



CENTER OF ANALYSIS
OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

REVISITING THE 44-DAY WAR: AN IN-DEPTH RETROSPECTIVE





CENTER OF ANALY
OF INTERNATION
RELATIONS

REVISITING THE 44-DAY WAR: AN IN-DEPTH RETROSPECTIVE

VASIF HUSEYNOV

Head of Department at the Center of Analysis of
International Relations (AIR Center)

BAKU-2024



CENTER OF ANALYSIS
OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

Mirza Ibrahimov 8, Baku, AZ1100, Azerbaijan,
Phone: (+994 12) 596-82-39, (+994 12) 596-82-41,
E-mail: info@aircenter.az www.aircenter.az

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 4

Introduction 5

The Inevitability of the Military Option 7

44-Day War 14

Trilateral Statement 25

International Reactions 30

Concluding remarks 36

Abstract

By 2020, the escalating provocations by Armenia's military and political leadership convinced both the Azerbaijani people and the international community that the peace talks mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group since the mid-1990s had lost their relevance, rendering a peaceful resolution impossible. The Armenian government's plans to relocate the "parliament" of the separatist entity established by Armenia in Azerbaijan's occupied territories to the Shusha city, the acceleration of illegal Armenian settlements in these lands, and the July 2020 provocation along the Tovuz region of the Azerbaijan-Armenia border all heightened tensions. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's rejection of the Madrid Principles, as well as the Minsk Group's other proposed solutions, further exacerbated the situation, culminating in a military confrontation. Despite repeated warnings from Azerbaijan, the international community failed to prevent Yerevan's aggressive policies. As a result, large-scale military operations between the two countries began on September 27, 2020, following yet another Armenian provocation. This war, known as the 44-Day War or the Second Karabakh War, concluded at midnight on November 10 with a tripartite statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, marking Armenia's capitulation. Thanks to the bravery of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and the astute foreign policy of Azerbaijan's leadership, the nearly 30-year occupation of Azerbaijani lands came to an end. With the liberation of Karabakh, a new era dawned for both Azerbaijan and the broader region.

Introduction

All attempts for a peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over many years failed to achieve any success as a result of the destructive policies of the Armenian leaders. Interested in extending the status quo and strengthening control over the occupied territories of Azerbaijan after the ceasefire agreement signed in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan in May 1994, Yerevan imitated negotiations and refused to implement the resolutions (822, 853, 874, and 884) of the United Nations Security Council which were adopted in 1993 and called for the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Although the Azerbaijani side has repeatedly stated that the negotiations would not last forever and that it would resort to military action if the peace initiatives failed, the military and political leaders of Armenia ignored this and felt safe behind a supposedly impenetrable defense barrier they had built along the Line of Contact (i.e. the frontiers of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan). Therefore, they did not shy away from provocations that insulted the Azerbaijani people and played with their sensitivity, and even made new territorial claims. This approach of Armenia gradually increased the tension between the conflict parties and led to the intensification of military clashes in the border regions and on the Line of Contact.

After a long period of stagnation, the change of government in Armenia in mid-2018 created an opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and resulted in a reduction of tension in the region. The messages of Armenia's new leadership led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in closed meetings about its interest in resolving the conflict, the signals it gave in this direction, and the reduction of military clashes in the front-line increased hopes for peace. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that Pashinyan was abusing this process to consolidate internal control of his government. After consolidating in power, he immediately returned to the extremist approach regarding Armenia's claims to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and announced the infamous statement "Karabakh is Armenia, period". Since the beginning of 2020, provocations against Azerbaijan increased against the background of provocative statements

from the military circles of Armenia that more Azerbaijani lands will be occupied in the event of a new war.

In July 2020, after the clashes in the territory of Tovuz region, news began to spread about the rapid arming of Armenia by Russia and preparations for a larger-scale military aggression. In parallel with this, the consolidation of Armenian military units, increase in the supply of weapons and even the creation of voluntary military units was observed in the frontline areas. The country's leadership in Azerbaijan brought this information to the attention of the world community and emphasized that Armenia's preparation for a new war is a great threat to peace and security in the region. Unfortunately, neither the OSCE nor other international organizations tried or succeeded in dissuading Yerevan from aggressive plans. As a result, early in the morning on September 27, Azerbaijan was subjected to an armed attack by Armenian military units.

The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan began with the counter-offensive operation carried out by the order of President Ilham Aliyev, the Commander-in-Chief of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. Thanks to the heroism of the Azerbaijani army, this war became an honorable stage in the history of Azerbaijan. In a short period of time, the strongest defense lines built by the enemy over the years were broken, and Armenia was hit with a blow it could never have imagined. The Armenian leadership was powerless in the face of this shock and had to sign the act of capitulation on the night of November 9-10. With the liberation of Karabakh and surrounding districts and, thus, the end of the Karabakh conflict, a new era began for Azerbaijan and the entire region.

The Inevitability of the Military Option

After the 2018 government change that brought Nikol Pashinyan to power in Armenia, a new phase in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict emerged, sparking a degree of optimism. Unlike his predecessors, Pashinyan was neither of Karabakh origin nor a participant in the Karabakh war of the early 1990s, which raised hopes that he might adopt a more constructive stance in peace talks. Indeed, early in his tenure, several positive developments suggested a shift. By the end of 2018, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed for the first time to establish a military hotline between their commanders, and by January 2019, they committed to concrete steps aimed at “preparing their populations for peace.” According to leaked reports, during this period, the leaders of both countries engaged in personal communication at Armenia’s initiative, with Pashinyan even proposing secret negotiations in an unnamed European country.¹



President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meeting in Munich, Germany, February 15, 2020.

Simultaneously, there was a noticeable decrease in military clashes between the two sides. For example, in 2017, one year before Pashinyan’s

¹ Eynulla Fatullayev. 2020. “Тайные переговоры между эмиссарами Никола Пашиняна и Ильхама Алиева. Haqqin.az. <https://haqqin.az/news/190193>.”

rise to power, 39 servicemen were killed in battles between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, but by 2018, the number had dropped to eight.² Humanitarian efforts, such as facilitating visits by relatives of prisoners from both countries and organizing exchanges of journalists, also helped ease tensions. In November 2019, for the first time since 2001, journalists from both sides were exchanged, allowing them to meet with local experts and media representatives. Azerbaijani journalists were even permitted to visit the Karabakh region and meet with local Armenian community representatives.

These developments underscored the role of political will in reducing tensions and fostered hopes for future agreements and, ultimately, peace. However, these expectations were short-lived. Pashinyan's abrupt shift in foreign policy caused a sharp deterioration in the peace process, setting the stage for renewed escalation. It later became clear that Pashinyan's initial peace initiatives were primarily intended to secure stability on the front line while he dealt with internal political struggles. Once he consolidated power, he abandoned these efforts and adopted a more radical, nationalist stance in the conflict.

