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BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. The military confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia

On In October, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan continued its counteroffensive operations along the entire front line, inflicting devastating blows on the Armenian Armed Forces. While Armenian Prime Minister vowed to 'fight for every millimeter' of occupied territories of Azerbaijan, from the start of the military counter-offensive and amid international calls on all sides for de-escalation and ceasefire, President Ilham Aliyev has said that Armenian troops' withdrawal from Azerbaijani lands is the only way to end the military operations. At a meeting with a group of wounded soldiers under medical treatment at the Central Military Clinical Hospital of the Defence Ministry in Baku in early October, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "for 30 years, we have been patiently waiting for a peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict. We were told to be patient. However, Armenia's new prime minister put forward seven conditions to us, which we rejected as unacceptable. I have one demand - unconditional and complete liberation of the occupied territories. If it is fulfilled, the hostilities will be suspended, peace will be restored, and bloodshed will stop." In early October, the Azerbaijani Army liberated the strategic town of Jabrayil on the border with Iran, 16 villages of Jabrayil District, and several villages of adjacent Fuzuli District. The village of Madagiz in the north of Karabakh was also liberated.

In early October Azerbaijan regained control over its Fuzuli and Jabrayil districts adjacent to Iran. This part of the country's border with Iran had not been under Azerbaijan's control since 1993. President Ilham Aliyev told Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani in a phone conversation on 6 October that Azerbaijan had "regained control over a part of the occupied

Iranian-Azerbaijani border" and would soon place its border troops on its border with Iran in the territories retaken from Armenian forces. On October 7, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan reported that Armenia targeted Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

Addressing the nation live on TV on 9 October, President Ilham Aliyev announced the liberation of a number of occupied Azerbaijani settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh. "The Azerbaijani Army liberated Hadrut, as well as the villages of Cayli, Yuxari Guzlak, Gorazilli, Qislaq, Qaracali, Afandilar, Suleymanli and Sur," President Ilham Aliyev said, defining the ongoing developments in the Karabakh front as a historic victory. "The liberation of these villages and the Hadrut settlement is our historic victory. Azerbaijan is liberating occupied territories," President Ilham Aliyev noted. President Ilham Aliyev underlined that the military operations were proceeding according to the plan based on modern military principles. Today, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan have full advantage on the battlefield - both in terms of logistical support and in terms of combat readiness.

Detailing the course of the military operations, President Ilham Aliyev said that "in some cases, it took us several days to overcome some of the engineering fortifications. At the same time, we do everything in such a way as to minimize losses. Therefore, in some cases, we strengthened our positions in different directions, and then we prepared for a new operation to have the maximum result with minimum losses".

President Ilham Aliyev repeatedly stressed that the responsibility for the breakdown of the negotiations, as well as for the emergence of an armed confrontation, rested entirely with the leadership of Armenia, pointed out that Armenia, by taking steps aimed at disrupting the negotiating process, delivered a

serious blow to this process. The provocative statements and other measures by Armenia seriously disrupted the negotiating process and drove it into a dead end. Over the past two years, the current military and political leadership of Armenia purposefully aggravated the situation around the conflict, including numerous practical steps enhancing the illegal consequences of the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan and the ongoing military occupation of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. The most striking examples of this have been the phrase "Karabakh is Armenia", the military concept called "a new war for new territories", the military provocation in the direction of Tovuz on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border in July 2020, and the measures aimed at populating the occupied territories with Lebanese and other ethnically Armenians from the Middle East.

As Dr Gulshan Pashayeva, a board member at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, pointed out "it is a well-known fact that illegal resettlement is a gross violation of the norms and principles of international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crime. Both Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 82 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court deal with this specific issue. Thus, one would expect that the international system would be taking practical steps to hold accountable the states that are carrying out policies of illegal resettlement. Unfortunately, this is not always the case".

Dr Gulshan Pashayeva also noted that "after the ceasefire, reached in 1994, illegal resettlement became one of the most important subjects for Armenia, for the separatist regime that Armenia created in Nagorno-Karabakh, and for the Armenian diaspora. Sources, including Armenian ones,

report that tens of thousands of settlers have moved into the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including the districts of Lachin, Kalbajar, Zangilan and Jabrail adjacent to the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in an organized manner with the purpose of annexing these territories. In fact, two missions to the occupied Azerbaijani territories conducted by the OSCE in 2005 and 2010 found evidence of the presence of Armenian settlers in the occupied territories. The devastating war in Syria has also significantly contributed to this process. Many of the more than 15,000 Syrian Armenians who could not find a home in the largest Armenian cities have settled in neighbouring Nagorno-Karabakh. The latest wave of the policy of illegal resettlement is directly linked to a shocking explosion occurred in Beirut on August 4, 2020, after which the separatist authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh announced that they were ready to receive about 100 to 150 families of Armenian origin from Lebanon and envisaged providing 25 million drams (about \$51,000) to the Armenian community of Lebanon from their reserve funds. On September 10, videos have been distributed on social media demonstrating the resettlement of the first Armenian family from Lebanon to Shusha, an Azerbaijani town with significant cultural and emotional meaning for Azerbaijanis".

In a televised address to the nation on 4 October, President Ilham Aliyev said that "he [Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan] sets seven conditions for us. Who are you to put forward conditions?! Now I will see what conditions you will set, begging on your knees for the ceasefire to be restored. The ceasefire, at the request of the Armenian prime minister, was kept restored for two years". Recalling that the Armenian prime minister asked him for a pause, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "he asked me, saying that the domestic

situation was difficult, as they pressured him from all sides. 'Give me some time, I will resolve this issue, I came up with new ideas, I crossed out everything that was in the past. Give me the opportunity, give me some time,' [he asked]. I said OK. And what happened?" President added: "A year later, he makes a speech and says 'Karabakh is Armenia'. Let him say 'Karabakh is Armenia' now," adding that "phone calls I receive and the conversations during them are of course confidential. And now, in some cases, they ask me: What are your conditions? I have one condition: Let them leave our lands, let them leave, and the confrontation will stop. However, not in words, but in deeds. Let him say: I recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, as it is enshrined in the basic principles". President Ilham Aliyev went further, adding: "Let him say: I will withdraw the troops from the occupied territories, as enshrined in the basic principles. Let him ask for forgiveness from the Azerbaijani people and say that Karabakh is not Armenia. The last condition: Let them give a timetable, let them give us a schedule for the withdrawal of the Armenian Armed Forces from the occupied territories".

