

## **Turkey's Approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis (2003-2020)**

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### **Abstract**

**Objective:** The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was one of the longest-standing international crises. It officially started on February 20, 1988, and not ended until Dec. 2020, when a cease-fire was signed and involved a military confrontation between Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Republic of Azerbaijan, as the most important factor in the geopolitical region of the South Caucasus, after obtaining its independence faced the crisis ensued from the occupation of the land at the hands of Armenia. It later turned into an international crisis due to the intervention of some external powers. In the meantime, Turkey, as an ally of the Republic of Azerbaijan, has always tried to maintain its position among regional and trans-regional actors through its intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. Therefore, the main purpose of the research is to explain Turkey's foreign policy approach toward the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and likewise this article tries to focus on the developments of this approach during the governance period of the Justice and Development Party since 2003.

**Methods:** The method used in this study is descriptive - analytical based on the geopolitical theory and library resources.

**Result:** According to the findings of this study, Turkey's foreign policy released it from unilateralism and one-way commitment and will run the fluidity as the strong factor in its foreign policy structure to supply its profits in Nagorno-Karabakh. In fact, Turkey benefits from the Nagorno-Karabakh, more than before now. It seems that Turkey has helped the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh radically changed in favour of Baku which in the long term is in its own favour.

**Conclusion:** The results show that, by following the 'strategic depth' doctrine, influenced by the policy of détente of its neighbours and neo-Ottomanism, Turkey has followed the path of advocacy of Western policies toward independence and influence over the South Caucasus and Karabakh regions in pursuit of its national interests.

**Keywords:** Turkey, South Caucasus, Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, the Justice and Development Party.

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## 1. Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the most complex, dangerous, and the bloodiest one. The conflict started at the end of the 1980s, following Armenia's territorial claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. In parallel, the systematic expulsion of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic started in 1987. At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist and both Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independence and was recognized by the international community, the conflict gradually evolved into a full-scale inter-state war. Between 1992 and 1993, a considerable amount of Azerbaijani territory was occupied by Armenia, including Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts.

The international community has consistently condemned the use of military force against Azerbaijan and the resulting occupation of its internationally recognized territories. In 1993, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted four resolutions (822, 853, 874, and 884) in connection with the armed seizure of Azerbaijani territories. The resolutions demanded the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied regions of Azerbaijan. The resolutions also called for the restoration of economic, transport, and energy connections in the region, and the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). The UNSC in these resolutions established that the territory of Azerbaijan was the object of military occupation with all legal consequences that this determination entails. Despite the legally binding nature of the Security Council resolutions, Armenia has not complied with its terms and continues to occupy Azerbaijani territories (MFA Report, 2016).

Since 1992, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has engaged in efforts to achieve a settlement of the conflict under the aegis of the Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the US. Despite international mediation, the policy of the Armenian side demonstrates its intention to secure the annexation of the Azerbaijani territories that it has captured through military force and in which Armenia has carried out ethnic cleansing on a massive scale. Even though the active phase of the conflict ended in 1994 with the signing of a ceasefire agreement in Bishkek, violations of the ceasefire have always been fairly commonplace along the line of contact (LOC) between the armed forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In April 2016, an unprecedented escalation of the conflict known as the four-day war claimed the lives of over a hundred soldiers on both sides and dispelled the myth about the "frozen" nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Mustafayeva, 2018).

Since the beginning of the Cold War, because of the formation of the geopolitical region of the South Caucasus and the resultant security imperatives owing to the threat from the Soviet Union, Turkey has played an important role in the region by joining the defense arrangements of the West, such as NATO. After the Soviet Union collapsed and it lost its strategic importance, the departure from the Russian borders gave Turkey the hope that, with greater

autonomy in foreign policy, it would be possible to establish integrity between Turkish countries by creating a connection among the newly independent republics (Koulai and Goudarzi, 2015: 39). Thus, the gap of power resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union in the South Caucasus provided Turkey an opportunity to become one of the most important actors in its peripheral regions, including the South Caucasus (Falahatpisheh and others, 2016: 38). On the one hand, Turkey is concerned about jeopardizing the political stability of Azerbaijan and, on the other, it is dissatisfied with the disruption in relations with its Armenian neighbor. Moreover, especially since the Justice and Development Party came to power, Turkey has been trying to play its role even against the West and the Minsk group (Zaki and Pashalou, 2016: 144).

## **2. Research Question and Hypothesis**

In this regard, we aim at accounting for the main question “What is the approach taken by Turkey towards the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis after the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2003?” In accounting for the question, the hypothesis developed in this papers holds that “followed by the 'strategic depth' doctrine as well as influenced by the policy of detente of its neighbors and neo-Ottomanism, Turkey has followed the path of advocacy of Western policies toward independence and influence over the South Caucasus and Karabakh regions in pursuit of its national interests.”. This article tries to focus on the developments of this approach during the governance period of the Justice and Development Party since 2003 while examining Turkey's foreign policy approach toward the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. For analyzing this issue, the article uses the geopolitical theoretical framework and the descriptive-analysis method using library resources.