In March 2019, the Pashinyan government attempted to alter the format of internationally mediated negotiations by involving representatives from the local regime in the occupied Karabakh region, a move protested not only by Azerbaijan but also by the OSCE Minsk Group.³ Armenian military leadership further escalated tensions. Speaking at an Armenian diaspora meeting in New York in March 2019, Armenia's Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan rejected the "land for peace" formula proposed by mediators, instead promoting the idea of a "new war for new territories."⁴ He advocated for an aggressive stance that would expand Armenia's control over additional Azerbaijani territory in the event of renewed conflict. Tonoyan's statement came shortly after a

2 International Crisis Group. 2020. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer" <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>.

3 Vasif Hüseyinov. 2020. "New Hope for a Breakthrough in the Nagorno-Karabakh Deadlock?". The Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13611-new-hope-for-a-breakthrough-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-deadlock?.html>.

4 Iragir.am. 2019. "We Do the Opposite – New War for New Territories". <https://www.iragir.am/en/2019/03/30/71511>.

meeting in Vienna between the Armenian prime minister and Azerbaijani president, mediated by the OSCE, during which the two leaders had adopted a joint statement emphasizing the need to create a conducive environment for peace. Tonoyan's remarks demonstrated that Armenia's ruling circles were not genuinely interested in peace.

In the following days, Prime Minister Pashinyan gradually hardened his rhetoric and adopted a more extremist position. In August 2019, during his speech at the opening ceremony of the Pan-Armenian Games, held illegally in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, he proclaimed the slogan "Karabakh is Armenia, period," which expressed a desire for the unification of Armenia and Karabakh.⁵ This statement not only broke from the tradition of previous Armenian governments, which had denied Yerevan's control over the occupying regime established in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, but it also undermined the essence of all peace initiatives. Even Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Armenia's ally within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), responded to Pashinyan's speech, emphasizing that such statements "do not help to resolve the conflict."⁶

Despite this, there was no international pressure on the Armenian government to refrain from provocative and dangerous rhetoric or to engage in substantive negotiations. Quite the opposite: the lack of international reaction encouraged Pashinyan to abandon negotiations altogether. In April 2020, his government denied that there was any document for the settlement of the conflict on the negotiating table, thereby rejecting all OSCE Minsk Group initiatives, including the Madrid Principles.⁷ The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made this statement in response to Lavrov's remarks about peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Speaking at a videoconference organized by the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation, Lavrov had

5 Joshua Kucera. 2019. "Pashinyan calls for unification between Armenia and Karabakh".

Eurasianet. <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh>.

6 Əbdül Kərimxanov. 2019. "What did 2019 mean in terms of Karabakh conflict?".

Azernews. <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/160259.html>.

7 Rəhim Rəhimov. 2020. "Russian Foreign Minister Reignites Conflict Debate in Armenia, Azerbaijan". Eurasia Daily Monitor. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-foreign-minister-reignites-conflict-debate-in-armenia-azerbaijan/>.

expressed support for the current format of negotiations and described the documents on the table as “very important in terms of the implementation of [United Nations] Security Council resolutions.”⁸ Given that the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council in 1993 called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian military forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Lavrov’s statement raised particular concerns in Armenia.

Another provocative act occurred in May 2020, when the “inauguration ceremony” of the “president” of the Armenian separatist regime installed in the Karabakh region took place in the occupied city of Shusha, which holds significant historical and cultural importance for Azerbaijanis. Additionally, it was announced that the “parliament” of the separatist regime would soon be relocated to Shusha. Such provocations from Shusha, a city historically Azerbaijani with over 90 percent of its population being Azerbaijanis, clearly indicated that the enemy had no interest in negotiations.

Pashinyan’s irredentist nationalist rhetoric surrounding the dream of “Greater Armenia” not only angered Azerbaijanis but also caused discontent in Türkiye, Armenia’s western neighbor. Pashinyan celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920, which proposed the division of modern Türkiye’s lands among several states, including Armenia, but which never came into force. This celebration reflected a disconnection from reality and indirectly led Pashinyan to voice territorial claims against Türkiye.⁹ In August 2020, presenting the Treaty of Sèvres as a historical fact, Pashinyan stated, “We are obliged to remember this treaty, understand its importance, and follow its message,” implying a territorial claim against Türkiye.¹⁰

8 Official Website of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2020. “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to questions at a roundtable discussion with the participants of the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund in the videoconference format, Moscow”. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4103828.

9 Panorama. 2020. “Pashinyan: Treaty of Sevres continues to be a historical fact”. <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2020/08/10/Pashinyan-Treaty-of-Sevres/2341518>.

10 Jirair Labaridian. 2020. “Step, this time a big step back”. Aravot. <https://www.aravot-ru.am/2020/09/02/335325/>.

Against the backdrop of these provocations, Azerbaijan began to express its dissatisfaction with the peace talks and the failure of international mediators more vocally, emphasizing that Armenia's aggressive policy poses a significant threat to peace and security throughout the region. On July 6, 2020, in one of his last press conferences before the Tovuz clashes, President Ilham Aliyev openly criticized the international mediators, admitting that the peace process had become "meaningless."¹¹ The international community remained silent regarding Azerbaijan's concerns, which encouraged Armenia to organize systematic attacks against Azerbaijan, both along the state border and from the occupied territory of Karabakh.

From July 12 to 15, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated into a major military confrontation along the state border, encompassing the Tovuz region of Azerbaijan and the Tavush region of Armenia. Clashes involving heavy artillery and drones resulted in the deaths of several soldiers and civilians, as well as the destruction of infrastructure in the border region. The attack, which occurred along the border between the two states – away from the occupied lands of Karabakh – was a deliberate move by Armenia to pave the way for the involvement of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the conflict.

Many observers suggested that another objective behind the provocation was to sever the transport link between Azerbaijan and Europe via Türkiye. The Tovuz region, where the clashes occurred, is crucial because it hosts Azerbaijan's main energy pipelines (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor) and transport routes (the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the East-West Transport Corridor). Consequently, political commentators proposed that the Tovuz provocation was driven by forces envious of Azerbaijan's close relations with the West and Türkiye.

Although the clashes in Tovuz quickly subsided, they heightened tensions between the conflicting parties. The news of Major General

11 Official Website of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic. 2020. "Ilham Aliyev attended the inauguration of modular hospital for treatment of coronavirus patients opened in Khatai district of Baku". <https://en.president.az/articles/39491>.