As Vasif Huseynov, a senior advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, pointed out "the growingly populist and nationalistic policies of the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who came to power following the Velvet Revolution of Armenia in mid-2018 dramatically radicalized his society and militarized its agenda. Despite the fact that Pashinyan promised to solve the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict soon after he took the premiership and initiated secret meetings with the Azerbaijani government towards this goal, he has abandoned these initiatives immediately after having consolidated his grip of power in the country". As it was pointed out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan,

"the attack by the Armenian Armed Forces on Azerbaijan on 27 September is another step in the destructive policy pursued with the aim of escalating tensions. As a sovereign state, Azerbaijan has taken appropriate steps within the frameworks of the right to self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. As a result, part of Azerbaijani territories was liberated from the Armenian occupation."

"The reluctance of the Armenian leadership to comply with the norms and principles of international law do not contribute to the normalization of relations between the two countries. It is impossible to talk about the establishment of normal relations between two states, if one of them puts forward territorial claims to the other, invades its territory and occupies its lands," Bayramov added.

In an interview with the Russian RBC TV on 11 October, President Ilham Aliyev said that Russia had "a whole lot of instruments" to influence Armenia. "I am convinced that in case Russia insists, taking account of the fact that we have changed the status quo and have broken the line of contact, and I believe that Yerevan has sobered up, undoubtedly, Russia has a whole lot of instruments to convince Armenia within a short period of time that the only way of this situation... is to reach a solution with Azerbaijan," President Ilham Aliyev said.

In an interview with Turkish Haber Global TV channel on 12 October, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated once again that Azerbaijan has changed the status quo. "The status quo is gone. The settlements in Agdara, Fuzuli, Cabrayil, and Hadrut districts have already been liberated. What kind of status quo can we talk about? There can be no question. Contact line? There is no contact line! ... We broke through it in several places - from the north, from the south, and then from the east. What

line of contact can we talk about? It is not there," President Ilham Aliyev concluded and pointed out that the new realities emerged after 27 September and Armenia should accept it.

On October 15, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the Erick Erickson Show on WSB Atlanta that "we're hopeful that the Armenians will be able to defend against what the Azerbaijanis are doing, and that they will all, before that takes place, get the ceasefire right, and then sit down at the table and try and sort through this - that is - what is a truly historic and complicated problem set". Azerbaijan criticized US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "The Azerbaijani side thinks that the opinion voiced by the US Secretary of State is not in line with numerous official statements the US government made earlier about this conflict. This opinion also does not benefit the US status as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's press service said on 16 October.

In his interview to Turkey's NTV news channel on 15 October, President Ilham Aliyev noted that both military and peaceful ways were the major keys to ensure the country's territorial integrity and bring about a lasting solution to the conflict. "No result has been achieved over these 30 years. For 30 years, using this ceasefire regime, Armenia has built powerful engineering and fortification structures on the occupied lands. Today, thanks to the professionalism and courage of the Azerbaijani Army, we are breaking through these fortifications. For 30 years, Armenia has strived not for peace, but for the permanent preservation of these lands under occupation. If you strive for peace, why are you building these fortifications in Fuzuli, in Cabrayil or in Agdam directions?" President Ilham Aliyev said. "The leadership of Armenia has become

completely insolent. See what Pashinyan and his defence minister said. The defence minister said that we would wage a new war against Azerbaijan, a new war for new lands. This was an open threat to us. Pashinyan said 'Karabakh is Armenia. Period!' That is, not an inch of land will be returned to us. How can this conflict be resolved peacefully in this case? I said that we are now in the process of resolving this issue militarily," President Ilham Aliyev added. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that the military advance would go ahead, until the opposite side sits down at the negotiating table. Commenting on Turkey-Azerbaijan relationship, President Ilham Aliyev stated that "Azerbaijan and Turkey cooperate actively and fruitfully in the military sphere. In addition, there is a mutual assistance agreement. This is our right and if necessary, if there is a big threat to Azerbaijan, we will use this opportunity, because Turkey is our ally".

On October 17, the third major strike carried out against Ganja since September 27. The attack left 14 civilians killed and around 50 wounded. In his address to the nation on October 17, President Ilham Aliyev announced that the Azerbaijani Army retook seven villages of Fuzuli District and the town of Fuzuli. The president further added that the battle for the city was difficult. "The battle for Fuzuli was hard. Time will pass and this battle will be described in books and manuals. These were real battles that required a lot of professionalism, skills, courage, and dedication. During these 30 years, the enemy built such strong fortifications on the line of contact that some believed that it was impossible to liberate the city of Fuzuli from occupation and even the most famous military experts were of the opinion that the capture of Fuzuli and its liberation from occupation might take months, and it was a big question whether this operation would be successful or

not. However, the Azerbaijani Army coped with this honorable mission, and in a short time, most of the villages and the city of Fuzuli in Fuzuli District were liberated from the enemy," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Commenting on the third shelling of Ganja, which left 14 civilians, including kids and elderly people, killed, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "this is a crime against humanity. If the international community does not want to bring Armenia to justice for the crimes committed, just as no one has brought them to justice for the Khojaly genocide, we will bring them to justice ourselves. We will punish them ourselves, and our punishment will be just. They deserve the heaviest punishment. The military-political leadership of Armenia are criminals, and we will punish these criminals".

