Azerbaijan; Armenia*

Introduction

The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh remains to be one of the most controversial issues of the twentieth century. Although the Versailles Peace Conference recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918–1920 (Altstadt, 1992, p. 102), Armenia did not abandon its demand on the territory. After two years controversies, when the South Caucasus countries became part of the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1920s, Nagorno-Kara-

bakh was again flagged as a topic of discussion. At the result, plenum of Kavbureau CC RCP(b) (Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks) decided to leave Nagorno-Karabakh within the territory of Azerbaijan SSR according to the decree of the July 5, 1921 (Baguirov, 2008, p. 5). Further in 1923, Nagorno-Karabakh was granted with an autonomous status (Saparov, 2012, p. 315).

However, this attempt of the Soviet leadership did not stop hostility between the two nations over Nagorno-Karabakh, just prevented direct clash for a while. Despite several attempts of the Armenian to annex Karabakh to Armenian SSR during the Soviet Union, it was after reform programs of glasnost and perestroika of Gorbachev that Armenian SSR found a new momentum that provided the country with the opportunity to openly express its territorial claims against Azerbaijan. Although, in comparison not only to other mountainous regions of the Soviet Union but also to the Azerbaijan as a whole the living standard in Nagorno-Karabakh was relatively high, Armenia was arguing that Armenians who were living in the Nagorno-Karabakh region were deliberately discriminated by the Azerbaijani leadership (Melander, 2001, p. 51). Thus, on 20 February 1988, the Regional Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh decided to transfer the region to the sovereignty of Armenia. This attempt of Armenia was rejected not only by Azerbaijan SSR, but also by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Central committee of the CPSU with reference to the Article 78 of the USSR Constitution (Krüger, 2010, p. 18). The Article 78 of the Constitution was insisting that only 15 Soviet Union republics had the right of secession from the Soviet Union, but the autonomous republics or *oblasts*, belonging to the union republic, did not have the right to secede or unify with other(s) without the consent of the union republic that they were subjected (Zürcher, 2007, pp. 25–26). Meanwhile, as Erik Melander argues, “Soviet leaders opposed Armenian designs in Nagorno-Karabakh because of the risk that similar demands could be made by various regions in the Soviet Union, thus destabilizing the whole state... Gorbachev, however, was [also] worried that the large-scale use of force would jeopardize his reform program” (2001, p. 53). However, while taking no notice to the indication of the USSR Constitution and the concerns of Soviet leadership, Armenian side used the Soviet Law of 3 April 1990 “on the Procedures for Resolving Questions Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the USSR” as a legal basis for secession Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan and began to create their political structures within the region, which, according to scholars, explicitly violated not only above-mentioned article of the Soviet Constitution, but also the 1990 April Law *per se* (Dədəyev et al., 2014, pp. 123–124). However, from that time on, Armenians possessed unconstitutional government over Karabakh (Zürcher,

2007, p. 165) and following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia and lasted until the cease-fire agreement of May 1994 (Freizer, 2014, p. 110), which caused serious material and moral damage. Despite the level of the damage for the winning and losing side, as Erik Melander argues, “The general theoretical puzzle with wars is that they are costly to all sides” (2001, p. 49). However, the special focus of this research is the investigation the case of Azerbaijan. The majority of studies in this regard either neglect investigating detailed causalities of the war or lack in encompassing the result from economic, political, and social perspectives. Therefore, this research is intended to investigate the economic, political, and social damage and causalities of the Nagorno-Karabakh war for Azerbaijan while putting special emphasis on Khojaly Massacre. The main research question of the study is: *To what extent Russia and Armenia deliberated special plans to perpetrate ethnic cleansing in Khojaly?*

Secondary data analysis is the most compatible research methods for this research. Hence, to primary method used to answer thesis questions are content analysis. The primary sources that are going to be used for this research are newspapers, government statements, official documents, and reports. The secondary sources encompass scientific books and journal articles in this field.

The Consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh War traced serious physical, material, and moral consequences for Azerbaijan. The result of the war was the breach of the territorial integrity and inviolability of Azerbaijan by Armenia. According to official statistic of Azerbaijan the overall occupied and affected territories of Azerbaijan at the result of war was 17, 000 sq. km. (10, 563 sq. miles), approximately 20%, which includes: the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the territory of the former NKAO that was abolished in 1991 by Azerbaijan; Seven occupied regions of Azerbaijan surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh: Lachin, Kelbajar, Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrail, Gubatli, and Zengilan; Territories of Gazakh, Agstafa, Tovuz, and Gedebeý that bordering with Armenia; Territories of 4 regions that bordering with the Line of Contact: Terter, Goranboy, Agjabedi, and Beylagan; Territories of the administrative regions of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, a landlocked enclave of Azerbaijan surrounding with Armenia, Iran, and Turkey (USAN Factsheet, 2012).

Along with the territorial loss, Azerbaijan was a first former Soviet state encountering problems with refugees and IDPs. The deteriorating situation that triggered the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia forced approximately one million Azerbaijanis to leave their homelands.

The displacements of Azerbaijanis took place in two stages. The initial flow of the refugees occurred between 1988 and early 1991, when the ethnic tension increased at the result of the secession movement of Nagorno-Karabakh (Profile of International Displacement: Azerbaijan, 2005, p. 10). According to International Crisis Group (2012, p. 2), during the first wave of ethnic clashes, all ethnic Azerbaijanis of Armenia, approximately 250,000 people, left their homes and flee to Azerbaijan.

The second displacement began at the end of 1991, when the conflict escalated into war until the cease-fire agreement in May 1994. It was estimated that during these years approximately 22,000/25,000 people were killed and more than 4,500 people are still missing. According to the figure of 2010 of the State Committee for Refugees and IDPs of Azerbaijan, the number of IDPs was 586,013 that consisted of mainly ethnic Azerbaijanis, including Kurds, Russian, and Mekhseti Turk of the region (Azerbaijan: After Some 20 years, 2010, p. 3). In this regard, the US Committee for Refugees (USCR) emphasizes that since 1993 more than 568,000 people, 42,072 from Nagorno-Karabakh and the rest from the other occupied regions: Fizuli (133,725 persons), Agdam (128,584 persons), Lachin (63,007 persons), Kelbadjar (59,274), Jabrayil (58,834 persons), Gubadli (31–276), Zangilan (34,797), Terter (5,171), and Adjabedi (3,358), were displaced (USAN Factsheet).

The war also damaged social-economic sphere of Azerbaijan. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, the social-economic damage of the war is as following: 6 cities, 12 settlements of urban type, 830 provinces, 700 hospitals and medical institutions were destroyed in the occupied territories; More than 150,000 dwelling houses and apartments were looted and destroyed; 4366 public and medical service buildings were destroyed; 927 libraries were plundered; 4, 6 million copies of books and invaluable manuscripts were obligated; 6 state theatres, 368 clubs and 85 musical schools were destroyed; 6000 industrious, agricultural and other enterprises were plundered; 244,000 sheep and 69,000 heads of horned cattle were taken from the occupied territories; 70% of summer pasture of Azerbaijan were located on the occupied area; Telephone stations for 35,000 subscribers, 2500 transformer substitutions and 15,000 km of electric lines were pillaged (Aggression against Azerbaijanis, 2004, p. 8).

The scale of damage to the cultural property was also huge. Objects of the cultural heritage in occupied territories were destroyed, a great deal of historical, cultural, humanitarian, and religious monuments and masterpieces were plundered, and various historical museums in the region were devastated. Unique memorials of the Bronze Age - more than 10 barrows on the Khojaly barrow field were also plundered and the Azykh cave that located in Fizuli region was transformed into the depot (Aggression against Azerbaijanis, 2004, pp. 9–10).