Polad Hashimov and Colonel Ilgar Mirzayev's deaths during an attack by Armenian military units on July 14 caused significant disappointment and anger towards the invaders among the Azerbaijani populace. In response, unprecedented and spontaneous mass protests erupted in Baku, with around 30,000 people demanding that the government retaliate against Armenia and initiate military mobilization immediately.

Following the Tovuz clashes, reports of the militarization and arming of Armenian society became more frequent. These included the increasing flow of weapons from third countries to Armenia and the organization of military groups comprising 100,000 male and female volunteers under the age of 70.¹² Protesting the arming of Armenia by its allies, President Aliyev declared that cargo flights carrying weapons from Russia to Armenia were still ongoing, labeling this as an existential threat to Azerbaijan.¹³

During this period, the illegal settlement of Armenians brought from abroad was also observed in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. A day after the catastrophic explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, on August 4, 2019 Arayik Arutyunyan, the leader of the occupying forces in Karabakh, announced their readiness to accept 100-150 Armenian families.¹⁴ Later, on August 25, Arutyunyan stated at a meeting dedicated to assistance programs for Lebanese Armenians that the separatist regime would "welcome all [...] compatriots who want to move to Karabakh and provide them with housing." These illegal settlements, in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, aimed to strengthen Armenia's control over the occupied lands and put the opposing side in a challenging position during future negotiations.

These developments served as key signals of a future war between the two countries. In September, during his addresses on local and in-

12 Ani Mejlumyan. 2020. "Armenia to create nationwide civilian militia". Eurasianet. <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-to-create-nationwide-civilian-militia>.

13 Official Website of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic. 2020. "Ilham Aliyev received credentials of incoming ambassador of Greece". <https://en.president.az/articles/40686>.

14 Asbarez. 2020. "Two Lebanese-Armenian Families Settle in Artsakh". <http://asbarez.com/196423/two-lebanese-armenian-families-settle-in-artsakh/>.

ternational platforms, President Ilham Aliyev stated that Armenia was preparing for a new war and consolidating its troops along the contact line for this purpose. In his video address at the UN session's general debates on September 25, 2020, he reiterated the provocative actions of Armenia and urged official Yerevan to refrain from criminal acts:

“The Prime Minister of Armenia has announced the creation of armed groups consisting of tens of thousands of civilians who will be compelled to participate in military operations against Azerbaijan. The Minister of Defense of Armenia is calling for a ‘new war for new territories.’ Armenia is threatening to target major cities and critical civil infrastructure in Azerbaijan, including the Mingachevir reservoir and the Sangachal terminal – one of the world’s largest oil and gas terminals located near Baku, which provides energy security for dozens of countries. Armenia is also attracting mercenaries and terrorists from various countries to use against Azerbaijan.”¹⁵

In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev also highlighted the destructive actions of Armenia's patrons, urging them not to further exacerbate the situation in the region by arming the criminal Armenian military units:

“We are deeply concerned about the increasing supply of weapons to Armenia. From July 17 to September, we witnessed the transportation of over a thousand tons of military equipment to Armenia via military cargo planes. Considering that Armenia is one of the poorest countries in the world and cannot afford to spend billions of dollars on weapons, we can conclude that these weapons are being provided free of charge. Supplying arms to an occupying country that has engaged in ethnic cleansing seriously undermines peace negotiations and encourages the occupying state to resort to new military provocations. In this regard, we call on all countries to refrain from supplying arms to Armenia.”

15 Official Website of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic. 2020. “Ilham Aliyev delivered a speech at general debates of 75th session of United Nations General Assembly in a video format”. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/40937>

44-Day War

Despite Armenia's refusal to comply with the relevant decisions and resolutions of various international organizations, including the UN Security Council, the official government of Yerevan faced no significant pressure or sanctions. Consequently, it ignored the Azerbaijani government's repeated calls for peace. Following the Tovuz clashes in July 2020, Armenia, having continuously armed itself and militarized its population, committed another provocation on September 27 by firing various weapons, including heavy artillery, at the positions of the Azerbaijani army in the frontline zone. This attack targeted not only military positions but also residential areas densely populated with civilians, located far from the front lines.

The gross violations of international law by the Armenian armed forces and their criminal acts prompted the Azerbaijani side to take urgent countermeasures. Consequently, martial law was declared across the Republic of Azerbaijan at 00:00 on September 28, 2020. A partial mobilization was announced the following day. The people of Azerbaijan, along with the state and military, united as one to defend their land.

The Azerbaijani army quickly advanced, breaching defense lines that Armenia had fortified over many years using various technological capabilities. In the initial days of the counter-offensive operation, numerous strategic points were liberated in the Fuzuli and Tartar regions, as well as in the northern direction of the Kalbajar region, particularly in Murovdag. The strategically significant Tartar village of Madagiz was liberated from occupation, and on the same day, the President of Azerbaijan restored its historical name, renaming it Sugovushan. In a short period, the Azerbaijani army also cleared Jabrayil city (on October 4) and Hadrut settlement (on October 9) from enemy forces, capturing advantageous positions in the Khojavand region.

The Azerbaijani Armed Forces successfully executed the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, delivering a crushing blow to the enemy and leaving them in a desperate situation. The myth of the "invincible

Armenian army,” which Armenia had constructed and instilled in its people for years, was shattered. The government of Nikol Pashinyan, now in a crisis, saw its only solution in reaching out to world leaders, seeking assistance, and urging them to pressure official Baku to achieve a ceasefire.

In the course of military operations, an agreement on a humanitarian ceasefire was reached three times until November 10, each time violated due to provocations by the Armenian Armed Forces. The first ceasefire agreement was established during a meeting of the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia in Moscow on October 10. However, the truce was broken a few hours later following an attempted attack by the Armenian side, prompting a strong counterattack from the Azerbaijani army. On October 17, the city of Fuzuli was liberated from enemy control. The swift liberation of Fuzuli, located on the front line, garnered significant attention, achieved at the cost of the life and blood of Azerbaijani soldiers who breached the fortified defenses the enemy had established. The scene in liberated Fuzuli was devastating; like other territories occupied by the enemy, Yerevan destroyed all settlements, leaving no building intact.

After Armenia violated the subsequent humanitarian ceasefire agreement reached at the initiative of France on October 17, the Azerbaijani army continued its counter-offensive operations, liberating the city of Zangilan on October 20 and the Aghband settlement and other residential areas on October 22, thereby cutting off ties with Iran and fully controlling the state border. This victory was celebrated with great enthusiasm in both North and South Azerbaijan, where compatriots gathered across the Araz River to honor the heroism of the Azerbaijani army with applause and songs. These successes caused significant agitation and anxiety on the enemy front, prompting Nikol Pashinyan to turn to major powers for assistance. On October 24, a meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers was held in Washington, mediated by the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, resulting in a humanitarian ceasefire agreement in accordance with the Moscow statement from October 10. However, the ceasefire, an-

nounced on the evening of October 25, was broken the following day, leading to another flare-up of hostilities.¹⁶ Following another attack by the Armenian armed forces, the Azerbaijani army advanced toward the Lachin corridor and began to monitor the main highway connecting Armenia with Karabakh from 10 kilometers away using artillery. The Gubadli district was liberated from occupation on October 25.