Commenting on the shelling of Ganja and international indifference, Hikmat Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Foreign Policy Issues and Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration, said that "the absence of political and diplomatic pressure on Armenia and the fact that its actions are not condemned encourages Armenia to commit new crimes".

In October, Armenia also started illegally importing weapons from all over the world under the guise of humanitarian aid. Azerbaijan appealed to the International Civil Aviation Organisation to investigate reported cases of arms deliveries to Armenia on civilian aircraft. Hikmat Hajiyev tweeted on 10 October that Atlantis Armenian Airlines transported missiles and rocket systems to Armenia onboard civilian aircraft, noting that it was "a blatant violation" of the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation and of International Civil Aviation Organisation regulations. On 11 October, Hajiyev also noted that Armenia had received new Smerch

missiles delivered via civilian airlines under the guise of humanitarian aid.

At the same time, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan continued their advance along the Iranian border in the Armenian-occupied territories south of Nagorno-Karabakh. They erected the flag of Azerbaijan at the Khodaafarin bridge on the Araxes River, a site occupied by Armenian forces since the early 1990s.

On October 18, Armenian armed forces targeted crude oil and condensate export pipelines in Azerbaijan's Xizi District. The air-defence system intercepted the missile and part of the explosive elements of the missile were scattered in an area which is 250 meters away from a section of the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline, which is of strategic importance for Azerbaijani-Russian economic cooperation.

Baku also asked Moscow to look into the issue of arms smuggling from Russia to Armenia during the ongoing war. In an interview with Russian state-owned TASS news agency on 19 October, President Ilham Aliyev noted that "we have informed the Russian side of our assumptions that these are being smuggled. Because it is difficult for us to believe that Russia, which is a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and a country that ought to remain neutral, just like France and the USA, could be arming the Armenian side during the active phase of the conflict. According to information available to us, major Russian businessmen of Armenian origin, as well as well-known arms traders who are under international sanctions, are involved in this scheme. And the goal of our appeal to the Russian side was, among others, for it to deal with this issue". During the interview, President Ilham Aliyev also gave details of basic settlement principles. Among the basic settlement principles developed by the OSCE Minsk Group, President Ilham Aliyev listed the opening of communication lines

between Azerbaijan and its exclave Nakhchivan, as well as between Armenia and Russia through Azerbaijan."At the same time, the basic principles state that all communication lines are to be opened, not only the Lacin corridor [linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh]. Communications are to be opened between Azerbaijan proper and Nakhchivan. The Armenian side was to provide guarantees of security for this corridor. Communications are to be opened on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia was supposed to have a free land route to the territory of the Russian Federation, which it still currently has [through Georgia], but it is much easier through Azerbaijan and it will not depend on weather conditions, snowfall in the mountains and so on," President Ilham Aliyev added.

In a televised address to the nation on October 20, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated his call on Armenia to withdraw its troops from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories and said Azerbaijan was not planning any military operation on Armenian territory. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that Azerbaijan was acting within international law, fighting exclusively within its own internationally recognized territory. "The UN Security Council resolutions did not work. We have made major efforts, the UN General Assembly, Non-Aligned Movement, Council of Europe, European Parliament, Islamic Cooperation Organisation and other organizations adopted resolutions. An agreement signed between the European Union and us also supports the inviolability of our borders, our sovereignty and our country's territorial integrity. That is this is the basis for the settlement of this conflict," the president said. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that "Azerbaijan is carrying out the combat operation on its own territory, as recognized by the international

community. We are not conducting any operation on the Armenian territory, we have no such plans despite the fact that they bombed Ganja from Armenian territory twice. We did not respond in kind. We reciprocated on the battlefield".

President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted the fact that no country would ever recognize the occupational regime as an independent state. "No-one has recognized the self-styled Nagorno-Karabakh republic. They are now trying hard, bending over backwards to have world countries recognize the self-declared criminal entity. They have lost their minds, they do not understand that no-one will do that, they do not understand that any country which does so cannot be regarded as a friendly country by Azerbaijan. Not just a friendly country, we will cut off all ties with such a country," President Ilham Aliyev added.

A possible recognition of the independence of the occupational regime in Nagorno-Karabakh would be the final nail in the coffin of the current negotiating format for the settlement of the conflict through the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. As Bayramov put it, "Such a decision would become the pinnacle of the irresponsible and adventurous policy of the Armenian leadership. By doing this, Armenia will finally violate international law, rejecting the entire body of traditions and foundations of international relations... Such a decision by Armenia will inevitably lead to a new round of escalation of the conflict and the deterioration of the situation in the region."

During his address to the nation on October 20, President Aliyev announced the liberation of the town of Zangilan, on the southern stretch of the Azerbaijani-Armenian border, and 24 villages in Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Xocavand and Zangilan districts. President Ilham Aliyev also said Azerbaijan had so far destroyed 241 Armenian tanks and captured 39; destroyed 50

infantry fighting vehicles and captured 24; destroyed 17 self-propelled artillery guns and 198 cannon; destroyed 58 and captured 12 mortars; captured 25 grenade-launchers; and destroyed 53 anti-tank weapons, 70 Grad guns, two Uragan multiple rocket launcher systems, two volley-fire missile systems, one TOS gun, four S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, three TOR anti-aircraft systems, about 40 OSA anti-aircraft systems, five Kub and Kruq anti-aircraft missile systems, six UAVs, two Elbrus operational tactical missile systems, one ballistic missile, one Tochka-U missile, eight electronic countermeasures and 198 trucks. Fifteen of the trucks were full of munitions. The army also captured 102 trucks.