The amount of the ecological disaster was also massive. At the result of the war, the irrigation and water supply system of the region and its neighboring areas has been disrupted. Armenian seized 280,000 hectares of forests, 2 national parks, and 4 national nature reserves. Additionally, 200 fossil, fauna, and geological monuments of nature are under the control of Armenian forces. 800 km of railway communications and roads, 15 kilometers of electric and gas lines and 1,203-kilometer irrigation and water communications system were destroyed and 160 bridges had blown up (Mustafayeva & Garayev, 2013, pp. 58–59). Armenia also caused damage to water resources. Hence, circa “2.1 million m³ of polluted water is thrown down without preliminary purification in the Aras, first of all in its tributaries, running on the territory of Armenia and Azerbaijan occupied territories every day” (Aggression against Azerbaijanis, 2004, p. 9).

The occupied lands also possess various rich deposits of mineral resources; 2 gold, 4 mercury, 2 chromite, 1 lead-zinc, 1 copper and 1 antimony (Mustafayeva & Garayev, 2013, pp. 57–58). Consequently, according to United Nation Development Program (UNDP), at the result of the aggression the total material cost and economic damage is estimated around USD 53.5 billion. (Azerbaijan Human Development Report 2000, p. 52) Because of this economic loss in the occupied regions, nearly 7000 establishments were closed, which were providing 24% of the grain revenues, 41% of liqueur production, 46% of the potato growth, 18% of the meat production and 34% of the milk production of the economy of Azerbaijan (Dədəyev et al., 2014, p. 203).

In addition to total material cost and economic damage, the period of the Nagorno-Karabakh war was experienced by fierce power politics competition, occasional violence, domestic instability, and military coup against the legitimate government, and brought end of the short-lived democratic government of Azerbaijan (Caspersen, 2012, p. 134). Furthermore, Azerbaijan spend great amount of its annual revenue for defense and militarization, which can be spend for social welfare and development of society.

The Khojaly Massacre

The Khojaly massacre that happened on the night of 26 February 1992 was the bloodiest page of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. “What happened in [Khojaly] was the first mass massacre of civilians by the military and was a symptom of a very dangerous development. It also marked an impressive Armenian military success” (Vaserman & Ginat, 2008, p. 355). The massacre yielded mass killing of hundreds of civil population with inhuman brutality. On that night, the Armenian forces, under the command of Major Oganyan Seyran Mushegovich and Yevgeniy Nabokhin, with the

help of the 366th motorized infantry brigade of the Russian Interior Ministry occupied Khojaly. According to official statistics of Azerbaijan, following the occupation 613 innocent Azerbaijanis, including 106 women and 83 children, were massacred. Twenty-five children were orphaned and 130 lost one parent. Eight families were totally exterminated. Four hundred and seventy-six people were permanently disabled. A total of 1275 people were taken hostage, and even though afterwards most of the hostages were released, the fates of 150 of them are still unknown (Nuriyev, 2008; Goltz, 2012, p. 189).

The results of the massacre were difficult to show; An unheard-of punitive crime were Perpetrated against civilians. According to the medical examination, tens of the victims of massacre, including women, children, and old people were killed with unusual brutality. The evidences broadcasted by international media indicate some dead bodies exhibit victims had been scalped alive; parts of bodies, such as, heads, legs, and ears had been mutilated; some had been burned alive. In this regard, most of the international newspapers and foreign witnesses share the bloodiness of the Khojaly massacre. Pascal Privet and Steve Le Vine narrates that, “Azerbaijan was charnel house again last week: a place of mourning refuges and dozens of mangled corpses dragged to a makeshift morgue behind the mosque. They were ordinary Azerbaijani men, women and children of Khojaly” (1992). On 3 March 1992 *the New York Times* also reported that, “Fresh evidence emerged today of a massacre of civilians by Armenian militants in Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian enclave of Azerbaijan” (Massacre by Armenians Being Reported, 1992). “Time magazine called the actions against Khodjali “grim and unconscionable, reporting that many of those killed had been mutilated” (March 16, 1992). The Washington Times wrote that video footage backed accounts of the slaughter of women and children (March 3, 1992)” (Goltz, 2012, p. 192). A photographer of Reuters, Frederique Lengaigne reveals she had seen two trucks on the outskirts of Nagorno-Karabakh that filled with the dead bodies. “In the first one I counted 35, and it looked as though there were almost as many in the second... Some had their heads cut off, and many had been burned” she said (Massacre by Armenians Being Reported, 1992). However, the most decisive report came from *Human Rights Watch*, which recalls that, “In February 1992, Karabakh Armenian forces-reportedly backed by soldiers from the 366th Motor Rifle Regiment of the Russian Army-seized the Azeri-populated town of Khojaly... More than 200 civilians were killed in the attack, the largest massacre to date in the conflict” (1994, p. 6).