President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Gubadli and Zangilan districts, December 23, 2020.

The war represented a significant celebration of unity and solidarity among Azerbaijanis worldwide and a demonstration of support between the people in Azerbaijan, the state, and the army. All the propaganda campaigns by Armenia aimed at creating discord and breaking unity in Azerbaijan failed. As the Azerbaijani army successfully advanced and liberated lands previously occupied by the enemy, the unity among the

¹⁶ TRT. 2020. "Azərbaycan ilə Ermənistan arasında üçüncü humanitar atəşkəs". <https://www.trt.net.tr/azerbaycan/aktual/2020/10/26/az-rbaycan-il-erm-nistan-arasinda-ucuncu-humanitar-at-sk-s-1515686>.

people grew stronger. Citizens rallied to support the army, initiated various campaigns to aid the effort, and, most notably, many young people volunteered to fight at the front. Against this backdrop, confusion, political crisis, and mistrust of the government emerged in Armenia, leading to various forms of desertion and evasion of military service within the army.



Victory Parade, December 10, 2020 .

In response, to retaliate for losses in the battle zone, instill fear in the Azerbaijani populace, and distract attention from the front, the Armenian armed forces grossly violated international law by targeting civilian areas far from the front lines with ballistic missiles. Settlements such as Aghdam, Tarter, Fuzuli, Barda, Ganja, Goranboy, and Naftalan – all densely populated areas – were subjected to rocket and heavy artillery fire. These attacks sometimes occurred at night, when people were asleep, with the intent of inflicting maximum casualties. During these assaults, Armenia employed weapons like Smerch cluster bombs and Scud-B ballistic missiles, which indiscriminately targeted civilian populations and infrastructure, thereby violating international conventions

prohibiting the use of such weapons against civilians. According to information from the General Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan, 98 civilians were killed and 414 were injured during the war, with more than 3,000 houses and 100 residential buildings destroyed or damaged.¹⁷

Despite these criminal acts, the enemy could not break the determination of the Azerbaijani people and army. In the final days of October, the Azerbaijani army approached Shusha, and local battles began around the city. Arriving from an unexpected direction, brave soldiers of Azerbaijan traversed dozens of kilometers on foot through dense forests, climbed the steep rocks of Shusha with light weapons, and entered the city from several points, catching the enemy off guard. The Azerbaijani army quickly overcame the enemy's resistance, destroying hundreds of enemy soldiers in the battles for Shusha.



President Ilham Aliyev raises the National Flag of Azerbaijan in Shusha, Azerbaijan, January 15, 2020.

¹⁷ Azernews. 2020. "Civilian death toll in Armenian attacks reaches 98". <https://www.azernews.az/aggression/173321.html>.

On November 8, President Ilham Aliyev visited the Alley of Martyrs and announced the liberation of Shusha from occupation: “Shusha, which was under occupation for twenty-eight and a half years, is liberated! ... We achieved this historic victory on the battlefield... Dear Shusha, you are free! Dear Shusha, we are back! Dear Shusha, we will revive you! Shusha is ours! Karabakh is ours! Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”

President Aliyev commented on the battles of Shusha: “The liberation of Shusha from occupation demonstrated our strength and the professionalism of our army, as well as the courage and heroism of our soldiers. Liberating Shusha required great professionalism and bravery. I am certain this operation will hold a special place in world military history, as our heroic soldiers, armed only with light weapons, executed this operation through mountains, forests, and pathways. The liberation of Shusha from occupation is our glorious victory.”



An officer of Azerbaijan's Special Forces in front of the Shusha Fortress.

The announcement of Shusha's liberation on November 8, considered the pearl of Karabakh, marked a decisive moment. On the day that Commander-in-Chief President Aliyev proudly declared after the liberation of Shusha, the occupying state had no choice but to raise a white flag and agree to capitulation. As a result of the successful counter-offensive operations by the Azerbaijani army, five cities (Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Zangilan, Gubadli, and Shusha), four settlements (Minjivan, Aghband, Bartaz, and Hadrut), and 286 villages were liberated from occupation by November 9.

From the war's outset until its conclusion, the military and political leadership of Armenia deceived its people, providing false information about the situation at the front and instilling unrealistic illusions about the mythical power and heroism of the Armenian army, even after the Azerbaijani army had gained complete control of Shusha. This deception led to shock and outrage in Armenia when news of the country's signing of the act of capitulation emerged on the night of November 9-10. People flooded the streets, attacked state institutions, and severely beat the parliamentary speaker, Ararat Mirzoyan, who was the only high-ranking official they could find. Protesters who entered the Prime Minister's residence could not locate Pashinyan and settled for looting the property instead.

According to various sources, more than 80 percent of the Armenian armed forces' potential was destroyed during the war, with a significant number of tanks, heavy equipment, and anti-missile defense systems crushed or captured as military trophies by the Azerbaijani army. Thousands of Armenian servicemen were killed, and up to 20,000 sustained various degrees of physical injuries. The Armenian leadership, which misled its citizens with numerous lies, refrains from providing complete information about losses and manipulates casualty figures. For instance, although only a small portion of the Armenian servicemen who fought in the war were from the Armenian community of Karabakh, official Yerevan attributed part of the losses to this community while omitting them from Armenia's official statistics. In August 2021, Pashinyan announced that 3,773 servicemen from Armenia had been

killed, with 243 reported missing. Furthermore, official reports did not disclose information about mercenary fighters involved in the conflict from abroad or the losses among them.¹⁸

In August 2021, during a meeting with veterans of Karabakh, President Ilham Aliyev stated that the Azerbaijani army had martyred up to 3,000 people during the 44-Day War and noted that more than 1,600 bodies of Armenian invaders had been found in the liberated territories since the war's conclusion.¹⁹ He emphasized that while Armenia had not returned the remains of up to 4,000 Azerbaijani citizens who went missing after the First Karabakh War, Azerbaijan had repatriated the bodies of Armenian soldiers in accordance with the principles of humanism. Additionally, he pointed out that, according to information obtained by Azerbaijan, Armenia had lost at least 7,000 to 8,000 personnel.



Azerbaijani artilleryman during the 44-day War.

18 Armenpress. 2021. "Number of Artsakh war casualties is 3773, another 243 MIA – says PM Pashinyan". <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1061477.html>.