On October 25, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan liberated the town of Qubadli from Armenian occupation. In his address to the nation on October 26, President Ilham Aliyev said Baku is ready for a military-political solution to resolve the conflict. "The military-political solution must resolve the issue of restoring Azerbaijan's territorial integrity," President Ilham Aliyev said. President Ilham Aliyev also reiterated that Azerbaijanis must return to the lands of their ancestors and both Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples should then learn to live side by side in Karabakh. President Ilham Aliyev said that Armenian armed forces had violated the cease-fire minutes after it came into force at 08.00 local time on October 26, adding that "but still I have ordered the Azerbaijani Army to show restraint, not to yield to provocation". Furthermore, the president underlined once more that the conflict remaining in a frozen state cannot satisfy Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev also stressed that weapons were being delivered to Armenia on a mass scale at a time when the Azerbaijani Army had defeated thoroughly its armed forces in Karabakh. "Well, why someone, who is calling for a cease-fire, is

sending weapons to Armenia?" President Ilham Aliyev said, adding that "if you want it to stop, stop supplying arms".

President Ilham Aliyev also criticized the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries for their failure to put pressure on Armenia in order to resolve the conflict. The Minsk Group co-chairs shared responsibility for the failure of the peace talks held between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the past 30 years. "What was the Minsk Group's activity about - did it put pressure on the occupier? No. Did it want to put pressure? No," President Ilham Aliyev said. The Minsk Group co-chairs, and primarily Armenia, had been happy with the frozen state of the conflict and no country objected to Armenia's illegal settlement policy in the occupied area, which was a violation of international law. President Ilham Aliyev said that what we are doing now is "carrying out UN Security Council resolutions [adopted back in 1993 and calling for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories] on our own, whereas this must be the job of the UN Security Council itself". The president also pointed out that if the UN Security Council permanent members and the Minsk Group co-chairs have failed to enforce the law, let them stand aside, let them not get in the way, adding that all the mediators' activities currently aimed "to save Armenia, the aggressor, the occupier". "If you want to save Armenia, tell it to leave our lands, to go away immediately," the president noted. "If not, we will go to the end, we will go to the end and chase the enemy out, the way we are doing now". At the same time, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "a mediator must be neutral, if it is not, let them renounce their candidacy. If a mediator is not neutral, they cannot be a mediator".

As Dr. Esmira Jafarova, a board member at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, pointed out, “although the OSCE possesses the mechanisms to make a difference in the conflict resolution process, and its co-chairs have been engaged with mediation and facilitation work, the present format does not have the capacity and necessary tools to support attaining a final and lasting peaceful solution to the conflict. Despite all the work done so far, by extending the same treatment to both states – one being the victim of occupation, while the other is seeking to maintain its territorial acquisitions – the OSCE runs the risk of failing this task and consigning the entire South Caucasus region to many more years of instability. With matters remaining static in their present shape, the likelihood that the parties can achieve a negotiated conflict resolution based on the norms and principles of international law, as well as the relevant UNSC resolutions, seems, unfortunately, rather meagre. Peace and reconciliation are long overdue in a region torn by conflict and mistrust. Security and confidence-building are not delivered automatically to those states in the most affected parts of Europe upon their membership in the OSCE. It takes hard work, dedication and well thought-out strategies. The OSCE has a real chance to demonstrate that it can foster security and cooperation – the assets that its name stands for – in the South Caucasus region. It is long overdue”.

In an interview with Italian Rai-1 TV on 26 October, President Ilham Aliyev said he regretted that France and Russia, which are the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group that mediates a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, had levelled unsubstantiated accusations against Azerbaijan. “All these are an attempt to besmirch Azerbaijan. I regret that these kinds

of unsubstantiated accusations are made by the co-chair countries. They must be impartial,” the president said. “We do not talk every day about how much weapons Russia is supplying to Armenia. We are not saying that if not for external support, Armenia could not have stayed on occupied territories for a single day. There is both political, military and moral support, and it is the countries that must remain impartial that are rendering this support”.

As Dr Farid Shafiyev noted that “some news reports about the ongoing hostilities by outlets such as the BBC and Reuters contain unconfirmed sources about Syrian fighters in Azerbaijan. During the previous major outbreak of violence, in April 2016, Armenia made claims about ISIS recruits in Azerbaijan. Pashinyan himself voiced the information about Muslim radicals walking in the streets of Baku and demanding the closure of stores selling alcohol. The term “fake news” gets thrown about casually these days, but in this case, it is entirely appropriate. Despite being fully debunked, parts of the Western media, in my view, having predisposed Orientalist stereotypes against Azerbaijan, which eases the lobbying efforts of Armenian ultranationalists. In fact, Azerbaijan, even with its democracy deficit, is a country with strong secular traditions that has prosecuted Islamic radicals to the full extent of the law, imprisoned ISIS fighters, supported U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and assisted Western intelligence agencies in eradicating terrorism. Frankly, today’s Azerbaijan is a Muslim country as much as The Netherlands is a Christian one. The Armenian lobby groups in Washington, such as the Armenian National Committee of America and their recruits on the Capitol Hill, including several sitting Congressmen and Senators, do a big disservice to U.S. national interests by

advancing the narrow xenophobic and extremist agenda of one ethnic group”.

In his interview with Italian Rai-1 TV on 26 October, President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that there had been no proof of Turkish troops' involvement in the fighting. Turkish F-16 fighter jets had remained in Azerbaijan following joint military exercises held just before the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh started. But they are not involved in the combat. “But we are not asking how many Russian MiQ-29 or Su-30 fighter jets there are on Armenian territory. We are not saying that Russia has a 5,000-strong military base in Gyumri, Armenia, and according to information available to us, supplies are being delivered regularly to the Armenian armed forces from there, and in contrast to what is being said about us, these are facts. Therefore, I suggest that those who want to accuse us, before making hasty conclusions based on false information, should look at themselves first,” President Ilham Aliyev added. Speaking of Turkish F-16 fighter jets in Azerbaijan in a televised address to the nation on 26 October, President Aliyev reiterated once more that “our Turkish brothers have left them in order to render moral support to us,” adding that “if there is an external attack on us, they will see those F-16s”.