Hereby, it would be noteworthy also to put special emphasis on the Armenian opinion in this regard. According to ‘The Armenian Cause-Newsletter of the Armenian National committee of Canada’ it was ‘Artshak self-defense’ forces that were fighting ‘considerable’ military forces of Azerbaijan in Khojaly and on 25 February they opened

a corridor for the evacuation of the civil Azerbaijanis after capturing the city. However, the Azerbaijan soldiers used the civilians as a shield, “they resumed bombardment of the NKR populated points, and when they were compelled to leave the village, they themselves shot the civilian inhabitants” (History of Artsakh, 2008, p. 4). Meanwhile, Armenian historian Davidian narrates that on 26 February Armenian forces and the CIS’s 366th Motor Rifle Regiment managed to capture Khojaly and during the evacuation process of the civilians fighting erupted between Azerbaijani soldiers and Armenian and CIS soldiers. According to Davidian, “Azerbaijani soldiers mixed in with these evacuating civilians. The result was the deaths of hundreds of evacuating Azerbaijani civilians and soldiers” (2008, pp. 7–8).

The statements made by Armenians raise questions related to the “self-defense” forces and denying death of the civilians during that night. Firstly, attention should be drawn on the “Artshak self-defense” and make it clear that if the self-defense forces mean the unified military group of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, military forces of Armenian Republic, and 366th Military Regiment of Russian Army, mentioned in the statement of David Davidian. In his statement, he precisely makes it clear that there were not only “self-defense” forces of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians but also combined forces of ethnic Armenians and the Russian 366th Motor Rifle Regiment. In addition, Armenia denies the death of hundreds of civil population and estimates the civilians’ deceased less than a hundred; however, Davidian in his narration proof that hundreds of civil population were killed. Furthermore, Armenians also condemned Azerbaijan in the death of the civil population. Therefore, while referring to the reports of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia argues that, it was Azerbaijani National Front that prevented evacuation of civilians. The Minister further states that, “on this matter, the September 1992 Helsinki Watch non-governmental organization report quotes an Azerbaijani woman who says that Armenians had notified the Azerbaijani civilian population to leave the town with white flags raised, in fact the Azerbaijani militia shot those who attempted to flee” (Letter by Holly Cartner, 1997, pp. 17–18). However, in his letter to Alexander Arzumanyan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Holly Cartner, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, states that our reports does not reflect the view of the above-mentioned statement of Armenia. The letter indicates that,

Neither our overview and version of the events, nor the individual interviews with Azeri refugees from Khojaly and other villages in Nagorno-Karabakh published in the report could possibly support the notion that Azerbaijani forces willfully prevented the evacuation of civilians or that they shot their own citizens. We are deeply distressed that the Ministry has, wittingly or unwittingly, linked our report to views which we reject and which our report does not reflect (Letter by Holly Cartner, 1997).

Armenian side also argues that there were qualified Azerbaijani soldiers and mass quantity of heavy military equipment in the city. Thus, the reason that Armenian attacked to the city was “self-defense”. Nevertheless, investigating the interviews of Armenian officials reveals the fact that Armenians intended the Khojaly massacre beforehand. As per De Wall aptly writes:

Yet Armenians now do admit that many Azerbaijani civilians were killed as they fled Khojaly. Some blame irregular Armenian fighters, acting on their own behalf. An Armenian police officer, Major Valery Babayan, suggested revenge as a motive. He told the American reporter Paul Quinn-Judge that many of the fighters who had taken part in the Khojaly attack “originally came from Sumgait and places like that” (2003, p. 171).