19 Apa. 2021. "Prezident: "Ermənistan öz itkilərini gizlədir, bizdə olan dəqiq məlumata görə n azı 7-8 min itki verib". <https://apa.az/az/xeber/resmi-xeber/prezident-ermenistan-oz-itkilerini-gizledir-bizde-olan-deqiq-melumata-gore-en-azi-7-8-min-itki-verib-658643>.

The war also exposed the falsehood of Armenia’s “independent Artsakh Republic.” Official Yerevan, which had promoted the separatist regime established in the occupied territories as an independent and sovereign state while denying any influence over it, demonstrated the exact opposite as soon as the war began. On September 27, 2020, following the onset of military operations, Yerevan reaffirmed its active participation in the conflict, declaring full mobilization not only within the Karabakh region but also in Armenia itself. The Armenian military and political leadership admitted to providing untruthful and misleading information to the international community for years while directing military operations on the Armenian side and ultimately being the party that signed the tripartite declaration.

This acknowledgment also revealed that the root of the conflict between the two states was not “self-determination,” as claimed by the Armenians, but rather the illegal occupation of one state’s territory by another. The invaders who surrendered Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin without a fight – burning forests, houses, cutting down trees, and destroying the limited infrastructure left behind after 30 years of looting – exposed their true attitude to these territories.

The Azerbaijani army heroically defeated the armed forces of the occupying state. The most modern weapons, acquired as a result of President Ilham Aliyev’s visionary policies over many years, played a crucial role in accomplishing this difficult task with minimal losses. “There is not a single piece of military equipment belonging to the Azerbaijani Armed Forces in the hands of the enemy. There is an objective observation of the battles, and any military expert can see that the Azerbaijani army has achieved victory on the battlefield today. The Azerbaijani army demonstrates its superiority; Azerbaijani soldiers and officers exhibit high moral and psychological qualities and strong morale. We are fighting on our own land and liberating our own territory. The soldiers of Armenia are invaders. The land where the war is fought is not theirs,” the President of Azerbaijan proudly declared in one of his addresses to the people during the war.



President Ilham Aliyev’s visit to Gubadli and Zangilan districts, December 23, 2020.

During the war, the effective work of Azerbaijan’s political leadership with the mass media that flowed into Baku from foreign countries enabled the true voice of Azerbaijani people to be conveyed to the world and helped secure victories on the information front. Throughout the 44-day war, President Ilham Aliyev gave interviews to approximately 30 foreign media organizations, bringing to the attention of global audiences that Azerbaijani lands had been under illegal occupation for about 30 years, that international law had been ignored by the occupying state, that UN resolutions had not been implemented, and that the reasons for the war had been clarified.

Among the foreign media outlets where President Ilham Aliyev was interviewed were Russia’s “Rossiya-1,” “Perviy,” RBK television channels, “Ria Novosti,” “TASS,” and “Interfax” agencies; Türkiye’s “TRT Haber,” “CNN-Turk,” “Haber Global,” “Haber Türk,” “NTV,” and “A Haber” televisions; France’s “France 24,” and “Le Figaro”; Germany’s ARD television; Japan’s “Nikkei” newspaper; the USA’s “Fox News” television; Italy’s Rai-1 television and “La Repubblica” newspaper; Spain’s EFE news agency; as well as well-known networks such as “Al Jazeera,” “Al Arabiya,” “Euronews,” “CNN International,” “Sky News,” and “BBC News.”

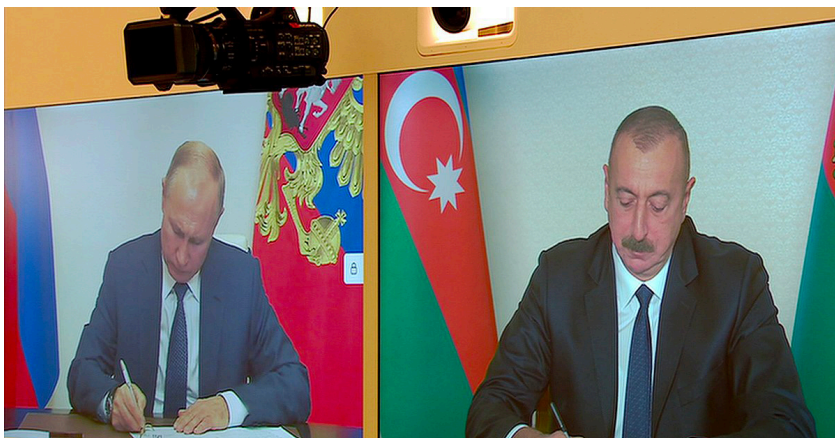


President Ilham Aliyev's interview with BBC News, November 9, 2020.

In these interviews, high level of professionalism of the President of Azerbaijan allowed him to skillfully respond to the prejudices, accusations, and slanders he faced repeatedly, calmly conveying the truth to the other party. For instance, despite the Azerbaijani side's repeated assertions that the provocations by the Armenian armed forces were the reason for the war, some foreign journalists did not hesitate to make biased accusations against Azerbaijan. For example, a question posed by the French newspaper "Le Figaro" asked, "Mr. President, my first question is, why did you attack Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27, and what are the political goals of this military attack?" Such questions often felt more like accusations than inquiries. In response to a similar question from the American "Fox News," the head of state firmly articulated his position: "It was not Azerbaijan that started fighting on September 27. Until now, no official representative of any country has raised this issue before us. It was Armenia that attacked on September 27, and the goal was to completely disrupt the negotiation process."

Trilateral Statement

On the night of November 9-10, the 44-Day War, which the people of Azerbaijan fought unitedly since September 27, ended with the signing of the capitulation act by the occupying state. “Today is a historic day for our country. Today, the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is over,” President Ilham Aliyev announced in his address to the nation immediately after signing the tripartite cease-fire declaration with Russian President Vladimir Putin via video conference on November 10.²⁰ In the statement, the parties agreed to halt the fierce fighting that had been ongoing since September 27 and to maintain their current positions.



Online Signing of the Trilateral Statement between President Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin, November 10, 2020.

Prior to the ceasefire announcement, the armed forces of Azerbaijan had liberated four districts surrounding the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region (Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zengilan, and Gubadli), as well as parts of the territory within the former autonomous region, including the cities of Madagiz (Suguvushan), Hadrut, and Shusha. The statement indicated that official Yerevan also agreed to withdraw its troops from

²⁰ Official Website of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic. 2020. “Ilham Aliyev addressed the nation”. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45924>.

the remaining three districts around the former Nagorno-Karabakh region: Kalbajar by November 15 (later extended to November 25), Aghdam by November 20, and Lachin by December 1. The statement also announced an agreement on the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the Karabakh region and surrounding districts under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as the exchange of prisoners of war, hostages, and other detained persons, including the return of bodies.

The status of the Karabakh region, a central point of contention between Armenia and Azerbaijan prior to the war, was not addressed in the tripartite statement. After signing the document, the President of Azerbaijan stated in his address to the people, “There will be no status as long as I am President.” This underscored the failure of the enemy’s attempts to create a second Armenian state on Azerbaijani lands and to present it to the international community as an independent entity, reinforcing Azerbaijan’s rightful position despite various pressures.

Based on the tripartite declaration, the parties agreed to temporarily deploy a peacekeeping contingent consisting of 1,960 armed military personnel from the Russian Federation, along with 90 armored vehicles, 380 vehicles, and special equipment along the contact line in Karabakh and the Lachin corridor. The statement outlined the temporary deployment of this contingent for five years, with automatic extensions for subsequent five-year periods unless one of the parties objects.

According to the final article of the statement, “All economic and transport links in the region are being restored.” The parties agreed on the establishment of two communication corridors: the five-kilometer Lachin corridor between Armenia and Karabakh, and another corridor linking the western regions of Azerbaijan to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The security of these corridors, which would facilitate the movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions, was the responsibility of the respective parties. Security in the Lachin Corridor was overseen by Russian peacekeeping forces and the Border Service of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) regarding the transport connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan.

Although Türkiye, Azerbaijan's main ally, was not mentioned in the tripartite statement, President Aliyev announced in his address to the nation that the establishment of a joint center to monitor the cease-fire with the participation of Russian and Turkish military forces was planned. Many details of the peacekeeping mission were not specified in the agreement and were to be resolved later through negotiations between Russia and Türkiye.

Thus, the November 10 statement concluded the 44-Day War and the occupation of Azerbaijani lands. The statement excluded the OSCE Minsk Group from the peace process, thereby minimizing the influence of Western co-chairs France and the United States on the Karabakh peace process. It preserved and strengthened Russia's strategic advantage in the South Caucasus while simultaneously creating new opportunities for Türkiye's geopolitical rise in the region.

"I hope that we will no longer use the phrase 'Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,' and I hope that we will soon move on to discussing other issues," President Putin said on November 13 during a meeting with Russian officials regarding the resolution of humanitarian problems in Karabakh.²¹ A week later, he warned against revanchist forces considering a violation of the trilateral statement, stating that "a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh is the only alternative to the tripartite agreement."²²

A similar statement was made by the President of Azerbaijan several times after the war. President Aliyev declared the end of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in his address to the people following the liberation of the Lachin region from occupation on December 1, stating, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has ended. If anyone thinks that this conflict is still ongoing, they are wrong."²³ At the end of November of that year, Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jeyhun Bayramov, announced during a speech at the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Black Sea Eco-

21 TASS. 2020. "Putin hopes the word conflict won't be used for Nagorno-Karabakh anymore". <https://tass.com/politics/1223535>.

22 RT. 2020. "Russia: 'The only alternative is war' - Putin on Nagorno-Karabakh deal". <https://www.ruptly.tv/en/videos/20201120-063-Russia---The-only-alternative-is-war---Putin-on-Nagorno-Karabakh-deal>.

23 Official Website of the President of the Azerbaijani Republic. 2020. "Ilham Aliyev addressed the nation". <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45924>.

conomic Cooperation Organization that the process of restoring peaceful coexistence in the resolution of the conflict had begun.²⁴

The tripartite statement was essentially an act of military surrender for Armenia. At that time, Armenian social media users expressed, “This is the biggest tragedy faced by the Armenian people in the last 100 years.” There were calls both in Armenia and the diaspora to withdraw from the agreement or renew it. However, these protests soon subsided as it gradually became clear that the alternative would be far more disastrous for Armenia. “The implementation of the tripartite statement is very painful. However, the decision was made in a situation where the alternative could be more painful,” Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan admitted on November 27 during a meeting with local governors.²⁵

Russian peacekeepers began moving toward Karabakh immediately after the establishment of the ceasefire. However, Russia’s mission extended beyond merely monitoring the ceasefire; it also included providing humanitarian aid to people living in the area where the peacekeepers were temporarily stationed and who had been affected by the war. On November 13, President Putin signed a decree to create an interagency humanitarian center for the Karabakh region. The center included representatives from the Russian Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergency Situations, and Disaster Prevention, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Security Service, and other federal executive bodies. According to Putin, the center would assist the war-affected population in returning to normal peaceful life, restore civil infrastructure in Karabakh, address current problems facing residents, and facilitate the return of refugees.

Türkiye’s role in the peacekeeping mission was particularly well-received in Azerbaijan. On November 18, the Turkish parliament approved the deployment of military forces to Karabakh to join

24 Report. 2020. “Ceyhun Bayramov: ‘Münaqişənin həllində dinc birgəyaşayışın bərpası mərhələsinə qədəm qoymuşuq’”. <https://report.az/qarabag/ceyhun-bayramov-munaqisenin-hellinde-dinc-birgeyasayisin-berpasi-merhelesine-qedem-qoymusuq/>.

25 Defence.az. 2020. “Pashinyan calls implementation of Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal ‘painful’”. <http://defence.az/az/news/149200/pashinyan-calls-implementation-of-nagorno-karabakh-peace-deal-painful>.

Russian forces in the ceasefire monitoring center. The mandate calls for Turkish troops to be stationed in the center for a year as part of an agreement reached between Ankara and Moscow to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire. On December 1, it was reported that Türkiye and Russia had agreed on the technical details regarding the foundation and principles for the operation of a joint Türkiye-Russia peacekeeping center.

International Reactions

Reactions from the international community to the 44-day War were ambiguous. Notably, the roles of Türkiye and Pakistan, which supported Azerbaijan in the complex international political landscape and strengthened its diplomatic position, should be emphasized. The moral and political backing from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his government, and the Turkish people – who maintained constant communication with the President of Azerbaijan from the first hours of the war – coupled with numerous visits from high-ranking Turkish officials to Azerbaijan during the conflict, allowed Azerbaijan to withstand the pressure from pro-Armenian states and organizations and to fight with greater confidence.

Countries such as Israel, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina also supported Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity during the war. Furthermore, the support of the Non-Aligned Movement, chaired by Azerbaijan since 2019, and its member states participating in the UN Security Council played a significant role in Azerbaijan’s diplomatic efforts. Thanks to the principled positions of these member states, the UN Security Council prevented the adoption of a draft resolution during the war that did not align with Azerbaijan’s interests. Hikmat Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan and Head of the Department of Foreign Policy Affairs of the Presidential Administration, made a public statement regarding this development, stating that:

“After discussions held on October 19 at the UN Security Council regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, a draft statement was prepared on behalf of the Security Council chairman. Notably, the draft statement did not include references to the well-known resolutions of the UN Security Council. This project was primarily developed by the Russian Federation and France. Indonesia, Niger, Tunisia, Vietnam, South Africa, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Dominican Republic – non-permanent members of the UNSC and members of the Non-Aligned Movement – twice violated

the silence procedure and insisted on including a reference to UNSC resolutions in the statement. Through this, these states once again demonstrated their commitment to the UN Charter, the norms and principles of international law, the resolutions of the UN Security Council, the Bandung Principles, and other UN documents. Following the persistent and principled position of the Non-Aligned Movement member states, the draft statement was officially withdrawn.”²⁶

In addition to these states that supported Azerbaijan’s rightful stance, there were others, including states and international organizations, that either supported Armenia’s occupation policy during the war or took a neutral position despite international law being on Azerbaijan’s side. Rather than responding forcefully to Armenia, which has ignored numerous international documents -including four UN Security Council resolutions – and the initiatives undertaken by the OSCE Minsk Group, these countries and organizations supported the occupation and the unjust status quo it perpetuated.



President Ilham Aliyev and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the Victory Parade in Baku, December 10, 2020.

²⁶ Report. 2020. “Hikmət Hacıyevdən açıqlama” <https://report.az/qarabag/hikmet-haciyevden-aciqlama5234/>.

One notable example of a pro-Armenian position came from France. Since the beginning of the war, French politicians, who made continuous statements, sought to rescue Armenia from its disgraceful situation while simultaneously slandering Azerbaijan. French President Emmanuel Macron accused Azerbaijan of starting the war and alleged its use of mercenaries, all without providing any evidence. This statement from the French leadership, whose country had not played a significant role in resolving the conflict for many years as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, did not condemn Armenia for occupying Azerbaijani lands or pressure it to end the occupation. This inaction caused considerable dissatisfaction in Azerbaijan and led to calls for France's removal from the Minsk Group.

Russia, another member of the Minsk Group, called on the parties to ensure a ceasefire and resume negotiations with the participation of international mediators. Contrary to expectations in Armenia, the Russian leadership announced that the shootings were occurring outside Armenia's borders and, therefore, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could not intervene.²⁷ At the same time, various Russian officials urged for the resolution of the conflict within the framework of international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. For instance, the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, Igor Krasnov, called on Baku and Yerevan to resume negotiations during a video conference held on October 8 with the delegations of the Prosecutor's Offices of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. He stated, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be resolved based on international legal norms and relevant UN Security Council resolutions."²⁸

The fact that the war coincided with a complicated period leading up to the presidential elections in the United States did not alter the approach of the Donald Trump administration to the conflict. President Trump told reporters at the White House on September 28 that the Unit-

27 Report. 2020. "Putin: Ermənistan KTMT-nin üzvüdür, lakin hərbi əməliyyatlar Azərbaycanca gedir". <https://report.az/qarabag/putin-ermenistan-ktmt-nin-uzvudur-lakin-herbi-emeliyyatlar-azerbaycanda-gedir/>.

28 BBC. 2020. "Qarabağ müharibəsi: Humanitar atəşkəs və Gəncəyə hücumlar – baş verənlərin xronologiyası". <https://www.bbc.com/azeri/live/azerbaijan-54417119/page/20>.

ed States was trying to find a way to stop the violence in Karabakh. He announced that the U.S. had good relations with the countries of the region and would therefore try to halt the war. Trump, who sought to win the support of the strong Armenian diaspora in the United States during his election campaign, expressed strong support for Armenia in a subsequent statement about the war on October 23: “We are working with Armenia. We have very good relations with Armenia. They are very good people... Let’s see what happens.”²⁹

This statement was made a day before the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington. Although the parties reached an agreement on a humanitarian ceasefire at that meeting, it could not be implemented. Overall, during the war, an agreement on a ceasefire was announced three times, thanks to the separate mediation of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. However, these agreements failed to materialize due to provocations from the Armenian armed forces. The joint efforts made by the Minsk Group were also unsuccessful. In statements issued during the war, the agency called on the parties to immediately cease fire and resume substantive negotiations but failed to influence the process.

While the November 10 agreement on the cessation of military operations irritated some pro-Armenian states, it was welcomed by most states and international organizations. Iran, a direct neighbor of the conflict zone, expressed support for the agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Consistent with its position during the 44-day war, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries should be respected, that internationally recognized borders should not be altered, that occupied territories should be liberated, and that the safety and rights of refugees and minorities should be upheld.³⁰ Iran’s emphasis on the principle of

29 Bloomberg. 2020. “Trump Says He Aims to Help Armenia in Azerbaijan Conflict”, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-23/trump-says-he-wants-to-help-armenia-in-conflict-with-azerbaijan>.

30 Official Website of Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2020. “Iran’s Statement on Agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia”. <https://en.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/616551/iran%E2%80%99s-statement-on-agreement-between-azerbaijan-armenia-russia>.

inviolability of territorial integrity – rather than the self-determination claim put forth by Armenia to justify the independence of the separatist regime it established in the occupied lands – was mainly interpreted as support for Azerbaijan. A similar stance was expressed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who stated in an interview with a local television channel days after the signing of the tripartite declaration that “according to international law, Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions are an inseparable part of the Republic of Azerbaijan.”³¹ The Russian leadership, as a mediator in the signing of the tripartite declaration and a guarantor of its implementation, emphasized the importance of enforcing the declaration to ensure peace in the region.

The restructuring of the geopolitical map of the region and the resolution of the conflict outside the framework of the Minsk Group displeased some Western countries. The deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh and the increase in Türkiye’s influence in the South Caucasus were interpreted as failures of Western foreign policy, particularly that of the European Union (EU) in its eastern neighborhood. Consequently, both the EU and the U.S. emphasized the importance of resuming the activities of the Minsk Group and reinitiating negotiations to achieve a lasting solution to the conflict in statements made after the signing of the tripartite agreement.

In the statement issued by the European Union regarding the tripartite agreement, it was noted that “the EU believes that efforts for a comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the conflict through negotiations, including the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, should be renewed. For this reason, the EU once again declares its full support for the international format of the OSCE Minsk Group led by the co-chairs and for the personal representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.”³² Similarly, the United States issued a statement: “The parties agree to work

31 Ria Novosti. “Путин высказался о территориальной принадлежности Нагорного Карабаха”. <https://ria.ru/20201122/karabakh-1585785534.html>.

32 Official Website of the Council of the European Union. 2020. “Nagorno-Karabakh: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union”. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/19/nagorno-karabakh-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/>.

with the OSCE to achieve a long-term and sustainable political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the principles of non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, self-determination, and equal rights of peoples as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act.”³³ The U.S. urged a swift engagement with the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, affirming its full involvement as a co-chair.

France’s reaction to the tripartite statement was particularly ambivalent. Contrary to its commitments under the co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group, which required France to maintain neutrality, official Paris adopted a decidedly anti-Azerbaijani stance, accusing Azerbaijan of aggression against Armenians and of using mercenaries during and after the war. This position was underscored by the nearly unanimous recognition of the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” by both chambers of the French parliament. On November 25, the lower house of parliament recognized the so-called “Artsakh republic,” followed by the upper house on December 3, both calling for the restoration of the “borders” established after the 1994 Armenia-Azerbaijan ceasefire agreement. Although the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the parliament’s decision did not change France’s official position and did not recognize the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic,” most observers contend that if official Paris had shown determination, it could have prevented the adoption of these resolutions. France’s response to the tripartite statement and the passage of anti-Azerbaijani resolutions in its parliament raised questions about France’s role in the Minsk Group as a neutral mediator. This also indicated that Azerbaijan would not accept the Minsk Group as an impartial mediator in post-war peace negotiations.

33 Official Website of the Department of State of the United States. 2020. “The United States Welcomes Cessation of Hostilities Between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Announces New Assistance to Respond to the Nagorno-Karabakh Humanitarian Emergency”. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-welcomes-cessation-of-hostilities-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan-and-announces-new-assistance-to-respond-to-the-nagorno-karabakh-humanitarian-emergency/index.html>.

Concluding remarks

The lack of international pressure on Armenia to comply with international law and UN Security Council resolutions, the absence of sanctions against the occupying state despite Azerbaijan's consistent calls, and the ineffective activities of the Minsk Group led Armenian leaders and the public to believe that Yerevan's control over the occupied territories would remain permanent. Relying on security guarantees from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenian leaders imitated negotiations, gradually adopting a tougher stance and even attempting to build new settlements in the occupied territories. There was a prevailing belief in Armenia that Azerbaijan would never attempt to liberate its lands militarily, considering the potential reactions from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In a speech to the Armenian Parliament on November 16, 2020, Prime Minister Pashinyan acknowledged that the indefinite extension of negotiations was Armenia's pre-war strategy. He stated, "Since 1998, there has been only one topic in the negotiation process: the lands should be returned to Azerbaijan."³⁴ The policy of the Armenian side was to prolong this process, engaging in negotiations merely for the sake of appearances without any intention of reaching an agreement or compromise.

While Armenian leaders mimicked negotiations, provocations from the country's military and political leadership tested the patience of the Azerbaijani people. The Armenian government, responsible for statements such as "Karabakh is Armenia, period," which denied the Madrid principles, and for holding a "swearing-in ceremony" for the leader of the occupying regime in Shusha, a historic Azerbaijani city, played a key role in the failure of peace negotiations and the outbreak of war. This government had also planned to transfer authority to Shusha and embraced the doctrine of a "new war for new territories."

³⁴ Diana Ghazaryan. 2020. "Pashinyan Admits Military Gamble to Impact Karabakh Negotiations Failed". <https://hetq.am/en/article/124367>.



President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Gubadli and Zangilan districts, December 23, 2020.

In July 2020, Armenia's military provocations along the state border and the clashes in Tovuz heralded a larger war between the parties. By attacking the positions of the Azerbaijani armed forces on the state border, Armenia aimed to expand the conflict's geography and involve third parties. Following the clashes, the rapid arming of Armenia, the indirect supply of weapons from Russia, and the swift militarization of Armenian society indicated that Armenia was preparing for a larger-scale war. Bolstered by security mechanisms within the CSTO and alliance agreements with Russia, and under the illusion of an "invincible Armenian army" following the First Karabakh War, Armenia believed that Azerbaijan could not engage in open conflict or would be defeated quickly.

Therefore, the defeat in the 44-day war and the subsequent capitulation created a shockwave in Armenian society. On the morning of November 10, Armenians awoke to a transformed reality. The Armenian people, who had been consistently misled by their government about the true situation on the front during the war, were largely unaware of the actual circumstances. Pashinyan's government even denied the loss

of the city of Shusha on November 8, when President Ilham Aliyev announced its liberation and the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan shared video footage from the city. The capitulation came as a significant shock to Armenians, who protested against the government, demanded Pashinyan’s resignation, and took to the streets. In the following days, several government members were compelled to resign, including Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan. Armenian President Armen Sargsyan, who stated on November 16 that the ceasefire statement had not been discussed with him in advance, called for early parliamentary elections and urged Pashinyan to resign.³⁵



Russia’s Peacekeeping contingent in Karabakh, Azerbaijan, November 2020.

The victory in the 44-day war, the liberation of the occupied territories, and the opportunity for hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons to return to their homes became the greatest achievement in the history of Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet independence. This his-

³⁵ Hetq.am. 2020. “Armenian President Says He Wasn’t Consulted on Deal to End Artsakh War”. <https://hetq.am/en/article/124145>.

toric victory, that was made possible by the visionary and astute foreign policy of the victorious Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev, the bravery of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, and the unwavering national unity despite numerous provocations, allowed Azerbaijan to implement the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council through military means. The scene in the liberated territories was devastating. After forcibly evicting Azerbaijanis from their lands, perpetrators razed entire settlements, destroyed infrastructure, and obliterated cultural artifacts, religious monuments, and mosques. The task ahead was to implement large-scale reconstruction projects in Karabakh and create the necessary conditions for the return of internally displaced persons.

However, despite the differing consequences for Armenia and Azerbaijan, the war that resolved the conflict created a favorable environment for both countries to benefit from the new regional situation. The tripartite agreement offered a historic opportunity for a peace treaty between the two nations and an end to hostilities. The return of all refugees and internally displaced persons to their lands and the restoration of coexistence in Karabakh became possible. Shortly after the war, in accordance with the tripartite declaration, the parties began negotiations to open regional transport and communication lines, thereby promoting regional integration. The concept of a regional cooperation platform proposed by the presidents of Azerbaijan and Türkiye began to gain traction. Thus, after the 44-day war, a new era commenced not only for Armenia and Azerbaijan but for the region as a whole.



CENTER OF ANALY
OF INTERNATION
RELATIONS

REVISITING THE 44-DAY WAR: AN IN-DEPTH RETROSPECTIVE

VASIF HUSEYNOV

Head of Department at the Center of Analysis of
International Relations (AIR Center)

BAKU-2024



CENTER OF ANALYSIS
OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

**REVISITING THE
44-DAY WAR:**
AN IN-DEPTH
RETROSPECTIVE