In an interview with the Russian Interfax news agency broadcast on October 28, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that after the Azerbaijani Army liberated four districts, principles related to the activities around five districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh, as stipulated under the Madrid agreement, were no longer relevant as the basic principles determined the sequence of returning territories - five districts at the first stage, and Kalbajar and Lacin districts at the second stage, and further, the return of Azerbaijanis to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and of all

refugees to their places of residence, where they lived before the conflict. “We have practically completed the first stage, and if now Armenia expresses its adherence to the basic principles, we will immediately talk about transferring Lacin and Kalbajar districts and part of Agdam District, which are under occupation, to Azerbaijani control. Thus, to a certain extent, we will facilitate the tasks of the mediators, because one of the important points will be considered as implemented and we will not have to wait for a certain second stage, as it should come immediately”. The president added that Armenian troops must be pulled out of Kalbajar, Lacin, and a part of Agdam District, if the parties agreed to a political settlement.

In a comment on Armenia's claims to hit Azerbaijan's major Sangachal oil terminal outside Baku, President Ilham Aliyev said that “if Armenia succeeds in realising what they promised, namely to bomb the Sangachal terminal, or our oil and gas pipelines, of course, this will be fraught with risks”. The Western world would condemn Armenia, because this oil and gas are needed mainly for European consumers. It is no secret that the gas pipeline from Azerbaijan contributes and will contribute to the energy security of European countries.

Shahmar Hajiyev, a leading advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, noted that “many Western companies have huge investments in the region. Armenia's military activities threaten their energy infrastructure, which are exporting Caspian oil and gas to the global energy markets. Ganja and Yevlakh are close to this strategic energy infrastructure, which connects Azerbaijan energy pipelines to Europe via Georgia and Turkey. Pipelines are difficult military objectives, however, because they are buried underground and Azerbaijan has advanced air

defence systems. However, if Armenia should manage to damage critical infrastructure, then it would not only interrupt the gas and oil supplies to Azerbaijan's energy partners, affecting their interests as well, but it would also create environmental problems," adding that "it is particularly concerning that these attacks occur just when the first gas from the Caspian Sea region will be supplied to European energy consumers via the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). Any reckless actions by the Armenian leadership will directly threaten EU energy security, likely creating even more problems for Armenia itself".

Speaking to Russian RIA news agency on 29 October, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov said that any negotiations on a cease-fire must be immediately followed by substantive negotiations on the basic settlement principles developed by the OSCE Minsk Group. "A cease-fire does not mean a settlement, and no verification mechanism can be a substitute for a durable solution to the conflict. In order to bring peace to the region, we have to get rid of the very fact of occupation. Armenian forces must withdraw from occupied Azerbaijani territories, as clearly stated in the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council adopted in 1993," Bayramov added. The deployment of any observer or peacekeeping forces on sovereign Azerbaijani territories must be agreed with Azerbaijan. Jeyhun Bayramov also added that any cease-fire monitoring mechanisms should be synchronized with the settlement process. "Otherwise, without Armenia's commitment to withdraw its forces from occupied Azerbaijani territories, the observers would simply serve the goal of securing the situation based on occupation," Bayramov noted.

Bayramov also pointed out that while Baku highly values Iran's efforts to help resolve the

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully, Iran was not a member of the OSCE Minsk Group and therefore, the sides to the conflict had to first approve Iran's role as a mediator. Bayramov said that for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to be resolved, countries should put forward a firm position and demand that Armenia implement the UN Security Council Resolutions and respect Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders. He said that Turkey was one of such countries. Among the reasons why Turkey should be involved in the conflict settlement, Bayramov cited the fact that Turkey is a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, it borders on all the three South Caucasus countries and is actively involved in the region, and that Turkey's position on Karabakh is based on the norms and principles of international law.

Azerbaijan also insisted on Turkey's involvement in the Karabakh peace settlement. President Ilham Aliyev said he would like to see Turkey in a Karabakh mediation group after the ongoing fighting in the conflict zone ends.

II. The failure of ceasefire agreements and Armenia's maximalist position

In his interview with Turkish TV channel TRT Haber on October 5, President Ilham Aliyev elaborated on Azerbaijan's conditions for ceasefire. "We must be given very serious guarantees. International mediators must endorse these guarantees. At the same time, we should be given a timetable for Armenia's withdrawal from the occupied territories, that is, on what day it will leave and from which district. Of course, then the war will end". Reiterating Azerbaijan's determination to put an end to the conflict, President Ilham Aliyev said: "We want this problem resolved peacefully and it must be resolved. The

mediators just want a truce there. The truce has been in force since 1994. But why has the problem not been resolved over these years?"

President asked, recalling a number of international documents, calling for an immediate solution to the conflict. Going back to the UN resolutions dating back to the early 1990s that called for the de-occupation of the Azerbaijani territories, President asked why the UN resolutions were not implemented: "Why were the UN Resolutions not implemented? Why were sanctions not applied to the aggressor state? All these questions are hanging in the air and there are no answers to these questions". President further added: "War has its own rules and laws. Every day has its own meaning. If we take a break, the enemy will gather additional forces. Their [Armenians'] speeches already indicate that they are getting Armenians living outside Armenia involved in this war. Thus, they want to move this war from the regional level and to turn it into a global war." Asked if clashes could open the way for a larger war and a larger regional crisis, President said "Armenia wants it anyway. Their dirty deeds are calculated for this. We believe that this should not be allowed. This is a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. We did not start this war. We are not guilty of it". President added that Azerbaijan was only protecting itself and wanted to get its own territories back. During the July 2020 clashes on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, the Azerbaijani troops did not cross to the land of Armenia, although we could have done so, President recalled, adding that "we delivered crushing blows to them and they retreated. There were no obstacles in front of us, no obstacles. We did not do this because, as I said, we have no military targets on the lands of the Republic of Armenia. However, Armenia is now attacking Azerbaijan from the territory of Armenia". Attacks on

civilian settlements and critical infrastructure of Azerbaijan also have a clear goal. "They are dragging us into this provocation so that we also attack Armenia and strike on it," President added. In an interview with Euronews TV on 7 October, President Ilham Aliyev reiterated Baku's condition for declaring truce and starting peace negotiations, that is Armenia should submit a timetable for the withdrawal of its armed forces from occupied territories. He also called on the Armenian government to abandon its maximalist position.