This statement shows that without any question there was an intended plan behind the attack and most of the Armenians took it as “revenge” against civilians of Khojaly, as Cornell puts it, “the attack was timed, in all likelihood not coincidentally, to occur on the anniversary of the Sumgait killings of Armenians four years earlier” (2011, p. 62).

De Wall also writes that during an interview with the current Armenian president Serzh Sarkisian he said that; “We don’t speak loudly about these things”. “A lot was exaggerated” in the casualties, and the fleeing Azerbaijanis had put up armed resistance” (2003, p. 172). De Wall narrates that Sarkisian’s summation of what had happened, however, was more honest and more brutal:

Before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that’s what happened. And we should also take into account that amongst those boys were people who had fled from Baku and Sumgait (2003, p. 172).

As mentioned before, Armenians and pro-Armenian writers still deny the massacre of civilians or argue that Azerbaijan killed own civilians for showing brutality of Armenians. Nonetheless, as Cornell recalls, “no one other than current Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan in an interview with British author Thomas De Wall seems to make the narrative clear” (2011, p. 62). Armenians also argue that they had opened a corridor for the evacuation, but the American journalist Thomas Goltz (1998, p. 119), who was in Khojaly two months prior to the massacre, reported that there were no working phones in the city, nothing was functioning, no electricity, no heating system, and no running water. The only way out of city was the helicopter, which was under threat with each run. Besides, question also arises concerning to the corridor. Thus, if there were such an issue why Armenians took more than thousand hostages and why most of the dead person were tortured and died with special brutality, burned, scalped, and beheaded. Concerning the ‘corridor’, De Wall writes,

[Khojaly] had been cut off by road for four months and was only defended by about 160 lightly armed men. Early in the morning, both civilians and fighters fled through the town's one remaining exit down a valley ankle-deep in snow. Outside the village of Nakhichevanik, they were met by a wall of gunfire from Armenian fighters. Wave after wave of fleeing men, women, and children were cut down (2010, p. 119).

Another Armenian, Markar Melkonian, in his book *My Brother's Road* that dedicated to his brother Monte Melkonian, of the well-known international terrorist also known as 'Commander Avo' testify that:

At about 11:00 p.m. the night before, some 2,000 Armenian fighters had advanced through the high grass on three sides of Khojaly, forcing the residents out through the open side to the east. By the morning of February 26, the refugees had made it to the eastern cusp of Mountainous Karabagh and had begun working their way downhill, toward safety in the Azeri city of Agdam, about six miles away. There, in the hillocks and within sight of safety, Mountainous Karabagh soldiers had chased them down. "They just shot and shot," a refugee woman, Raisa Aslanova, testified to a human Rights Watch investigator. The Arabo fighters had then unsheathed the knives they had carried on their hips for so long, and began stabbing... Now, the only sound was the wind whistling through dry grass, a wind that was too early yet to blow away the stench of corpses (2005, pp. 213–214).

All these statements are an explicit proves that the military attack was deliberately planned. However, hereby, the special attention should be drawn also to the "help" of the 366th brigade during the Armenian offences and the role of Russia should not be "undermined". It is obvious that Russia has been a strategic ally of Armenia since the outset of the conflict in order to keep its presence in the region. Regarding the intended plan of Russia behind the massacre of civilians in Khojaly, the special consideration should be paid to the geopolitical processes in the region during the period of Ayaz Mutallibov. Mutallibov came to power by replacing the First Secretary of AzCP Abdurahman Vezirov as a result of the Soviet military intervention on 20 January 1990 (Hunter, 2004, p. 344). The ruling of Mutallibov from January 1990 to August 1991 was called by the local *nomenklatura* [the system of bureaucratic patronage in the former Soviet Union] as "enlightened authoritarianism" (Zverev, 1996). Mutallibov was considered a Gorbachev's man; therefore, he became an early supporter of the Gorbachev's New Union Treaty efforts for reviving the Soviet Union by granting greater autonomous power to the union republics (Croissant, 1998, p. 40). Mutallibov was convinced that staying in the Union would be appropriate for Azerbaijan in terms of security. Thus, when Azerbaijan parliament adopted the resolution for independence on 18 October 1991, the behaviour of Mutallibov was

suspicious pertaining to the full independence of the republic, which became clear in his November speech at the parliament, as he tried to justify new Union plan of Gorbachev, “Moscow has abolished more than 80 central government ministries, there is no structure to dictate to us like before. The Centre will only take care of foreign and security policy, which too will be coordinated with us”. (Mekhtiev) Therefore, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 8 December 1991. Mutallibov acted as if Azerbaijan was already a member of this organization and signed the Alma-Ata treaty to join the CIS on 21 December, (Mekhtiev) which increased tension within the country. Pro-independent opposition groups were demanding full independence from any Russia-led organization, as it was believed that being part of the CIS would be a potential risk to independence. However, the last blow to Azerbaijani president came at the result of the occupation of Khojaly. According to Mutallibov, during the second discussion of the membership of Azerbaijan to the CIS in the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan, Boris Yeltsin called and asked for the ratification of the membership of Azerbaijan to the organization by the members of Supreme Soviet. Instead he promised for the disbandment of the 366th brigade. However, the Supreme Soviet rejected this proposal that was resulted with the massacre of the civilians in Khojaly (Ayaz Mütəllibovdan şok açıqlamalar, 2014). This step of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan angered Russia and induced to improve its relations with Armenia. Obviously, Russia was seeing the CIS as a starting point for recovering its exclusive dominance in the South Caucasus. However, the strategic approach of Russia was blocked by the unwillingness of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan to ratify the Tashkent treaty of 1991 and join the CIS. Therefore, the intention of Russia to involve the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians in Khojaly was clearly to preserve its already scattered position in the region and crush pro-Western and pro-Turkish attitude of Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

Termination of the USSR was followed with several ethnic conflicts and war escalations within its former borderline. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stemming from territorial claims of Armenia on historical Azerbaijani lands broke out the hot war from 1991 to 1994. The war repercussion was daunting for Azerbaijan as the military operations were conducted with disproportionate capacities, and obvious support of Russian armed forces backed Armenians to violate Azerbaijani territorial integration by occupation of 20% of its lands. Military aggressions did not only mean territorial

loss for Azerbaijan, but also devastated its cultural heritage, caused refugee and IDP crisis, and traced a dreadful impact on country's economy.

Armenian ferocity reached at its peak in Khojaly, which was a significant settlement centre of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Therefore, the occupation of the city was carried out through several intended plans: to facilitate further occupation and open the route to the Agdam, Shusha, Khankendi, Askeran; to frighten Azerbaijanis not only militarily, but also civil population to threaten their intention to resist against Armenians; and break the will of the Azerbaijan government to follow pro-Western and pro-Turkish policy. These facts prove that occupation of Khojaly and mass killing of civilians was a deliberative act. On the other hand, Russia uses the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a tool to keep its political presence in the region. In one hand it possess a military bases in the territory of Armenia and provide modern weapons and military equipment for the security of Armenia. On the other hand, it also sells military equipment to Azerbaijan. Russia is aware that if the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia will be solved there will not be any obstacles for these South Caucasian countries to trace pro-Western politics. Therefore, the existing status quo, 'no war, no peace' situation is in the favor of Russia. That is why it was stated that, Russia wants "neither winners no losers" in this conflict (Minassion, 2008, p. 15). Therefore, Russia was considered one of the main obstacles to the solution of the conflict that prevented any peace initiative by the Minsk Group from the outbreak of the conflict. As Armenian political analyst Eduard Abrahamyan (2014) argues that Russia intentionally tries to disrupt the work of the Minsk Group. In this regard, he elucidates that, "The main goal of Putin's policy is to preclude the political influence and activity of Western powers in unsettled conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Kremlin's purpose is to marginalize and to distance itself from the OSCE Minsk Group initiatives". Therefore, it would be beneficial for the regional integration and welfare if the conflicting parties reduce the influence not only Russia but also all great and regional powers and seek for compromises and peace for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

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