## **3. Research Findings and Analysis**

### **3.1. The Origin of Regional Conflicts based on Haggett's Theory**

The model of Hypothetical by Peter Haggett is an attempt to study geographical factors causing tension in relations between countries. This model involves a hypothetical country called “The Hypothetical” which has a set of specific conditions causing disputes with its neighbors. The hypothetical country is landlocked and has potential twelve points causing tension in relations with its neighbors (Haggett, 1983:477) (Haggett, 2001: 521).

Haggett presented this model for the first time in 1972 in the first edition of his book “Geography: A Modern Synthesis”. This model has been mentioned without any change in subsequent editions of the book in 1975 and 1995 and 1983. Also, a new book by Haggett called “Geography: A Global Synthesis” which was published in 2001 has been mentioned (Haggett, 1972, 1975, 1983, 1995, 2001).

In this model, Haggett has mentioned the following twelve geographic factors causing tension in relations between countries:

1. Right corridors for landlocked countries to access the sea through the territory of a neighboring country.
2. Disagreement over the division of waterline in mountainous borders
3. Repeatedly changing international fluvial border
4. Disagreement in determining the border in the joint lake and how to exploit its resources
5. Stealing upper side waters by countries located on top of it.
6. Spatial and territorial extension and spreading of an ethnic group to a neighboring country.
7. Establishment of racial or ethnic minority groups along two international borders.
8. Seasonal movement of nomads across two international borders
9. Ethnic separatist movement within a country.
10. Establishment of an important international resource next to the border that is claimed by neighbors. This resource may be an important strategic resource such as uranium or a cultural resource such as holy places.
11. The claim of a country over the territory of neighboring countries to maintain its superior and vital regional position and resources.
12. Legal conflicts over artificial fertilization of clouds to provide rain showers within the country and producing rain in the territory of neighboring countries as a result of the movements of clouds (Haggett, 1972, 1975, 1983, 1995, 2001).

In his model, Haggett has mentioned geographical and geopolitical factors causing tension between countries, and compared to other theories, has put more emphasis on spatial and regional variables. However, Haggett's model lacks the variables related to environmental, ecological and geo-economic resources that cause tension. Hence, we cannot consider it as a comprehensive model (Hafeznia et al, 2014:15-16).

Although this model of explanation of the tense geopolitical factors and conflict in the relations of countries has been formulated and provided for about four decades ago, it is still used in analyzing the tense tensions in international relations. But in this study, considering the difficulties in extracting accurately the extent of the influence and role of each of the factors of the Haggett's theory on foreign policy of Turkey towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, we will try to consider the origin of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh was a geopolitical issue while respecting the abovementioned factors and relying on geopolitical theories, including the Haggett theory. The purpose of this research is to examine Turkey's role in resolving this issue.

### **3.2. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

In 1987, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute escalated into violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while still being part of the Soviet Union. Nagorno-Karabakh is a section of mountainous territory that was awarded to Azerbaijan from the Soviet Union. Nagorno-Karabakh holds historical and religious significance to Armenia, as it is a historical part of Armenia and has a predominantly Armenian population. From 1987-1991 violent pogroms and

military force were exercised on both sides; from 1992-1994 full-scale war erupted. Amid considerable international pressure and 20,000 deaths, the violence was stopped by a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia in 1994 (Kaufman, 2001: 49-74).

The 1994 ceasefire is the only tangible diplomatic achievement towards the resolution of this conflict; all other peace talks have failed. (Branch, 2018) In April of 2016, in what became known as the Four Day War, military violence between Azerbaijan and Armenia erupted (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), killing at least 200 people. In this war, Armenia lost some controlled territory (Europe and Central Asia Report, 2017) in a clear display of Azerbaijan's advancement in its military capability since 1994. Although the ceasefire agreement is regularly broken, there has not been any large-scale violence since 1994, except April 2016 (Trend News Agency, 2018; Tert.am, 2018).

The de facto government or "Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh" (It should be noted that in 2016, the de facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh, or "The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh," changed its name to the "Republic of Artsakh"; it is commonly referred to as "Artsakh" in Armenia) uses joint Armenian and "Artsakh" military forces to defend the line of contact and the surrounding controlled territories. Armenia has reason to be concerned with the integrity of its defense of Nagorno-Karabakh, since Azerbaijan proved its increased military aptitude in the April 2016 War. Also, Azerbaijani troops are trained by Turkish forces in both Azerbaijan proper and in the Nakhchivan exclave that borders Armenia, Iran, and Turkey (Gurbanov, 2017). While Azerbaijan has continued to purchase Russian arms, (Zhuchkova, 2017) it started buying arms, including air-to-surface missiles, from Turkey (en.azeridefence, 2018). Regardless, Armenian and Karabakh forces should be able to retain their tactical ground superiority because of their elevated territorial advantage.

As Azerbaijan's oil reserves begin to dwindle over the next 24 years (Statistical Review of World Energy, 2018), it will be challenging for the Aliyev regime to sufficiently diversify the economy in preparation for the presumed economic shock. If the economic crisis hits, the domestic political atmosphere will become tumultuous, unstable, and uncertain for the survival of the Aliyev regime. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is likely to be its foreign adventure to distract the public from domestic issues by providing a scapegoat to keep the regime alive.

Beyond the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan's increasing pipeline projects tilt the geopolitical balance in favor of Azerbaijan. First, by investing in multi-national energy projects, most notably with Georgia and Turkey, Azerbaijan exports its Caspian energy to Europe, making it a critical alternative source, instead of Europe's continuous reliance on Russia or Middle Eastern states. Second, Azerbaijan profits from the sale of its energy. Third, by including Georgia and Turkey in these projects, it creates an inherent multi-beneficiary outcome, such as increased diplomatic relations, economic benefits (shared revenue and job creation), and less dependence on Russian energy.

Fourth, besides TANAP, the main investor in all of Azerbaijan's energy projects is BP, a UK-based petroleum corporation, thus enhancing British and western affinity for the energy-rich state (Manvelyan, 2015: 193-198).

With this Azerbaijani geopolitical advantage, Armenia incurs losses in three main ways. First, Armenia loses influence in Georgian-Armenian relations as Georgia will find Azerbaijan a much more profitable and beneficial partner. As Georgia aims to decrease its dependence on Russia, Azerbaijani pipeline projects provide employment, financial gain, and energy. Second, the three of Armenia's four neighbors all become richer from these energy partnerships, thus increasing the financial disparity between Armenia and its neighbors. Third, Azerbaijan makes substantial gains with European countries as a necessary alternative for energy, especially as Western and Russian relations continue to worsen, thus giving more hard value to Azerbaijan over Armenia, regardless of Armenia's more European aligned governance and values. This could also undercut support or neutrality for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Harris, 2018).

Therefore, according to Haggett's model, the factors responsible for creating insecurity in terms of geographic politics in Nagorno-Karabakh are as follows.

### **3-2-1. Landlocked**

The first factor in the hypothetical state of Haggett is that it is geographically landlocked. On the one hand, Armenia, as a landlocked country, is bereft of suitable geographical conditions with Iran or Georgia to access free waters. On the other hand, the country has historically had a hostile relationship with Turkey, which, in turn, laid for a foundation for insecurity and tension in Karabakh (Mir Heydar, 1994: 86).

### **3-2-2. Variable river borderline**

The next factor by Haggett's hypothetical model is related to the flood-plain river that forms the political boundary between the two hypothetical and neighboring countries. In the South Caucasus, this potential problem more or less does exist. For example, the Aras River denotes the border between the Islamic Republic of Iran with Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan and is located a few hundred kilometers from the Aras River in Turkey. This can be problematic given that Aras is a borderline river.

### **3-2-3. Abduction of water on the upstream of the river**

Another geographically stressful factor pertains to a river that extends into a hypothetical country from a neighboring country. In particular, how water is divided in this river can be a factor that contributes to stress. In this regard, the Kura River is a poignant example, which stems from Ghars in Turkey and flows through the Caspian Sea after passing through Georgia and Azerbaijan. Notably, this river is critical for Azerbaijan. Important irrigation channels of Upper Karabakh and Upper Shirvan are also fed from the reservoirs of this river. As a result, if Turkey and Georgia build dams on this river, a war-like situation develops in Caucasus (Mirheydar, 1994: 92).

### **3-2-4. Territorial and spatial expansion of an ethnolinguistic group into the territory of the neighboring country**

Peter Haggett posits that the greatest factor of geopolitical problems in the countries is ascribed to the presence of minority groups. This problem has crystallized more than anywhere else in Armenia. In a country, minority groups can exist in different ways and according to Haggett, each of them can create a specific type of tension. To illustrate, an ethnic-linguistic minority adjacent to the borders of the hypothetical country with the neighboring country can depend on the majority living in neighboring countries across the border. This, in turn, can lead to political tensions, as the minority people living in these countries want to belong to a nation that is included in the majority. In the South Caucasus, many cases can be mentioned as sources of tension and unrest in the region. For example, Armenians in Georgia are in the Akhalkalaki and Chavakhti regions near the northern border of Armenia. Over the past few years, they have been seeking autonomy, an issue that is typically accompanied by support from some Armenian circles (Kazemi, 2001, 111-112).

### **3-2-5. Ethnic Separatist's Movement within a Country**

According to Haggett, another factor about the minority is the existence of a coherent minority within the hypothetical country. The demand for this cohesive minority for separation and independence has led to the emergence of a separatist movement within the country. Correspondingly, as long as the separatist tendencies are limited within the country, there may not be a problem. However, when this separatist movement is supported by foreign forces, then, it becomes a geopolitical and problematic issue. This factor is well seen in the South Caucasus and fact, is one of the most important insecurity factors in this region. The documentary instance of this tension source is the Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts. In Karabakh, a coherent Armenian minority wants to become independent from Azerbaijan. The Armenian separatism of Karabakh, because of unclear and obvious support by Armenia, has evolved as a serious crisis between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began in the year 1988, and even after a decade, the corrective steps are still at a nascent stage (Drysedale and Blake, 1995:13).

### **3-2-6. Establishment of an Important International Source near the Border (Claimed by the Neighbors)**

According to Haggett, another geographic factor leading to traction between the hypothetical country and its neighboring country is related to a common natural resource, that is, an oil field, with a contention around its unilateral exploitation. This problem can also be seen in the disputes between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the three oil fields in the Caspian Sea, with the most important being Kupez or Sardar (Kazemi, 2001:114).



Map 1: Alexander Dugin's remarks on regional issues; the process of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict begins with the presence of Iran, Turkey, and Russia.

### 3.3. The Turkish Government's Approach

The principles of Turkey's foreign policy were formed under the influence of the thoughts of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) after forming the Republic of Turkey in the year 1923. One of the important features of Turkey's foreign policy is the behavior stability of the officials in the country and their adherence to the principles of foreign policy. Despite the many changes and revisions, these principles are similar to ones propounded during the Kemalism transition in the Republic of Turkey. This is true regarding the Atatürk's Westernism, especially in the field of Turkey's policy towards the West. The manifestation of this attitude can be seen in the formulation of new national goals in Turkey:

(1) Turkey is a country that is neither expansionist nor colonial, but a country seeking the domestic authority in the economic, industrial, scientific and military dimensions. In other words, it seeks the economic and technological power of the great Western powers.

(2) In addition to reaching technological equality with the West, Turkey wants to be recognized as a European nation and to be accepted in the Western camp (Vali, 1971: 61-70).

Accordingly, the goal of this country's governors is to be accepted as a member of the European community. Turkey's attempt to get closer to the West led the country to place the regional policies in the second level of foreign policy's priorities in the second half of the 1960s, but from now on and due to economic problems, Turkey's approach to the countries of the region was revised and the economic relations with the countries of the region was established, but by the end of the 1990s, it refused to intervene in the political and sensitive areas of the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the restructuring of the



international system and as a result of the end of the bipolar international system led to the changes in the foreign policy of various governments, including Turkey. Before the independence of the Central Asian and the Caucasus republics, over 70 years, all relations and foreign and regional relations were monopolized by the Russians. But now, the other dominant governments, including Turkey, have come to the competition (Ansari, 1995: 168-167). Due to its excellent relations with the European countries and the United States and playing an effective role in the mediation and peace process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Turkey could be a good option for studying in this research. In the Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey played its role as a mediator, supporter of the Azerbaijani government and a member of the Minsk group.

### **3-3-1. Justice and Development Party**

With the victory of the Justice and Development Party, also known as Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK) in 2002 and then its ascension to power in 2003, a fundamental evolution occurred in Turkey's foreign policy in the Caucasus region. The most fundamental change to have occurred was that new Turkish authorities tried to alter their previous approach to multilateralism at the regional and trans-regional levels. Under this new approach, Turkey has attempted to diversify its political partners in the region instead of focusing on the Western center and moving towards NATO and US policies (Sandrin, 2009: 6).

Since Justice and Development Party came into power in Turkey, the process of diversifying the country's foreign policy gradually moved towards the Middle East, Africa and South Caucasus in an attempt to become an active actor in the region. In particular, the South Caucasus and Karabakh regions were prioritized as part of Turkey's foreign policy. To that end, a key aspect of the nation's foreign policy included improving relations with neighbors (Larrabee, 2008: 5). Turkey's domestic political arena also witnessed some important changes in this period, especially during the early twentieth century, which witnessed an accelerated move towards the emerging middle power. According to Jenkins, at the beginning of its presence in Turkey's political arena, the Justice and Development Party tried to maintain its strategic relationship with the USA (Jenkins, 2012: 26). In that context, as an emerging middle power, Turkey tried to play the role of a good citizen positively. In this regard, indications by Turkey's Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu demonstrate this prioritization of foreign policy (Davutoglu, 2008: 77).

Notably, Turkey's internal political changes have also played a role in transforming the nation's foreign policy from merely being a strategic ally of the West to its growth as an emerging middle power. The internal position of the Justice and Development Party has been effective in determining its policies. During the first period, Turkey was unable to pursue more independent foreign policy goals due to the lack of political status of this group in Turkey's foreign policy, given that the military forces held much of the power. However, during the second period, after appointing Abdullah Gul as and the president of Turkey

and the events between the country's army and the Justice and Development Party, the latter was able to obtain local support and galvanized public opinion to express its views on the foreign policy agenda.

Regarding the Justice and Development party's alignment with US policies and the influence of Turkey's interior space, Turkey's expansionist movement and its aggressive view towards the region seen in the latest works that have been compiled on Turkey's foreign policy. Cook believes that Turkey, since formation, has devoted a large part of its foreign policy to institutionalizing its relations with Europe and the United States and has acted as a flexible actor in the Middle East. The isolated policy is taken by Turkey after World War I prevented Ankara from engaging in conflict and struggle in the region (Cook, 2012: 37). Turkey, with the presence of Ahmad Davutoglu as the main designer of foreign policy, considers the presence and active regional role as the most important area of its foreign policy (Niakui and Ahmadi Khoy, 2014: 191-190). The foreign policy of the justice and development party, based on the words of Prime Minister, Erdogan, and President, Abdullah Gul, can set out three guiding principles in Justice and Development party's policy:

- (1) Europeanization of foreign policy as a way to maintain the domestic and international legitimacy of the state.
- (2) Pursuing the policy ("zero problems") with neighbors, it means the creation of peaceful conditions in Turkey through the establishment of commercial and fundamental interests with them, especially the Islamic countries.
- (3) Taking a policy that establishes the required balance between the anti-American feelings of its hairy masses on the one hand and the current need for US support on the other hand (Hakan Yavuz, 2010: 326).

In fact, before 2003, Turkey's foreign policy was by far westernized and one-dimensional and the country had formed a large part of its policies in direction to relations with the West, especially the United States and the European Union. With coming to power of the justice and development party, Turkey's foreign policy turned from a one-dimensional policy to a multi-dimensional, pragmatic and interest-oriented foreign policy locally and internationally. One of the important dimensions of this foreign policy changed is attention to peripheral regions and neighboring countries to increase the role and position of Turkey in these regions, including the South Caucasus (Falahatpishe and others, 2016: 37).

Turkey, in the justice and development government, in the next step tried to increase its cooperation with the European Union in the South Caucasus region, focusing on two aspects of energy security and resolving the crisis of the region. Turkey, together with the formation of a more cohesive strategy in the European Union towards its eastern neighbors and in particular the Caucasus, to accelerate its membership in the European Union as well as diversify its regional counterparts, tried to cooperate with Europe Union on security issues (Schulz & Devrim, 2009). In the security filed, Turkey, despite criticizing the inaction by Minsk Group, increased its cooperation with this group in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to cooperate with European policies in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the European

Union's Black Sea Cooperation Program, developed by Europe for the development of regional security and economic cooperation and also to support the consolidation of the military, political and security structures of this region in Europe (Ataie and others, 2012: 139).

In the meantime, Turkey made its Caucasian policy as a priority to expand relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan and tried to promote its cooperation with this country at the strategic cooperation level. Turkey's absolute support from Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan have led to struggling between Turkey and Armenia that had historic differences. Thus, it can be said that Turkey considers the Caucasus as a territory for influence, but among the countries separated from the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan is closer to Turkey in terms of language, culture, and ethnicity. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Turkey was a follower for Azerbaijani and in 1992, after the occupation of part of the Republic of Azerbaijan by Armenia, it declared its readiness to attack Armenia that confronted the reaction of the United States and Russia, but in practice, it closed its borders to Armenia. These issues led to establishing a close relationship between two countries from the very beginning; at the same time, the Republic of Azerbaijan that wanted to increase ties with Western governments became closer to Turkey (Karamzadi and Khansarifard, 2016: 181-180).

The diplomatic deadlock in the settlement process of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis is a serious challenge to Eurasia's security. Both the countries of the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia emphasize their maximum demands for settling the crisis and consider it as a zero-sum game. Baku emphasizes the principle of the full territorial integrity of the states, while Yerevan refers to the right to determine the fate of nations. Thomas De Valle, a thinker at the Southern Caucasus Institute in the United States, writes about the existing diplomatic deadlock and the possibility of starting a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh:

If the Armenian leader declares his governorship over Karabakh and states that Azerbaijani lands around Karabakh occupied by Armenia forces between 1993 and 1994 cannot be returned; in this case, they will not leave anything to negotiate with Baku and the two sides will back to the course of the war (De Waal, 2018).

Along with the failure of mediation efforts, the growing arming of the parties involved and repeated violations of the ceasefire have increased the risk of war operation between the two countries. The ceasefire established in May 1994 has not been respected in practice and therefore the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict cannot be called "silent conflict. The conflicts that occurred in 2014 were, in fact, the end to the relative stability of the Karabakh region which has been dominant over the past two decades and since 1994. In recent years, the number of violations of the ceasefire in call lines has increased. In the meantime, the four-day war of April 2016, estimated at more than 300 deaths, showed the peak of the fragility of peace in the region (Council on Foreign Relation, 2018). Since the four-day war of April, the possibility of starting a full-fledged war in the

region has increased. The frequent violations of the ceasefire on the call lines and even on the international borders between the two countries of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia and the resulted civilian and military casualties occur in a situation where the disputed area is free of peacekeepers.

Another issue is that the fragile cease-fire dominated in the region owes to the balance of power that is in decline. The parties involved in the conflict have for many years been strengthening military capabilities and purchasing different and advanced combat equipment, such as ballistic missiles. The macro-oil revenues and the strengthening of the military and economic power of the Republic of Azerbaijan have contributed to the imbalance of power in favor of this country. According to the International Peace Research Institute of Stockholm, the Republic of Azerbaijan has imported the weapons equipment more twentyfold than Armenia between 2012 and 2016 (SIPRI, 2017).

The interests of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis are of international interest. That is, at least the peripheral countries of the Caucasus are included in these interests. In another aspect of the economic debate, especially in the context of energy security, Turkey is seeking to influence. Two major oil and gas pipelines have been performed with the support and involvement of Turkish interests. Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (which is the first line of oil and the second gas line). Therefore, Turkey has a multifaceted policy in the South Caucasus region concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and its perspective goes beyond what we consider to be one of its approaches. It has even a half-look at the future of relations with Armenia. Today, Turkey's exports to Armenia is done from the borders of Georgia. But if Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is achieved, surely, a good market will be achieved for Turkey. Even Turkey considers the opening borders between Armenia as the border problem between Armenia and Azerbaijan. So, these approaches are governed in Turkey's relations and the Turkish perspective to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis (Dehghani, 2016).

Thus, it can be said after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey has mentioned the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as one of its primary and basic conditions for improving diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan. Accordingly, settling the political differences and strengthening the bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia, regardless of the issue of Karabakh, has hurt the close cooperation and alliance formed between Baku and Ankara. For this reason, Ankara wants to move the Karabakh archery train in a way that does not affect the economic interests of the country and its political relations with the countries involved in the conflict such as in Russia, and, secondly, in the face of improving relations with Armenia and does not affect on friendly relations with Azerbaijan (Rashidoglu, 2016).

As it was mentioned, Turkey has made many changes in its domestic and foreign policy with the advent of the Justice and Development Party. Previously, Western-oriented and one-dimensional politics had shone on its diplomacy system and defined its interests concerning the West and its

membership in the European Union. But with the coming of the new government, its foreign policy became a realistic and multidimensional foreign policy that could turn Turkey from a relatively weak country in international relations to a regional power. Today, we see the expansion of its influence and interests in various areas of the world.

### **3-3-2. the Turning Point of Turkey's Foreign Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis**

While Turkish and Armenian relations have never been good, the opportunity for rapprochement following Armenia's independence from the USSR was negated as Turkey-backed Azerbaijan in the outbreak of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Hill and others, 2015). Although Turkey recognized Armenia as an independent state in 1991, it closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in support of Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh war (Altstadt and Menon, 2016). Between 2008 and 2009, Turkey made attempts to normalize relations with Armenia, but the initiative collapsed as a consequence of strong pressure from Azerbaijan, who succeeded to make progress in normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations contingent upon its settlement proposals for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Larrabee and Nader, 2013). In the immediate future, the normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara does not seem possible. Armenians have increased mistrust for Turkey, while domestic support for rapprochement has declined.

Although Turkish-Armenian relations are not improving, it is highly unlikely that Turkish troops will cross the border and attack Armenia. First, Armenia is a signatory to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), with Russia as its security guarantor. Second, the United States and other NATO members are certainly uninterested in being drawn into a petty regional conflict, resulting in a fight with Russia. Third, Armenia is no longer a high priority of Turkish foreign policy concerns. With the Syria conflict on Turkey's borders, internal unrest and divisions amongst the population, concerns with Greek relations over the Mediterranean islands and Cyprus, as well as its souring relations with the United States, Turkey is not immediately concerned with rapprochement or attacking Armenia.

In 2010, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a Strategic Partnership agreement, further impeding the opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. This military partnership with Azerbaijan has been enhanced in recent years by increasing the frequency and capacity of joint-military exercises in both mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan exclave (Shiriyev and others, 2016). While Azerbaijan sees the strategic partnership as a counterbalance to the Russian-Armenian military partnership Turkey views it as a guarantee for the flow of energy resources from the Caspian Sea basin.

As observed in history, the geographic position of Turkey was one of the most important geostrategic locations in the world, and it still is. Today, Turkey uses its geostrategic position to deliver energy from the Middle East and the Caucasus to Europe. As Turkey is not as rich as its neighbors in energy, it has positioned itself as the main facilitator in the transit of oil and natural gas, with

the Baku Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline for oil and the TANAP for natural gas being of key importance (Branch, 2018).

### **3-3-2-1. Turkey's Interests**

Turkey's goals in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are twofold: on the one hand, with its support of Azerbaijan, it wants to form a counterweight to the supporters of Armenia. From its perspective, these are the three leaders of the Minsk Group – the USA, France and Russia. On the other hand, Turkey wants to consolidate its status as a regional power by participating in the negotiation process. Nagorno-Karabakh is now also on the way to becoming an internationalized conflict zone where several regional and global rivalries are being fought. However, it is primarily a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is about the contested status of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is also about the seven territories occupied by Armenia, whose area is more than twice as large as Nagorno-Karabakh itself. There have been UN Security Council resolutions on this since the 1990s. The EU should not allow itself to be influenced by the tense relations with Turkey in its possible involvement in the settlement of the conflict, but should orient itself solely to the requirements of international law (Isachenko, 2020).

### **3-3-2-2. Turkey Relations with Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan was at the top of the list of nations with whom every expert on the Caucasus predicted Turkey would make the most progress in its post-Cold War relations. The expectation proved correct, and Turkish-Azeri relations started with a leap forward based on cultural, linguistic, and historic linkages as well as shared economic, political, and strategic interests. In time, Turkey has become the only country that consistently supported Azerbaijan in its struggle over Karabakh, risking its relations with Armenia and Russia along the way.

Although the harmonious relationship between the two countries established during the reign of President Elchibey was somewhat cooled down with Aliyev's rise to power in Azerbaijan, the cooperation continued and even expanded into various other domains. Apart from strategic cooperation against Russian attempts to re-establish its hegemony over the Caucasus, the two countries have been cooperating on Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) project, the possibility of transferring Azeri natural gas to Turkey, various cultural programs, and thriving trade, as well as on the establishing and training of the national army of Azerbaijan (Aydin, 2000).

The issues of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are considered as one of the main areas of Turkish political and security interests. Turkey's major concern in this regard is the growing influence of Russia in the South Caucasus and the confrontation with it. As the Nagorno-Karabakh War has damaged Turkey's vital interests aimed at maintaining stability in Azerbaijan and developing relations with Armenia. Turkey's support for the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has deepened the disagreements and hostilities between Armenia and Turkey. (Markarov and others, 2016: 111-113)."

Accordingly, the most important elements in Turkey's policies regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Support the positions of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- 2) Involvement in the role of Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran in solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- 3) An attempt to prevent further destruction of relations with Armenia (Bayat, 2015: 345-344).

Basically, Turkey's approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is a long-term issue. Turkey wants to expand its security in the South Caucasus against Iran and Russia. This goal strengthens Azerbaijan as a close ally. Turkey also views the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis in the context of a Turkish issue. On the other hand, Turkey seems to want to improve its relations with the United States and use NATO support in any possible crisis against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In addition, Turkey does not want to play any role in the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, unless it leads to the implementation of resolutions binding on Armenia (recognizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and implementing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan). Therefore, Turkey does not consider the activities of the Minsk Group and the Council of Europe to be very useful. In another dimension, Turkey tries to portray the issue of Azerbaijan in Turkey as a national and cross-party issue in Turkey, as well as the issue of Northern Cyprus. That means, as much as Nagorno-Karabakh is a problem of the Republic of Azerbaijan, it is also a problem of Turkey. In this regard, the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a necessary condition for the normalization of Turkey's relations with Armenia.

Also while Armenia believes that Nagorno Karabakh has nothing to do with the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Ankara wants to put pressure on the Armenian by using international community to end its continued occupation of part of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Therefore, by criticizing the international mediation, Turkey seems to consider the Minsk process meaningless and inefficient. From this point of view, European institutions should also resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis within the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. In this context, Turkey condemns the holding of elections in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Baku has the right to self-defense and occupies the Nagorno-Karabakh in accordance with the UN charter (Ramezani Bonesh, 2020).

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

Generally, the discussions show that geographic factors have an undeniable role concerning the security issues of Karabakh. It is worth mentioning that among twelve tense factors of Haggett, six factors are seen in the Karabakh area. Besides, some tense geographic factors, such as the existence of the outland area are seen in the Karabakh area and are not foreseen in the Haggett model. Therefore, many insecurities of South Caucasus and Karabakh are rooted in

geographic factors. In other words, some geographic factors in the Caucasus are the tense sources potentially that can be problematic in the future. However, it should be noted that geographic factors are not entirely responsible for creating many insecurities in Karabakh, but they can be tense when they accompany the other factors. Therefore, the approach and practice of Turkey's foreign policy after coming to the power of the justice and development party as an external factor can affect the settlement or continuation and tension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Turkey's foreign policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis after coming to power of the justice and development party in 2003 and influenced by détente policy with neighbors and new Ottomanism, it has enjoyed more dynamism in comparison to the period before, the unilateralism period towards the West. Turkey, from the first period of coming to power of the justice and development party, moved away from the West and moved toward East. The peak of this move was from 2005 to 2009, namely when Turkey played an influential role in the region by resorting to soft power. In this regard, Turkey highlighted the slogan "minimizing tension with neighbors" as one of the foundations of its foreign policy. Therefore, since 2003, Turkey has tried to prevent further destruction of relations with Armenia, because Turkey is one of the most important and influential countries of the South Caucasus and Karabakh region and there is no surprise that this country tries to maintain its interests and strengthen its position.

The Republic of Azerbaijan, as the most important factor in the geopolitical region of the South Caucasus, after the independence, confronted the geopolitical crisis of occupation of the land due to the territorial expansion of Armenia, a crisis that later became international through the intervention of some powers. Turkey, as an ally of the Republic of Azerbaijan, has always tried to maintain its position among regional and trans-regional actors through the intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis.

So the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkish's partiality from the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is the major obstacle to the normalization of relations of Turkey with Armenia is explainable within the framework of geopolitical theories. In the meantime, since coming to power the justice and development party with a cultural and economic approach, Turkey is trying to end the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis in favor of the Republic of Azerbaijan through first, the ethnic and linguistic integration and Pan-Turkism efforts;

Second, prevention from the growing development of Russia's and Iran's influence in the region; and third, the participation in the oil production of Azerbaijan and its transfer through the Turkish soil.

Therefore, in explaining the reasons for the long-standing crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh, the key issue is that, in addition to the specific and subjective Armenian perceptions or the territorial claims of the parties, other factors, including the interference of other countries are also involved and controlling the conflict by two involved countries become impossible. Because, sometimes one of the interested governments with different and sometimes conflicting



interests makes difficult to reach the process of understanding and agreement. So, as much as the number of actors in the crisis increase, the possibility of reaching an understanding becomes more difficult and the possibility of its continuation increases.

It should be noted that geographic factors are not entirely responsible for creating many insecurities in Karabakh, but they can be tense when they accompany the other factors. On the other hand, since coming to power of justice and development party, Turkey, using a coherent and specific foreign policy and governing a pragmatic view on the foreign policy, has been able to increase its interactions with the countries of the South Caucasus area and also its presence and influence in the Karabakh region. Also, the mentioned policy has been able to improve Turkey's position in the South Caucasus area and to provide more and more benefits for this country in the Karabakh.

By siding with Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey is primarily pursuing the goal of undermining the current status quo of the region. Ankara aims above all to secure a place at the table where a solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be negotiated in the future. Turkey thus wants to negotiate with Russia in the South Caucasus, preferably without Western actors. However, because of the complexity of Turkish-Armenian relations, there is a risk that Armenia and Turkey might become the eventual opponents in this conflict, rather than Armenia and Azerbaijan. The EU's engagement should not be determined by its tense relationship with Turkey, but rather by the UN Security Council resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh.

With these words, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan backed Azerbaijan's demand to Armenia to vacate the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenian troops as well as Nagorno-Karabakh, immediately after the start of the military escalation on September 27, 2020. Later, Erdoğan vehemently criticized the USA, France and Russia who as co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group mediate in the conflict. From the perspective of Azerbaijan and Turkey, this format is neither neutral nor efficient, as no solution has been found for nearly thirty years. Turkey is explicitly on Azerbaijan's side and is prepared to give Baku full support 'both on the field and at the negotiating table'. At the same time, it has repeatedly stressed its interest in resolving this conflict together with Russia.

In the other words, as an emerging middle power, Turkey's foreign policy released it from unilateralism and one-way commitment and will run the fluidity as the strong factor in its foreign policy structure to supply its profits in Nagorno-Karabakh and as the geographic and geopolitical factors are gradually formed over a long period, leave a long-lasting effect (either positive or negative). This suggests that to resolve the insecurities in the Nagorno-Karabakh, it should try to minimize the effect of negative geographical factors by removing the other causes of insecurity. However, generality, these factors indicates that it is very important to consider the tense geographic resources to

resolve the security problems of Nagorno-Karabakh, which could be a solution to many of the security problems in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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