After more than 10 hours of negotiations, the humanitarian ceasefire agreement had been reached by Azerbaijan and Armenia at Russian-brokered talks in Moscow. "A ceasefire is declared from 12:00 a.m. on 10 October 2020 for humanitarian purposes, for an exchange of prisoners of war and others withheld, as well as an exchange of bodies with the mediation of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)," the statement said. However, the ceasefire agreement was quickly breached by Armenia. At the same time, Armenia immediately began to make statements that unilaterally and inaccurately interpret the statement of the Moscow meeting, as well as reflecting the slogans of self-determination and recognition of the illegal regime established by Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan condemned Armenia for violating the humanitarian ceasefire that entered into force in the Karabakh conflict zone on 10 October. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the Armenian army shelled Azerbaijan's Agdam and Tartar districts immediately after the ceasefire entered into force and that several hours later it attempted at attacking Hadrut and Cabrayil. On 11 October, the Defence Ministry of Azerbaijan said that Armenia had shelled the towns of Ganja and Mingecevir and

villages in Goranboy, Tartar, Agdam, Agcabadi, Fuzuli, and Cabrayil districts, killing civilians.

On the morning of 11 October, Hikmat Hajiyev travelled to Ganja outside the conflict zone following a missile attack on it at night. Hikmat Hajiyev described the attack as "a terrorist act and an act of genocide". He had also tweeted that Armenia had obtained Smerch missiles under the guise of humanitarian aid and immediately launched attacks on civilians and electricity infrastructure in the town of Mingecevir. The missile attack on Ganja killed nine and wounded 34 civilians. President Ilham Aliyev noted in a tweet the shelling of a civilian quarter in the city - some 100 km off Nagorno-Karabakh - was a war crime and added that the missile attack came from Armenia's Vardenis region. "Armenia has grossly violated the ceasefire by firing rockets at civilians in Ganja. This is a war crime and a gross violation of the Geneva Conventions," a tweet by President Ilham Aliyev said. Visiting the scene of shelling in Ganja, Hikmat Hajiyev noted that the countries selling weapons to Armenia should know that "it uses those weapons against civilians, against children". The presidential aide also said that the missile strikes on Ganja are a military and political provocation of the Armenian leadership. "We classify Armenia's missile strike on Ganja as a terrorist attack, a war crime, genocide against the Azerbaijani people. This is a military-political provocation of the Armenian leadership," Hikmat Hajiyev said. The military purpose of this provocation is to intimidate the population of Azerbaijan and wreak havoc in society. According to Hikmat Hajiyev, the political objective is "the expectation that Azerbaijan will strike back at facilities in Armenia, and thus Armenia will have a reason to get third countries involved in the conflict".

As Dr. Esmira Jafarova pointed out, "right after the humanitarian ceasefire took effect,

Armenia's subsequent actions and statements caused utter confusion and disappointment. Armenia violated the humanitarian truce that it had asked for within minutes of it being signed. The second largest Azerbaijani city, Ganja, was attacked using Tochka-U and, later, SCUD ballistic missiles on the very night that the ceasefire took effect. Azerbaijan also reported the shelling of cities such as Tartar, Barda, Mingachevir, Aghjabedi, and Beylaghan. However, Ganja became a textbook example of war crimes against peaceful civilians. The missiles used against Ganja are proven to have large destructive capacity and their use against civilians is prohibited under international humanitarian law. The attacks were also confirmed as having been launched directly from Armenian territory".

On October 17, a new temporary humanitarian ceasefire was agreed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, on October 18, after the ceasefire took effect, the Armenian army grossly violated the new ceasefire and started shelling areas around the town of Cabrayil and villages of Cabrayil District along the River Araz from mortars and artillery guns. Hikmat Hajiyev said that despite the cease-fire 229 projectiles were fired at Tartar, Goranboy and Agdam districts, and three missiles were fired at Xizi, which is close to the capital Baku, and Agcabadi District.

On October 21, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said there was "no diplomatic solution" in sight for the conflict, adding that Armenians must "fight to the end". He called on local officials, political parties and civil society to form volunteer brigades to aid the war effort. Commenting on Pashinyan's remarks, Hikmat Hajiyev stressed Armenia's reluctance to negotiate a peaceful solution to the ongoing war in Karabakh. "A statement by the Armenian prime minister that the

Karabakh conflict does not have a diplomatic solution indicates once again that Armenia is absolutely not interested in resolving the conflict peacefully. With this statement, the Armenian leadership admits that their goal is to keep the Azerbaijani territories under occupation. This confirms once again that the statements by officials in Yerevan on the settlement of the conflict through negotiations are nothing but hypocrisy,” Hikmat Hajiyev said.

The Armenian prime minister, irresponsibly and for the sake of his political ambitions, calls on all civilian authorities and civilians to take up arms and take part in hostilities. This official position of Armenia proves who violates the humanitarian ceasefire and is acting to aggravate the situation in the region. The statement by the Armenian prime minister was made immediately after the working visits of the foreign ministers of both countries to Moscow at the initiative of Russia and ahead of the meeting at the level of foreign ministers in Washington at the US initiative. President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly stated Azerbaijan's readiness for negotiations and a diplomatic settlement of the conflict. Azerbaijan supports the settlement of the conflict through negotiations in accordance with the existing roadmap and the UN Security Council resolutions.

On October 25, Armenian and Azerbaijan announced a new ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States. According to a joint statement from the United States, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the humanitarian ceasefire should have taken effect at 8:00 a.m. local time on October 26. However, within minutes the ceasefire entered into force, Armenia again grossly violated the ceasefire. Two previous humanitarian ceasefire agreements brokered by Russia since a war

started on September 27 did not hold up in a similar manner.

On October 30, the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers met the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmen in Geneva to discuss a peace settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Calls for a cease-fire will be meaningless unless a permanent solution has been found to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the occupation has ended. Throughout October, the essence of the negotiation mission remained the same – an end should be put to Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan made it clear that Yerevan should pull its troops out of the occupied territories. Azerbaijan also urged the international community to put greater diplomatic pressure on Armenia to make it withdraw its troops from the occupied lands. As Dr. Esmira Jafarova pointed out, “when agreeing to the humanitarian truce, Azerbaijan made its objective very clear – its determination to liberate its occupied territories is inexorable. Having embraced a position of strategic patience for almost three decades and remained a committed party in the peace negotiations, Azerbaijan had hoped for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, with negotiations lasting for almost three decades without delivering a tangible solution to the conflict, Azerbaijan’s strategic patience started to wear thin”.

III. Armenia continues to commit war crimes by targeting civilians

Since the war started, Armenia resorted to the traditional tactic of terror and intensive shelling of the civilian population and infrastructure of Azerbaijan, including settlements and people far from the conflict zone. Armenia continued using heavy artillery

to shell Azerbaijani settlements. A total of 21 civilians died and 70 others were injured in Armenian missile attack on the town of Barda on October 28, using banned cluster bombs. The use of banned cluster bombs by Armenia has also been verified by Amnesty International. Five civilians were killed and 12 wounded in a missile strike on Barda just a day earlier. These attacks have brought the number of Azerbaijani civilian casualties since the start of the fighting on 27 September to 91 killed and 400 wounded. This act of Armenia is a war crime, which grossly violates the provisions of international humanitarian law, including the 1949 Geneva Convention. From the outset of the military operations, President Ilham Aliyev instructed the military not to shoot on civilians and civilian targets. "Our targets are military installations, positions, equipment, and manpower. However, Armenia, loyal to its criminal actions, is shelling our settlements, where civilians are dying," President Ilham Aliyev said.

According to Vasif Huseynov, "the over-reliance of the Armenian political and military leadership on the defense system they had built along the line of contact between the occupied Azerbaijani territories and the rest of Azerbaijan, their underestimation of Azerbaijan's defensive capabilities, and, in particular, the conviction that Russia would militarily intervene in the war if Armenia needed, encouraged them to launch a new military operation to realize Tonoyan's expansionist doctrine".

The objective behind these attacks was made clear by Vagharshak Harutyunyan, the chief adviser to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who, in an interview with TV show "Vesti" aired on the Russian TV channel Russia-1 on 6

October stated that, "now we have developed a tactic of striking artillery. And in the future we will strike at peaceful settlements in order to cause panic". According to Vasif Huseynov, "firing SCUD-B and Tochka-U ballistic missiles and "SMERCH" heavy multiple rockets against civilian settlements, Armenia sought, among others, to cause a humanitarian tragedy in Azerbaijan, create public fear, and thus generate popular discontent with the government".

Moreover, Azerbaijan has urged civilians living in the occupied lands to keep away from military facilities. The Defence Ministry of Azerbaijan addressed Armenians living in the conflict zone to tell them that Azerbaijan was not targeting civilians or civilian facilities or infrastructure but military infrastructure. "For this reason, we are calling on the civilian population residing in these areas to keep away from the fighting areas," the statement published on the website of the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan said. Azerbaijan also made clear that it would help those civilians to stay safe amid the heavy fighting and to evacuate them, offering them treatment envisaged by the Geneva Convention.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan used modern technology and unmanned aerial vehicles to hit military targets in the occupied territories. When shelling the Nagorno-Karabakh town of Xankendi and its outskirts, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan only target military facilities. Armenia, however, shelled from its own territory Azerbaijani towns such as Ganja and Mingcevir, the latter being home to a reservoir and a power station, which are outside the Karabakh fighting area. Yerevan's goal in shelling Azerbaijani towns outside the conflict zone has been to make Azerbaijan take

response measures and then involve third parties in the conflict through the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation. "Since last Saturday [3 October], Armenia has been targeting Azerbaijan's cities of Ganja and Mingcevir [the latter being home to a reservoir and a power station] which are 100-200 km away [from the conflict zone]. Combat operations themselves are an unfortunate scenario. Still there are known rules for conducting combat operations. But for Armenia there are no red lines. The mindset of the Armenian military-political leadership is a terrorist mindset. Azerbaijan's position is based on international law and historical truth. The Azerbaijani leadership has declared on many occasions that it has no problems with the Armenian civilian population living on Azerbaijani territories," Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov said.

Armenia was also deliberately putting journalists' life at risk in the conflict zone. Yerevan did not take measures to make sure that journalists Armenia brought to the fighting zone could be clearly distinguished from soldiers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan urged journalists not to travel to the conflict zone and advised "all media representatives and foreign journalists strictly to comply with rules and laws of the Azerbaijani Republic regarding their accreditation in the territory of the country".

Vasif Huseynov pointed out that "the military operations did not take place as Armenians expected. The deployment of modern weapons, especially military drones, by Azerbaijan over the last years, coupled with the determination and solidarity of the general public, helped Azerbaijani army to advance into the occupied region and liberate around

30% of these territories in the first month of the war. The more territories lost by Armenians, the more aggressive they had become. On the one hand, the desire to re-take the lost positions, on the other hand, the goal to retaliate for other losses led Armenians to disregarding the international calls for ceasefire and attacking Azerbaijan's civilian settlements with missiles".

Vasif Huseynov pointed out that "unfortunately, not only the officials in the Armenian government, but also representatives of the general public and even journalists advocated this inhuman strategy. For example, Tatul Hakobyan, an Armenian journalist who had also participated in the Western-initiated peacebuilding initiatives between Armenia and Azerbaijan, called his government hours before the deadly missile attack against Barda city of Azerbaijan on 28 October, to cause "a large-scale human tragedy" in Azerbaijan, which he sought as the only way to push Azerbaijan into concessions".

IV. Economic implications of Azerbaijan-Armenia military confrontation for Armenia

Orkhan Baghirov, a leading advisor at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, noted that the continuation of armed confrontation creates not only humanitarian issues and political instability in Armenia, but also grave economic problems. As military expenses are rapidly increasing, it negatively affects the economy of Armenia which has already severely suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic. Just in first 4 days of armed confrontation, Armenia lost the military equipment and ammunition worth more than 1.2 billion US dollars. As Orkhan Baghirov pointed out "weak economic activity and

financial problems also affect the level of GDP. Despite the fact that Armenian government predicted only 2% decrease in April, it lowered its predictions to -5% in August and to -6.8% in October. Therefore, in the end of year the level of the GDP will be about \$1.57 billion less compared to the initial predictions. On the other hand, because of the armed confrontation, the national currency of Armenia is depreciating which also diminishes the level of GDP in terms of US dollar. Economic situation in Armenia also negatively affects its international ratings." In its recent revision of Armenia's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating, Fitch Ratings downgraded its rating to 'B+' from 'BB-'. According to Fitch Ratings, the main problems that are negatively affecting the rating of Armenia are the high and growing net external debt, large structural current account deficit, a reliance on remittances, weak FDI inflows and the armed confrontation with Azerbaijan.

V. Propaganda and false narratives about the conflict

Some experts and observers claimed that the lack of democracy is a major factor in the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict. The reality could not be further from the truth. As Dr. Farid Shafiyev, Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations, pointed out "the nature of the dispute is not based on a democratic deficit (or religion as some like to claim). Rather, the dispute is grounded in Armenian territorial claims that revolve around the concept of "miatsum," meaning unification of the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. The two nations peacefully co-existed before the rise of Armenian nationalism; the first expulsion of Azerbaijanis by Armenian extremists started in the fall of 1987 from the district of Kapan, long

before the Sumgait events of 1988". Dr. Farid Shafiyev also noted that "identifying the conflict as the result of a democracy problem also implies that in the event of a more democratic state, the West would be more sympathetic to the Azerbaijani position. The events of 1992, more specifically the adopted Article 907 of the "Freedom Support Act" (banning U.S. aid to Azerbaijan) implemented during the presidency of the pro-western Abulfaz Elchibay, debunk these claims. All leaders of Azerbaijan have become victims of Western villainization, regardless of their politics".

Dr Farid Shafiyev pointed out that "recent developments on the ground are thus portrayed in parts of the Western media with several clichés and entrenched stereotypes with the help of pro-Armenian writers. Aside from falsely framing the conflict as a religious one, the Pashinyan government also advances the narrative of democracy vs autocracy. It fails to mention that Pashinyan has imprisoned his political opponents; remains silent on the fact that his populist and increasingly ultranationalist rhetoric has been consistently bereft of a vision for how to accommodate Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced person's (IDPs) who want to return to their homes, and fails to mention that Armenia's occupation has resulted in the total and complete ethnic cleansing of the pre-war Azerbaijani population. This twisted idea of freedom exclusively for Armenians calls to mind white supremacist ideology that presupposes the physical extermination of non-whites".

Although the Armenian government had suffered from autocracy and corruption all these years, as Dr Farid Shafiyev noted, "they still got to enjoy a permissive international environment. Even today, Armenia is still violating international law and not abiding by

UNSC resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884, yet Yerevan does not get met with a substantial amount of disapproval from the international community. This again shows that the international community's true concerns are not focused on the presence or absence of democracy".

As Dr Farid Shafiyev put it, "it is also essential to decode current Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan's vision of "democracy." The fact that Pashinyan's version of regional "democracy" can only be extended to Armenian nationals, with Azerbaijanis ethnically cleansed from both Armenia and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, makes such a vision more resemblant of white supremacist ideology rather than democracy".

Dr Farid Shafiyev pointed out that "when Armenian ultranationalists launched their unification campaign in February 1988 in an already crumbling Soviet Union, Armenia's strong diaspora in the West supported it through a well-organized network of policymakers, journalists, and scholars. This ethnic conflict was portrayed as a religious one, even though Armenia manages to enjoy as good relations with Iran as Azerbaijan does with Israel. For liberals, it was presented as a self-determination struggle, while the end goal of the ultranationalist campaign was Armenia's territorial expansion and the

establishment of "Great Armenia." In the evolving geopolitical environment of the post-Cold war era, Armenians exploited Islamophobia and Turkophobia to advance their cause".

As Dr Farid Shafiyev put it, "the argument that the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict is caused by a democracy problem also implies that were there no democracy deficit, the problem would have been solved. However, such a hypothesis does not hold once we take into account the current ethno-territorial conflicts within Western democracies such as Quebec in Canada, Scotland in the United Kingdom, Catalonia in Spain, as well as Flanders in Belgium. The existence of advanced democracy simply does not solve or prevent these conflicts from happening in their regions," adding that "when assessing some policies implemented in Western democracies, it becomes clear that those countries themselves have resorted to the use of force in certain instances, even on foreign soil and sometimes without proper authorization from the UN Security Council as required by international law. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has patiently waited for peaceful negotiations for almost thirty years and now is practicing its legal right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter".