

AZERBAIJAN'S NON-ALIGNMENT





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Report

BAKU - 2022



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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Foreword

The end of the Cold War at the end of the 1980s seemed to make irrelevant not only political–military blocs, but also those that opposed allegiance to them, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). However, this perception was fleeting. Today, the world is more fragmented than ever, and alliances are more relevant—as is the idea of non-alignment.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries was created within the context of Cold War competition between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the growing independence from 1955–1961 of former colonies. The leaders of India, Indonesia, Egypt, Syria and Yugoslavia convened the first NAM summit in 1961. Despite the countries having close, friendly relations with either the United States or the Soviet Union, and having political tension among themselves, the movement managed to maintain the culture of non-bloc development. The non-aligned countries rejected the idea of allegiance to superpowers to preserve their independent status.

Today, several core principles of the NAM remain relevant, and are even more acute despite the movement’s significant transformation since its inception in the 1950s during the era of the Cold War and decolonization. The NAM advocates multilateralism—a concept that had the potential to provide more favorable international conditions for small states to survive and profit in the unsafe international environment that persisted following the end of the Cold War. Both the bipolar Cold War and the post-unipolar, Western-dominated world were characterized by numerous territorial, ethnic, and religious conflicts, some of which were, and are, proxy wars supported by global and regional powers.

The NAM stands for multilateralism rooted in decisions based on consensus, which is another core principle of the movement that rebuffs coercion. Furthermore, the NAM prioritizes the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty that, in the cases of some member states, have been threatened by bellicose regional powers, irredentism, or separatism.

Overall, the NAM reinforces the ideas and principles of the United Nations—the organization that has both succeeded and failed on many occasions to maintain international peace. The failure of the United Nations emanates from the lack of collective coercive mechanisms and from the unilateral use of force, and the NAM advocates the former and opposes the latter.

Since October 2019 Azerbaijan, a relative novice in the organization, has been chairing the NAM. Azerbaijan is positioned in the South Caucasus, neighboring Armenia, a member of the Russia-led CSTO military bloc, and Georgia, which aspires to join NATO. Azerbaijan has vigorously advocated for maintaining the core principles of international law and multilateralism. The present report discusses both the broad framework of the NAM and Azerbaijan’s vision and strategy for the movement.

Farid Shafiyev

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I. Introduction

Maintaining a balanced, multipronged foreign policy and equidistance from all military-political blocs have defined the core of Azerbaijan's interactions with its international partners over the decades. Dedication to this policy and its continuing success became the defining character of Azerbaijan's foreign policy to date. As a continuation of this policy, Azerbaijan became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 2011; this is the largest group of states after the United Nations, and pursues not aligning with or against any major power or joining military blocs.

Although Azerbaijan does not have very deep historical relations with the NAM, it has done a lot in recent years to rejuvenate this institution in the international relations system. The objectives pursued by the NAM and Azerbaijan largely coincide, which creates a good synergy between Azerbaijan and NAM today. In 2019, Azerbaijan became the chairman of the NAM for the period 2019 to 2022, later extended until 2023. This period was unfortunately plagued by a global pandemic due to COVID-19 and ongoing conflicts around the world. While many of the NAM member states were underdeveloped and struggling with the pandemic, some others were also facing external threats. During this period, Azerbaijan was able to demonstrate leadership in the movement and rally efforts toward dealing with common problems.

Azerbaijan's informed choice to become a non-aligned country turned it into a natural ally of the NAM. However, this report is not only about Azerbaijan's relations with the NAM but aims to look at broader issues relating to Azerbaijan's non-aligned foreign policy. In this regard, the report includes topics related to the theoretical framework, Azerbaijan's relations with the NAM, the success of its balanced foreign policy against the background of the war in Ukraine, as well as Azerbaijan's energy policy and strategy that made the country self-sufficient to be able to independently pursue policies of its own choice.

The first section of the report, titled "Theoretical perspectives on Azerbaijan's non-alignment in international relations," is written by Dr. Vasif Huseynov. Dr. Huseynov sets out to evaluate states' foreign policy strategies from two realist approaches: structural realism and neoclassical-realism. According to him, structural realists think that, as the margin of maneuver becomes increasingly limited for weak states, they have to adapt to the imperatives of the international distribution of power between the great powers. However, he further asserts that structural realism is not enough to explain the behavior of small states. Dr. Huseynov argues that neoclassical realism appears to better explain the foreign policy strategy of weak states, and this school of realism contributes to the abovementioned debate by highlighting the intervening influence of state-level variables. He further attempts to explain Azerbaijan's non-aligned foreign policy after the period of regaining its independence through the prism of neoclassical realism on the grounds that structural realism alone is insufficient to explain it.

Section II, titled "Azerbaijan's multi-vectored foreign policy and the Non-Aligned Movement," discusses Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy choice and its cooperation with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This is written by Esmira Jafarova, who first dis-

cusses the success of Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy and, in this context, highlights the unity of purpose with the NAM, which also pursues a non-aligned, non-bloc policy in international affairs. Jafarova, argues that the Azerbaijani chairmanship of NAM for 2019–2022 enabled the movement to continue to live through its rejuvenation. According to the author, Azerbaijan as an emerging “middle power” has assumed a leadership role to forge consensus among the NAM group in order to attain coordinated actions, including in regard to the COVID-19-induced global calamity. Jafarova rightly underlines that Azerbaijan and the NAM share convergent objectives. One of the most momentous episodes testifying to the formation of mutually supportive and successful partnerships between NAM countries and Azerbaijan was the unequivocal backing Azerbaijan received from NAM for its territorial integrity during the 44-day Karabakh War with Armenia from September 27 to November 10, 2020.

The third section of the report is also written by Vasif Huseynov and titled: “Azerbaijan's role in the region: Acts of balancing in the context of the geopolitics of the Russia–Ukraine war.” For Azerbaijan, the Russia–Ukraine war has been another test of the balanced approach of the country's foreign policy that it has maintained since the mid-1990s. Azerbaijan has had much more room for maneuver through these troubled times than Ukraine or Armenia. Despite this balance at the geopolitical level, the political leadership of Azerbaijan, although it has refrained from openly criticizing Russia, has declared support to Ukraine by highlighting the importance of international law, especially sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the basis for achieving a ceasefire between the conflicting parties.

The next article is written by Javid Valiyev and titled “The Ukraine and Azerbaijan wars: Similarities and differences.” In this article, Javid Valiyev compares the international reaction against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Armenia's invasion of Azerbaijan. According to Valiyev, the international community did not express a fair position on the rightful defense of Azerbaijan, compared with its unequivocal support to Ukraine during its war. During the 44-day Karabakh War, they tried to present Azerbaijan's just war as unjust. The rocket attacks on Azerbaijani civilian areas by Armenia did not receive enough negative backlash from international actors. No sanction was ever applied against Armenia. Most importantly, Bayraktar TB drones were presented as “death angels” in Azerbaijan's just war but as “saving angels” in Ukraine.

The last part is written by Shahmar Hajiyevev and titled “Energy resources as an important component of Azerbaijan's independent foreign policy.” In his article, Hajiyevev analyzes the oil and gas strategy of Azerbaijan after regaining independence. According to Hajiyevev, Azerbaijan has proven itself to be a reliable energy partner for all parties. The country can potentially increase gas deliveries to Europe by using its gas reserves in the Caspian Sea and accessing natural gas sources from other countries. So far, Azerbaijan has managed to realize the strategic objectives of its energy strategy successfully. All energy projects clearly illustrate that Azerbaijan has successfully implemented its energy policy, supporting regional cooperation and connectivity, as well as strengthening the national economy. The purpose of this article is to argue that Azerbaijan's successful energy policy, and the self-sufficiency brought by economic welfare, has served as a powerful enabler for Azerbaijan being able to pursue the policies of its own choice.

II. Theoretical Perspectives on Azerbaijan's Non-Alignment in International Relations

Vasif Huseynov

There is a consensus among international relations scholars that neutrality (nonalignment) is the optimal strategy for smaller states that are stuck between great power rivalries.¹ It enables such states to maintain ties with rival great powers and increases their chances of preserving their independence and security.² However, most of the time, neutrality turns out to be impossible to maintain, and regional states are forced to make a strategic choice. The advocates of structural realism put an emphasis on the third image analysis of international relations and assert that, as the margin for maneuver is increasingly limited for weak states, they have to adopt to the imperatives of the international distribution of power between the great powers.³ This logic expects regional states to bandwagon with the stronger or the more threatening great power when neutrality can no longer be maintained.⁴ The bandwagoning state joins regional organizations (including economic, political, and security institutions) supported by the threatening state, avoids deep engagement with rival great powers, and thus is forced to follow certain patterns of foreign policy considered acceptable by the predominant power.

1. *A Glance at a Scholarly Debate*

Stephan Walt argues that, "In general, the weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon."⁵ According to Walt, this is how great powers build their spheres of influence: weaker states in the geographic proximity of a great power opt to bandwagon with it as there is no balancing possible. Jack Levy has also supported this reasoning:

The hypothesis regarding balancing behaviour refers to the great powers more than to other states. Great powers balance against potential hegemon, whereas weaker states in the proximity of stronger states do what is necessary to survive, which often involves bandwagoning with the strong instead of balancing against them.⁶

Randall Schweller, making an important contribution to this debate, points out that states

1 E.J. Labs, "Do Weak States Bandwagon?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992, p. 385.

2 B.A. Fox, *The Power of Small States Diplomacy in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

3 K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 72-73, 194-195; M. Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), p. 3.

4 K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 127.

5 S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 29.

6 J.S. Levy "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in Philip Tetlock, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern., Jo L. Husbands, and Charles Tilly (eds), *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 231.

may also bandwagon for opportunities.⁷ In this logic, aligning with the stronger state may be chosen also for economic or security benefits: “bandwagoning is not just a behaviour to avoid capitulation, but a strategy that states adopt in order to gain something without having survival at stake.”⁸

However, the history of international relations has, on many occasions, shown that smaller states may also align against a stronger or more threatening power. In reality, not only do weaker states sometimes seek to balance against a stronger or more threatening great power, but they may, in some cases, even choose to fight against it alone.⁹

Scholars of international relations have offered various explanations for this inconsistency in the foreign policy alignment of weak states, but it has not been possible to complete the puzzle. The structural realist emphasis on the distribution of capabilities among great powers as the major driver in the strategic choices of weak states does not always apply in practice: The external environment and the global balance of power as independent variables do not produce the same actions in the foreign policies of weak states that are located in similar international environments. For example, William Wohlforth points out that structural realism “is of little utility in explaining much of the variation in local responses to Russia.”¹⁰ Even when we add conditional variables to the theory to derive more hypotheses, it fails to add much to the explanation of ... why Belarus has been such a faithful bandwagoner despite relative power and a geographical position similar to the Baltics.”

Stephan Walt’s inclusion of factors other than distribution of capabilities that impact the formulation of foreign policy strategies cannot be applicable in many cases, either. For Walt, in addition to aggregate power, external alignment strategies are affected by other important factors, such as: geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions. For Walt, weak states tend to bandwagon when the threatening state is much more powerful, when other allies are unavailable, or when the situation is about to transform into an armed conflict.¹¹ He points out that, under these circumstances, attempting to balance might even be an “unwise” option. This approach fails in some cases, for instance, in the relations between Belarus and Ukraine, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other. Although the two “common neighborhood” states are located within the same geographic proximity of Russia, they have pursued opposite foreign policy strategies: Belarus bandwagons with Russia, while Ukraine seeks to align with Western powers against Russia.

Similarly, James MacDougall’s study on the South Caucasus states has revealed that the regional states pursue different alignment strategies although they share a common stra-

7 R.L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, pp. 72–107.

8 L. Cladi & A. Locatelli “Structural Realism: Balancing, Bandwagoning Or What?” in Lorenzo Cladi & Andrea Locatelli (eds.) *International Relations Theory and European Security: We Thought We Knew* (Oxon & New York: Routledge 2016), p. 18..

9 E.J. Labs, “Do Weak States Bandwagon?,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992, pp. 383-416; Gvalia, G., Siroky, D., Lebanidze, B. & Iashvili, Z. “Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2013, pp. 98-131.

10 W.C. Wohlforth “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” in Thazha Varkey Paul, James J. Wirtz & Michael Fortmann (eds.) *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004), p. 232.

11 S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987).

tegic environment: “Azerbaijan and Georgia, to varying degrees, have balanced against the threat from Russia, although at times they have attempted to bandwagon. Armenia has not balanced against Russia, but rather has bandwagoned with Russia.”¹² Nor do the assumptions of the dependency theorists on the impact of economic dependence provide a convincing explanation for the strategic choices of weak states in some cases. For example, the recent crisis between Ukraine and Russia took place despite the economic interrelatedness between the two countries.¹³

Neoclassical realism appears better armed than other theories to provide analyses about the foreign policy strategies of weak states. Unlike structural realism, neoclassical realism is aimed at developing theories of foreign policy. This school of realism contributes to the abovementioned debate by highlighting the intervening influence of state-level variables.¹⁴ In analyzing domestic political processes as imperfect transmission belts between systemic pressure and foreign policy, the theory places an emphasis on the perceptions of the political elite, their ability to extract or mobilize societal resources to implement foreign policy, and the interference of domestic actors (public, business and industrial sectors, labor unions, and other organized economic interest groups such as the media, legislature, and ethnic and religious groups) in foreign policymaking.¹⁵

2. *Evolution of Azerbaijan’s Non-Alignment*

Non-alignment has been internalized into the foreign policy making of Azerbaijani governments since the mid-1990s—soon after the country regained its independence from the former Soviet Union. As presented above in the analyses of the various scholars, Azerbaijan pursued this strategy in a very complex geopolitical environment caused primarily by its location between Russia in the North and Iran in the South. Two other immediate neighbors of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia, had to abandon neutrality, however, as they threaded in opposite directions. While Armenia aligned with Russia and took part in its major regional political, military, and economic integration projects, Georgia sought, albeit not very successfully, to balance against Russia by integrating into the Euro-Atlantic political and military structures. This situation in the region demonstrates the invalidity of structural realist explanations for the non-aligned foreign policy course of Azerbaijan.

The variables proposed by neoclassical realism (i.e., the perceptions of the political elite, their ability to mobilize societal resources to implement foreign policy, and domestic political dynamics) offer a more convincing explanation for this question. Heydar Aliyev, the former president of Azerbaijan (1993–2003) and the founder of the non-align-

12 C.J. MacDougall, *Post-Soviet Strategic Alignment: The Weight of History in the South Caucasus*, PhD thesis, Washington, DC., Georgetown University, 2009, 57.

13 P.A. Papayoanou, “Economic Interdependence and the Balance of Power,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1997, pp. 113–40.

14 R.L. Schweller, “New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz’s Balancing Proposition,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, pp. 927-930.

15 G. Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1998, pp. 144-172.; R.L. Schweller, “New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz’s Balancing Proposition,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, pp. 927-930.

ment principle in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, prudently analyzed the ramifications of the one-sided approaches of his predecessors when he came to power in the midst of a precarious and unstable period in his country. Ayaz Mutalibov, the first president of independent Azerbaijan (1991–1992), sought to align with Russia, whereas his successor, Abulfaz Elchibey (1992–1993), opted for the opposite course—seeking to build an alliance with the West and Türkiye. Azerbaijan's western neighbor Armenia seized on the opportunity created by this chaos in Azerbaijan and militarily occupied up to 20 percent of Azerbaijani territories in the course of the First Karabakh War (1988–1994).

President Aliyev adopted a different strategy that is known in Azerbaijan as the “balanced approach in foreign policy.” This strategy was well informed about the geopolitical foundations of international relations, the limitations that the country's military and economic capabilities impose on its maneuvers, and the interests of the surrounding great powers. He sought to pursue a policy of rapprochement with Türkiye and the West without jeopardizing the core interests of other powers or provoking them to mull a backlash. This was possible thanks to Heydar Aliyev's profound experience in politics, his perceptions of the local and international imperatives, as well as the lessons learned from the national trauma the country was subject to in the early 1990s.

Heydar Aliyev managed to secure stability in domestic politics and economic development despite the challenges. In a short time after acceding to the presidency, he succeeded in reaching agreements with Western countries on giant energy projects. On September 20, 1994, the Agreement on the Joint Development and Production Sharing for the Azeri and Chirag fields, and the Gunashli field in the Azerbaijani Sector of the Caspian Sea, also known as “The Contract of the Century,” was signed. This was one of the landmark agreements in Azerbaijan's 20th-century history due to its political, economic, and strategic importance. It marked the beginning of Azerbaijan's transformation into a modern, powerful state engaged in sustainable economic development and paved the way for future projects of similar economic and geostrategic importance (e.g., the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, Southern Gas Corridor, etc.).

Azerbaijan's economic independence and the public support of Heydar Aliyev and his successor, and incumbent president, Ilham Aliyev allowed the government to navigate through various external challenges skillfully and prudently. President Ilham Aliyev continued the foreign policy course of his predecessor and managed to protect neutrality and non-alignment in foreign policy. Azerbaijan's accession to the Non-Aligned Movement of 120 countries in 2011 and Azerbaijan's four-year chairmanship in the institution (2019–2022) once again loudly pronounced this strategy. The following sections will provide further details of the non-aligned course in Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

3. *Summing up*

This section built its analysis on the conviction that neutrality (non-alignment) is believed by international relations scholars to be the optimal foreign policy course amidst the rivalries of great powers. The section concluded that approaches emphasizing the role of

the distribution of material capabilities in international relations, geographic proximity, aggressive intentions, offensive power, and economic dependence fail in many cases. It was argued that the analytical toolkit of neoclassical realism, recognizing the causal influence of systemic pressure and including the intervening influence of state-level variables, provides more convincing assumptions to explain the foreign policy strategies of smaller states.

The section applied this theoretical perspective to the analysis of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. It has been found that, despite being located in the same region, with similar geographical proximity to Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia pursued different foreign policy strategies. While Armenia bandwagoned with Russia in various military, political, and economic structures, Georgia, another South Caucasian country, abandoned neutrality. Georgia sought, albeit not very successfully, to balance against Russia by integrating into the Euro-Atlantic political and military structures. Azerbaijan turned out to be the only country in the region that succeeded in pursuing neutrality between the major powers while safeguarding the national interests of the country and building economic and political success.

This section revealed that the variables proposed by neoclassical realism (i.e., the perceptions of the political elite, their ability to mobilize societal resources to implement foreign policy, and domestic political dynamics) offer a convincing explanation for this conundrum. The lessons learned from the failures of the first two leaders of independent Azerbaijan, the country's economic success, and stable public support for the governments of President Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev have allowed Azerbaijan to effectively handle the foreign policy challenges and maintain friendly relations with all major powers without compromising the sovereignty and independence of the country.

III. Azerbaijan's multi-vectored foreign policy and the Non-Aligned Movement

Esmira Jafarova

Before embarking on highlighting Azerbaijan's relations with the NAM, this section aims to dwell a little more on describing Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy, already initiated in the above section. The existing synergy between Azerbaijan's contemporary foreign policy and the NAM should be discussed in the proper historic and geopolitical context that has so far informed Azerbaijan's foreign policy choices and strategy.

1. *The Success of Azerbaijan's Multi-Vectored Foreign Policy*

Azerbaijan's multi-vectored foreign policy has become one of the successes of its independent state-building process. To fully fathom Azerbaijan's choice of a balanced and multi-vectored foreign policy, one has to understand the realities, predicaments, and perspectives of being an independent post-Soviet republic with a Muslim-majority population, located between regional powers such as Russia and Iran, and, most notably, with a history of the decades-long occupation of its internationally recognized territories. Apart from the three-decades-long territorial conflict with Armenia, Azerbaijan's foreign policy was also shaped and impacted by its openness to cooperation with global, Euro-Atlantic, Islamic, and other regional and sub-regional institutions. Its success in decoupling religion from the state, i.e., being a secular state with Islamic traditions, also impacted on Azerbaijan's choice of allies among countries of similar as well as different faiths.

As noted above, the foundations of Azerbaijan's pragmatic foreign policy were laid by late President Heydar Aliyev in the early 1990s and, today, this has become Azerbaijan's brand, i.e., the so-called "multi-vector" or "balanced" foreign policy strategy. Perhaps it would have been hard to believe at the time that Azerbaijan would manage to strike the right balance among the competing interests of regional as well as external players. Nonetheless, this multi-dimensional foreign policy course, set by Heydar Aliyev and which stemmed from understanding the benefits of engaging with everyone based on one's national interest, has remained a successful foreign policy course for Azerbaijan ever since.

The complex neighborhood and history of domination by the Soviet Empire have made Azerbaijan a truly unique place where Islam meets other religions and the Orient meets the West. Moreover, since the early days of its independence, Azerbaijan has enjoyed rather close ties with other Islamic countries and became an active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which nevertheless did not impede it from also building an alliance with Israel, regardless of the animosities existing towards the latter in most OIC states.

Azerbaijan also stayed on good terms with Russia and Iran, despite the relationship not

being completely free of nuisance. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan staved off the prospects of Russian forces relocating to Azerbaijan, without, however, antagonizing Russia over that matter. Relations with Russia were on cooperative terms, but it was also clear that Azerbaijan did not concede on the issues of utmost importance, as some past examples testify; for example, Azerbaijan's principled stance on helping Georgia during the 2006 gas crisis and the final closure of Russia's Gabala Radar Station in 2012, for which financial and environmental reasons were cited.

Azerbaijan opts for neither bandwagoning with nor antagonizing Russia and thus manages to sustain cooperative relations with the country. Despite occasional disagreements between the two over free-of-charge military shipments to Armenia, the overall tenor of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan has been consistent, especially in the wake of Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day Karabakh War and Russia's general support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. With the deployment of Russia's peacekeeping contingent in Azerbaijan, in accordance with the November 10, 2020, trilateral agreement, relations between the two countries may acquire new significance, with Russia playing an increased role in the implementation of the agreements and the post-conflict stabilization of the region. Moreover, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a declaration on allied interaction on February 22, 2022.¹⁶ Section IV of this report will provide more detail on this.

Relations with Türkiye developed on both brotherly and pragmatic terms. "One nation, two states" became the modus operandi of the close kinship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Türkiye became Azerbaijan's natural ally by supporting the latter through the early years of independence and continued to do so on vital foreign policy issues, in particular, its position on the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. Turkish political support was therefore indispensable for Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day Karabakh War. The presence of Turkish military servicemen in the Joint Peacekeeping Monitoring Center, established by the abovementioned trilateral declaration, has further strengthened Türkiye's stance and stabilizing influence on the overall security architecture of the region.

When it came to Iran, populism with regard to Iran's Azerbaijani minority was never an option and good neighborliness between the two states became the preferred policy course. However, despite Azerbaijan's policy of pursuing good-neighborly relations with Iran, the latter was not immune to nationalist forces exploiting an imperialistic discourse that claimed that Azerbaijan is part of Iran and created unnecessary tensions between the two states over Azerbaijan's relations with the West and Israel. Iran's efforts to interfere with Azerbaijan's secularism and infiltrate radical religious elements into Azerbaijani society has also, from time to time, caused friction between the two neighbors, with Azerbaijan strongly standing for the values of secularism and nipping Iran's efforts to influence this in the bud. Moreover, Azerbaijan's confident victory in the 44-day Karabakh War also apparently made Iran apprehensive of Azerbaijan restoring its control over the border with Iran, thus leaving the latter with only a small portion of the direct land connection with its longtime ally Armenia. The pent-up dissatisfaction on the part of Iran manifested in late 2021 when the country deployed troops and military equipment along its border with Azerbaijan and started to hold military drills, clearly in an attempt to demonstrate

¹⁶ "Declaration on the Allied Interaction", available at <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55498>, (accessed: 27.07.2022)

the threat of the use of force. With Azerbaijan not backing down in the face of such manipulative tactics and Iran's realization of the Azerbaijani attitude in this regard, the belligerent episode of Fall, 2021, was finally defused through diplomacy. However, despite the existing issues, Azerbaijan has still managed to build practical cooperation with Iran on trade, transportation, and energy. Hence, relations with Iran are, overall, positive and pragmatic, despite the underlying issues stemming from Iran's insecurities vis-à-vis secular and independent Azerbaijan.

Since the 1990s, Azerbaijan has also engaged in building partnerships with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Azerbaijan's signing of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the EU in 1999 and membership in the OSCE in 1992, NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (NATO PfP) in 1994, and the Council of Europe in 2001, all testified to an increased desire on the part of the West and Azerbaijan for closer cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Although Azerbaijan never openly and plainly stated its desire or a plan to fully integrate with the Euro-Atlantic institutions, it continuously positioned itself as an active and reliable partner of Western institutions through participation, reforms, and active contributions.

The success of Azerbaijan in attracting the support of the U.S.A. and the EU for ambitious energy and infrastructure projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan and Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum, or Southern Gas Corridor, oil and gas pipelines that, running to European markets and bypassing Iran and Armenia and thus eliminating Russia's sole dominance as a potential energy route, testified to the ability of the Azerbaijani leadership to perform a delicate cost–benefit calculation about issues of utmost national importance and forge reliable partnerships with the West.

Moreover, after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S.A., Azerbaijan's importance was manifested in its strategic geographic location as well as in its willingness to help the Western allies to launch and conduct anti-terror operations by granting the U.S.A. blanket permission to overfly Azerbaijan's airspace as well as contributing in all possible forms to the universal anti-terror efforts.

In the vortex of a rather complex set of interests, Azerbaijan, with the help of the West, managed to keep Russia at bay and isolate Armenia, thus shaping regional economic and political alliances with Türkiye and Georgia for the years to come. However, this in no way indicated that Azerbaijan was set on a course of complete dissociation from Russia or seeking to antagonize its neighbor. Neither did it mean that this intensified practical and economic cooperation between the West and Azerbaijan in any way heralded a closer political integration between them.

As an example, in contrast to Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan was quick to dismiss the EU's proposed Eastern Partnership (EaP) Association Agreement because of the understanding that this offered a rather vague formula (more than a partnership and less than full-fledged membership) without specifying the ultimate reasons for engaging in this type of cooperation and reform.

Azerbaijan therefore initiated the idea of contracting a separate bilateral agreement with

the EU, the 2016 Strategic Partnership Agreement, which, unlike the Association Agreements and DCFTAs envisaged by the Eastern Partnership, is built on more equal terms of partnerships, thus avoiding the necessity to one-sidedly comply with the EU's expectations and thereby establishing a mutually beneficial cooperation platform for both. While the negotiations on this agreement were ongoing, the EU and Azerbaijan also signed the Partnership Priorities¹⁷ for 2018–2020 that focused on four main areas of cooperation highlighted in the EaP: strengthening institutions and good governance; economic development and market opportunities; connectivity, energy efficiency, environment, and climate action; and mobility and people-to-people contacts. It is reported that work on the EU–Azerbaijan Strategic Partnership Agreement are already close to completion.¹⁸

Azerbaijan's relationship with NATO is also framed by the PfP (1994), IPAP (agreed for a two-year period), and PARP (1997) programs, and through the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC, joined in 1992) and, later, Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council (EAPC, member since 1997). Within the framework of these, it is possible for individual countries to select suitable activities for bilateral cooperation; these include, among others, security cooperation, defense and security-sector reform, civil emergency planning, and science and environment. Azerbaijan made contributions to NATO-led peacekeeping operations in Kosovo (KFOR), the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan, and made significant financial contributions to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund.¹⁹

Azerbaijan participates in NATO's Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism (PAP-T), which envisages intelligence and analysis sharing with NATO, strengthening national counter-terrorist training capacities, and so on. It also works with NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC), within the Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) and Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program, and participates in the Partnership Interoperability Initiative and NATO Trust Fund projects for mine and unexploded ordnance clearance and demilitarization.²⁰

In spite of this practical partnership with NATO, Azerbaijan has no intention to be in a permanent association with the Alliance. Its engagement with NATO has remained on the level of good partnership and practical defense cooperation on a wide range of relevant areas.

Azerbaijan's international standing and outreach were further strengthened by its election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2012–2013 and, later, its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an institution that unites 120 diverse members and is the second largest such entity after the UN. Azerbaijan has spear-

17 "Partnership Priorities Between the EU and Azerbaijan Reinforce the Bilateral Agenda", 17 July, 2018, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/48244_en, (accessed: 11.08.2022)

18 "Azerbaijan-EU New Partnership Agreement 90 Percent Ready", *Report.az*, 16 December, 2021, available at <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/azerbaijan-eu-new-partnership-agreement-90-percent-ready/>, (accessed: 11.08.2022)

19 "Key Milestones of Azerbaijan-NATO Cooperation", available at <https://nato-pfp.mfa.gov.az/en/content/31/key-milestones-of-azerbaijan-nato-cooperation>, (accessed: 09.08.2022)

20 "Relations with Azerbaijan", available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm, (accessed: 22.07.2022)

headed important initiatives within the NAM and the Turkic Council over issues of global as well as regional importance. Uniting global efforts for dealing with COVID-19 was one of the most salient issues initiated by Azerbaijan within the NAM, which also resulted in the convening of a special session of the UN General Assembly in December 2020.

2. *Why NAM?*

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) represents a diverse group of states, the largest after the United Nations, the modus operandi of which is not to align with or against any major powers and that stands for “the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries.”²¹ The NAM was initiated at the Belgrade Conference of 1961 and has since expanded its membership from the original 25 states to 120 members. The establishment of the NAM, particularly in the wake of the demise of the colonial system and the independence struggles of nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the world, was also instrumental to the facilitation of the decolonization process.²² Ever since, the Movement has played a role in the maintenance of international peace and security, while also remaining faithful to its strategic choice of neutrality and non-alignment.

There have been many debates about the role and relevance of NAM in world politics, with some suggesting that the movement has mostly lost its appeal and importance regarding the most pressing international affairs. When Azerbaijan assumed its chairmanship of NAM for 2019–2022, it vowed to promote multilateralism, foster cooperation and solidarity within the NAM group, and work collectively towards rejuvenating NAM’s role in world affairs. What we are witnessing today in NAM under Azerbaijani chairmanship enables us to assert that the movement is currently living through a period of rejuvenation.

Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus region to have become a full member of the movement. Moreover, Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that pursues a multi-vector, balanced foreign policy course without seeking close association with any competing political-military bloc. It joined the ranks of the NAM in May 2011 in the run-up to Azerbaijan’s bid for membership of the UN Security Council.

Some speculate that the last-minute membership of Azerbaijan in the NAM did in fact help it to secure votes for the seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2012–2013 during the elections held in October 2011. Such speculation notwithstanding, it goes without saying that, as a non-bloc country that prioritizes a balanced foreign policy course, Azerbaijan and the NAM share convergent objectives.

With its 120 members, the NAM is the largest international entity after the United Nations and its *raison d’être* is neutrality from any military bloc. The Havana Declaration states that the NAM does not align with or against any major power center and stands for “the

21 “6th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement”, Havana, Cuba, 3-9 September, 1979, http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/6th_Summit_FD_Havana_Declaration_1979_Whole.pdf

22 “History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAligned+Movement>, (accessed: 14.06.2022)

national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries.”²³ Moreover, collective adherence to the ten Bandung principles (1955), including, first and foremost, those concerning respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, is an overarching determinant gluing such a diverse group of states together.

3. *Rejuvenation of NAM under Azerbaijani Chairmanship*

After Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the organization for 2019–2022, it convened NAM summits. The first of these took place in October 2019, with heads of state and governments of the NAM countries gathering in Baku to pass the torch of chairmanship to Azerbaijan and discuss the priorities of the organization for the coming years. The second, online, NAM summit took place on May 4, 2020, at the initiative of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world unexpectedly. Another summit after COVID-19 restrictions were partially lifted was held in Belgrade, Serbia, in October, 2021, on the occasion of 60th anniversary of the Movement.²⁴ The main message from these meetings was about undertaking best efforts to increase solidarity and mutual support among the members of the group. The outcomes that followed through these online summit meetings, particularly the one held online on May 4, 2020 and titled “United against COVID-19,” were also very important.

When the world was grappling with the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, NAM, at the initiative of Azerbaijan, gathered for an online summit that involved more than 40 NAM countries. The philosophy of this online summit was to unite NAM countries around fighting this global health challenge that had by then surpassed the contours of being a mere health crisis to have far-reaching socio-economic and political ramifications. This NAM Summit therefore showed the convergence of global interests and adherence to common principles highlighted in the very basic documents of the movement, including the one that specifies standing for “...security of the non-aligned countries”²⁵ as among the highest priorities of the group.

It was noted that “in the face of new realities posed by the pandemic, this open discussion within the group is needed for joining efforts to attain nimble actions and mutual support in order to achieve best and most effective solutions.”²⁶ Another important outcome of this online summit was the initiation of a NAM Task Force to create a database that would contain the basic humanitarian and medical needs of the NAM member states and that would then be submitted by the chair country to potential donors for attracting support to

23 Final Document of the 6th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Havana, Cuba 3 – 9 September 1979, available at http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/6th_Summit_FD_Havana_Declaration_1979_Whole.pdf, (accessed: 01.08.2022)

24 “Belgrade Marking 60 Years of the Non-Aligned Movement; Vučić: “Welcome home”, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2021&mm=10&dd=11&nav_id=111947, (accessed: 14.06.2022)

25 “6th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement”, Havana, Cuba, 3-9 September, 1979, http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/6th_Summit_FD_Havana_Declaration_1979_Whole.pdf

26 Esmira Jafarova, “Non-Aligned Movement is United Against COVID-19”, *Euractiv*, 5 May, 2020, available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/non-aligned-movement-is-united-against-covid-19/>, (accessed: 22.07.2022)

meet the needs of member states in the fight against COVID-19.²⁷ In a follow-up to the NAM Summit in May 2020, and with the support of NAM member states, Azerbaijan succeeded in convening a special 31st Session of the UN General Assembly related to COVID-19 in early December 2020.

Azerbaijan, as an emerging “middle power,”²⁸ has assumed a leadership role to forge consensus among the NAM group in order to take coordinated actions to address this global calamity. As well as initiating the Task Force described above, Azerbaijan has contributed US\$10 million to the World Health Organization (WHO) to support its efforts to fight the pandemic, and half that amount was allocated to the needs of NAM countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Azerbaijan’s belief in the values of international cooperation and multilateralism became the driving force behind its chairmanship of NAM, which, although originally set to run from 2019–2022, was recently extended by one more year, until 2023.²⁹ This extension of the Azerbaijani chairmanship happened during the online mid-term Ministerial Meeting of NAM that took place in July 2021.

Regarding this matter, the political declaration of the online Ministerial Meeting specifically underlined Azerbaijan’s sterling stewardship of the group’s work so far and expressed appreciation “for effectively steering the work of the Non-Aligned Movement in a challenging period for all Member States and for its commitment and readiness to continue the NAM chairmanship until the Republic of Uganda takes it over, in late 2023.” Under the Azerbaijani chairmanship, the NAM has acquired a renewed spirit and a louder voice in international affairs, and the unanimous extension of Azerbaijan’s term as chair stands as vivid proof of the meeting’s statement.

A further highlight of the same NAM Ministerial Meeting was that a new country, the Russian Federation, joined the fold, with observer status.

The political declaration of the July 2021 mid-term Ministerial Meeting under Azerbaijani chairmanship focused on a wide array of issues related to international peace and security, thereby positioning the NAM as one of the central players in the international arena for addressing those pressing challenges. To name just a few, the group expressed its commitment to exerting collective efforts toward fighting terrorism, xenophobia, racism, intolerance, national and religious discrimination, violations of human rights, lack of rule of law, and many other new and emerging threats.

The declaration also contained relevant provisions about security issues in several NAM countries, including placing a focus on “... post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration efforts in the NAM Member States to sustain peace, foster economic development and promote cooperation, and in this regard highlight the importance of effective mine action”³⁰ The political declaration of the mid-term Ministerial Meeting once

27 Ibid..

28 Esmira Jafarova, “Is Azerbaijan a Middle Power?” <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/Is%20Azerbaijan.pdf>

29 “Non-Aligned Movement at the Center of Multilateral Efforts in Responding Global Challenges”, Political Declaration, 13-14 July 2021, available at <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2021/nam0714.pdf>, (accessed: 12.07.2022), p.10

30 Ibid..

again highlighted the group's determination to fight COVID-19 and vaccine nationalism through collective efforts and ensure "... distribution of safe, quality, efficacious, effective, accessible and affordable COVID-19 vaccines between high-income and low- and middle-income countries."³¹

In line with Azerbaijan's efforts to foster stronger synergy and coordination within the NAM, in June, Azerbaijan hosted the Baku Conference of the Parliamentary Network of the NAM on "Enhancing the Roles of National Parliaments in Promoting Peace and Sustainable Development Worldwide"³² and, in July 2022, Azerbaijan hosted the Youth Summit of the NAM. The latter became the NAM Youth Organization during the session of the event that was held in liberated Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan.³³

4. *NAM and Azerbaijan's Fight to Restore its Territorial Integrity*

One of the most momentous episodes testifying to the formation of mutually supportive and successful partnerships between NAM countries and Azerbaijan was the unequivocal backing Azerbaijan received from NAM for its territorial integrity during the 44-day Karabakh War with Armenia from September 27 to November 10, 2020. When Azerbaijan embarked on a counteroffensive to restore its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, the three co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group, led by France, unleashed a motion for the adoption of a presidential statement by the UN Security Council, the text of which intended to set aside the four 1993 UN Security Council resolutions (822, 853, 874, 884) that demanded unconditional withdrawal of all armed forces of Armenia from the occupied Azerbaijani territories.

It was the persistent and principled position demonstrated by the NAM countries within the Security Council in support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity that prevented the adoption of such a biased document. President Ilham Aliyev later thanked all NAM countries for standing up for Azerbaijan and once again emphasized that the very same support that Azerbaijan received is reciprocated towards NAM countries on a wide array of issues.

As mentioned above, Azerbaijan's membership in, and its subsequent chairmanship of, the NAM is emblematic of its multi-vector foreign policy and persistence in seeking disassociation from any military and security blocs. However, the rekindling of the NAM's work and the strengthening of its global standing is also the result of Azerbaijan's ardent support for international cooperation, multilateralism, and global solidarity.

The success of the Azerbaijani chairmanship of the NAM also stands as a testament to the existence of mutually beneficial partnerships as well as the shared values within the group. The alignment of broader strategic objectives, coupled with dedication and per-

31 "Political Declaration of Non-Aligned Movement at the Center of Multilateral Efforts in Responding Global Challenges", 13-14 July, 2021, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2021/nam0714.pdf>, (accessed: 14.06.2022)

32 "Baku Conference of Parliamentary Network of Non-Aligned Movement Has Been a Success", available at <https://meclis.gov.az/news.php?id=1007&lang=en>, (accessed: 09.08.2022)

33 "Non-Aligned Movement Youth Summit Becomes Youth Organization", *AzerTac*, 29 July, available at https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Non_Aligned_Movement_Youth_Summit_becomes_Youth_Organization-2233832, (accessed: 03.08.2022)

sistence, has undoubtedly engendered the current model of a fruitful and enduring relationship between Azerbaijan and the NAM. At a time of global perturbation, when the world more than ever needs unity, effective multilateralism, and collective efforts, the achievements of the movement under Azerbaijani chairmanship will likely carry long-term effects, as NAM has rediscovered itself and demonstrated a stronger ability to make a difference on a global scale.

5. *Summing up*

Azerbaijan's multi-vector foreign policy stands out as a successful model to pursue. The country, therefore, intends to continue on the path that keeps its allies close enough without necessarily getting entangled in complex geopolitical rivalries. In this sense, Azerbaijan's relations with the NAM have so far proven to be solid, reliable, and mutually beneficial. The institution has rediscovered its place and purpose in international politics and increased its profile in international affairs.

Clearly, Azerbaijan's activism and efforts spent towards making NAM a more effective instrument to address collective challenges have paid off, especially during the era of COVID-19-induced troubles that witnessed an economic slump all around the world. However, besides delivering collective material gains, membership in NAM and promotion of the values that it stands for also demonstrates Azerbaijan's strong allegiance to the concept and strategy of non-alliance in its foreign policy. So far, Azerbaijan has opted for a balanced foreign policy and non-alliance in its interactions with military blocs; and this strategy has proven to work well for the country, thus making its partnership with NAM even more enduring and foolproof.

IV. Azerbaijan's Role in the Region: Acts of Balancing in the Context of the Geopolitics of the Russia–Ukraine war

Vasif Huseynov

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has caused a geopolitical earthquake in international relations, triggered the most severe confrontation between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War, and reverberated across the entire globe. For Azerbaijan, the Russia–Ukraine war has been another test for the balanced approach of the country's foreign policy that it has maintained since the mid-1990s. In contrast to Georgia, a country that is in a conflict with Russia and thus is threatened by the situation in Ukraine, and Armenia, a country that is economically and militarily dependent on Russia, Azerbaijan has had much more room for maneuver through these troubled times. Being economically and politically more independent thanks to rich oil and gas revenues, a growing non-energy economic sector, and having a strong strategic alliance with Türkiye, combined with the authority Azerbaijan has in multilateral diplomacy, official Baku feels more confident in dealing with foreign policy challenges.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan remains vigilant in the performance of its foreign policy to avoid risks that might undermine its national security. Azerbaijan works with its northern neighbor on a number of economic issues, which culminated in the recent declaration the country signed with Russia on February 22, 2022, on allied interaction.³⁴ On this basis, the country demonstrated support to Ukraine without provoking discomfort in its relations with Russia. The section below will expand on the details of Azerbaijan's policies vis-à-vis the Russia–Ukraine War and its foreign policy balancing act against the backdrop of the geopolitical tensions in the wider region.

1. *Balancing in Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective*

As previous sections of this report have already introduced, Azerbaijan is pursuing a policy of non-alignment in international relations although, unlike, for example, Moldova, its constitution does not prohibit joining military alliances. The government of Azerbaijan used to characterize its policy of non-alignment, which has been reaffirmed by the country's membership to the Non-Aligned Movement since 2011, as an imperative conditioned by its geographical location. In upholding these principles, Azerbaijan seeks to avoid allying with one geopolitical pole at the expense of the country's relations with other actors.

A quick overview of Azerbaijan's foreign policies in recent years supports this inference. For example, in June 2021, Azerbaijan signed the Shusha Declaration on allied relations with its major ally Türkiye. The countries vowed to militarily support each other if either

³⁴ Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Declaration on Allied Cooperation", *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 25, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-russia-sign-declaration-on-allied-cooperation/> (accessed: 14.04. 2022).

side is attacked by another state or group of states.³⁵ In February 2022, Azerbaijan signed another declaration with Russia in Moscow³⁶—a move that was interpreted by some Azerbaijani experts largely as a move for reassurance that Russia will not “pursue similar policies toward Azerbaijan [as Russia has carried out against Georgia and Ukraine] in exchange for Azerbaijan recognizing Russia as a dominant power in the broader former Soviet region.”³⁷ However, this declaration does not bear the same legal status for Baku as the one signed with Ankara, which has been ratified by the parliaments of both states.

In March 2022, Baku made another important decision and signed a deal with Iran to establish new transport and electricity connections linking the western part of the main territory of Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via the north-western region of Iran.³⁸ This was a timely move that assuaged Tehran’s concerns regarding the transportation projects promoted by Azerbaijan after the 44-day Karabakh War and provided necessary opportunities for Iran to become part of the transit hub emerging in its northern neighborhood.

Azerbaijan is also seeking to develop relations with the EU and is keen to sign a new framework agreement with the union in the near future.³⁹ Azerbaijan is also negotiating with its European partners about the possibility of increasing natural gas exports to the EU and thus helping the efforts of member states to mitigate the risk of dependence on single sources and supply routes.⁴⁰

The tragic experience of Ukraine came on the heels of the country’s abandonment of neutrality and the launch of efforts to accede to the EU and NATO, and has demonstrated the failure of the West to protect Ukraine against the threats and challenges this choice brought about. For Azerbaijan, this reaffirms the importance of the balanced approach in the Azerbaijan’s external orientation. Hence, the signing of the declaration with Russia can be interpreted, *inter alia*, as an attempt by Baku to ensure that Azerbaijan will not face any threats from the north similar to those faced by Ukraine and Georgia. This is critical for a number of reasons, but primarily because of the lack of any capable balancing power that would dare to openly and militarily confront Russia in the case of a challenging security situation that might involve Azerbaijan.

This cautious approach is related, among other factors, to the fact that Azerbaijan–Russia

35 “Azerbaijan, Türkiye Signed Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations”, *Official Website of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 15 June 2021, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/52115> (accessed: 03.06.2022).

36 No:056/22, Azərbaycan Respublikası Xarici İşlər Nazirliyinin Mətbuat xidməti idarəsinin məlumatı [No:056/22 Information of the Press Service of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan], *Mfa.gov.az*, 22 February 2022, available at: <https://mfa.gov.az/az/news/no05622> (accessed: June 3, 2022).

37 Vasif Huseynov, “Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Declaration on Allied Cooperation”, *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 25, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-and-russia-sign-declaration-on-allied-cooperation/> (accessed: 14.04.2022).

38 “Ilham Aliyev Received Delegation Led by Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development”, *Official Website of President of Republic of Azerbaijan*, 11 March 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55603> (accessed: 03.06.2022).

39 “Azerbaijani FM: “Signing of Agreement Between EU and Azerbaijan in 2022 is Possible”, *APA*, February 4, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/azerbaijani-fm-signing-of-agreement-between-eu-and-azerbaijan-in-2022-is-possible-367613> (accessed: 14.04.2022).

40 “Azerbaijan, EU Working to Expand Natural Gas Supplies to Europe”, *Caspiannews.com*, June 4, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-eu-working-to-expand-natural-gas-supplies-to-europe-2022-6-2-30/> (accessed: 10.06.2022).

relations have had problematic phases, both historically and over recent years. Russia's traditional support to Armenia in the former Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, Moscow's military supplies to Yerevan before and during the 44-day Karabakh War, and the deployment of Russian troops as peacekeepers in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan after the war constitute the rationale for Baku's vigilance in its Russia policies. Although the bilateral political ties at the top level remain stable, there are political circles in Russia that have threatened Azerbaijan in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, and the situation became tense in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan in March 2022. For example, Russian State Duma (lower chamber of parliament) deputy Mikhail Delyagin, quite contrary to the spirit of the Azerbaijan–Russia declaration on allied interaction, threatened Azerbaijan on state television with “harsh and unequivocal punishment” if the country disobeys Moscow's demands and sides more closely “with Türkiye, an ally of the United States.”⁴¹ On the Telegram channel, Delyagin asked his followers whether they thought Russia should attack Baku's oil industry infrastructure with nuclear weapons in response to Azerbaijani “aggression” in the Karabakh region.⁴² Although he later apologized for this comment, and although a spokesperson of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied such plans against Azerbaijan,⁴³ the scandal caused concern in Azerbaijani society.

2. *Azerbaijan Supports Ukraine's Territorial Integrity*

Thus, amid Russia's war against Ukraine, the geopolitical situation in the neighborhood has forced Azerbaijan to maintain the balanced approach in foreign policy that this country consciously adopted in the mid-1990s. Despite this balance at the geopolitical level, the political leadership of Azerbaijan, albeit it has refrained from openly criticizing Russia, has declared indirect support to Ukraine by highlighting the importance of international law, especially sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the basis for achieving a ceasefire between the conflicting parties. Azerbaijan and Ukraine officially consider each other ‘strategic partners’ and have consistently supported each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of their internationally recognized borders.⁴⁴ This has been critical in the context of the occupation of part of Azerbaijan's sovereign territories by Armenia in the past and Russia's occupation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.⁴⁵

The continuation of this support amid the Russia–Ukraine tensions came as a surprise for many observers, who expected Azerbaijan to unambiguously side with Russia in all

41 “Rusiya Dövlət Telekanalında Növbəti Təxribat: Azərbaycan Qarşı Təhdid Səsləndirildi” (Russian State Channels Airs Provocation Against Azerbaijan), *İctimai TV*, March 29, 2022, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLmJRhQpoEg&t=51s&ab_channel=İCTİMAİTV (accessed: 14.04.2022).

42 “Russian State Channels Continue Provocation Against Azerbaijan: Proxy MP Delyagin on a Leading Role”, *APA*, March 29, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/political/russian-state-channels-continue-provocation-against-azerbaijan-proxy-mp-delyagin-on-a-leading-role-video-371972> (accessed: 10.06.2022).

43 “Mikhail Delyagin's Statements About Azerbaijan are Unacceptable - Russian MFA”, *APA*, March 29, 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/cis-countries/mikhail-delyagins-statements-about-azerbaijan-are-unacceptable-russian-mfa-updated-372020> (accessed: 10.06.2022).

44 “Presidents of Ukraine and Azerbaijan Signed a Joint Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership”, *Official website of the President of Ukraine (2022)*, available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezidenti-ukrayini-ta-azerbajdzhanu-pidpisali-spilnu-deklar-72389> (accessed: 04.06.2022).

45 “Baku: Ukraine Crisis Should be Solved in Line with Int'l law”, *Azernews.az*, 25 February 2022, available at: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/189785.html> (accessed: 04.06.2022).

critical international issues following the Moscow Declaration of February 2022. Just a month before the breakout of the war, and amid the escalation of hostilities, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev was conspicuously the only leader from the post-Soviet space (excluding the Baltic States) who travelled to Kyiv, where he signed a number of agreements on deepening bilateral cooperation with Ukraine and declared his support for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.⁴⁶ The visit was also seen as an attempt of Baku to mediate between Kyiv and Moscow, as President Aliyev telephoned the Russian leader Vladimir Putin on his return from Ukraine.⁴⁷

Against the backdrop of such a strategic partnership developed between the two countries, Azerbaijan did not confine its support for Ukraine only to political statements during the country's war with Russia. On February 26, 2022, Baku donated a reported €5 million (US\$5.6 million) worth of medicine and medical equipment as humanitarian relief to Ukraine.⁴⁸ Georgia was the only other country in the South Caucasus that sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine, though in a smaller amount of approximately \$315,000, while Armenia did not send any.⁴⁹ Besides this, all the gasoline filling stations of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in Ukraine were instructed by Baku to provide free fuel for ambulances and emergency vehicles, adding that the first plane with medical assistance from Azerbaijan was expected to arrive in the early hours of February 27. Considering that there are more than 50 SOCAR gas filling stations in Ukraine, this assistance cannot be underestimated. Azerbaijan also provided fuel for Ukraine's agricultural needs during the sowing campaign. According to Ukraine's ambassador to Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan had provided a humanitarian aid worth \$20 million from the beginning of the war until the early July.⁵⁰

3. *Summing up*

The launch of Russia's war against Ukraine caused alarm signals across the neighboring regions, including in the South Caucasus countries. The geopolitical restrictions caused by their location in a widely contested region where Russia still enjoys strong influence shaped the responses of these three countries to the war. Azerbaijan found more room for maneuver thanks to the country's economic independence, traditionally balanced approach in foreign policy, and recently reinforced strategic alliance with the NATO member Türkiye. Baku has, nevertheless, been vigilant enough not to provoke Russia and

46 "Presidents of Ukraine and Azerbaijan Signed a Joint Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership", *Official website of the President of Ukraine*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezidenti-ukrayini-ta-azerbajdzhanu-pidpisali-spilnu-deklar-72389> (accessed: 14.04.2022).

47 "Ilham Aliyev Made a Phone Call to President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin", *Official Website of President of Republic of Azerbaijan* (2022), available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55276> (accessed: 04.06.2022).

48 "Azerbaijan Sends Humanitarian Aid to War-Hit Ukraine, Vows to Supply Ambulances With Fuel Free of Charge", *Caspiannews.com*, February 28, 2022, available at: <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-sends-humanitarian-aid-to-war-hit-ukraine-vows-to-supply-ambulances-with-fuel-free-of-charge-2022-2-28-0/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

49 "Georgia Sends Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine", *Civil.ge*, February 27, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/475744> (accessed: 04.06.2022).

50 "Ambassador: "Azerbaijan Has Sent Humanitarian Aid Worth \$20 Million to Ukraine So Far", *Report*, July 5, 2022, available at: <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/ambassador-azerbaijan-has-sent-humanitarian-aid-worth-20-million-to-ukraine-so-far/> (accessed: 20.07.2022).

has sustained economic ties with Moscow, which were further cemented in their joint declaration on allied interaction signed on February 22, 2022. The declaration was largely seen by Azerbaijani political experts as reassurance that Russia would not pursue similar policies vis-à-vis Azerbaijan as it did in its relations with Ukraine and Georgia. This reflects the geopolitical situation around Azerbaijan when two of the country's post-Soviet partners (Russia and Ukraine) clashed in a violent war in late February 2022.

Although Baku had to refrain from moves that would cause a backlash from its powerful northern neighbor, it did not remain indifferent to the troubles of Ukraine. Azerbaijani officials underscored the importance of territorial integrity and the inviolability of internationally-recognized borders in the context of the Russia–Ukraine War. Baku also provided humanitarian assistance and ordered its gas filling stations to fill the tanks of ambulances and emergency vehicles free of charge. Azerbaijan is also providing fuel for vehicles in Ukraine that are involved in the agricultural sector.

V. The War in Ukraine and the 44-day Karabakh War: Similarities and Differences

Javid Valiyev

Azerbaijan was the chairman of NAM when the 44-day Karabakh War started in Fall, 2020. Azerbaijan's restoration of its territorial integrity based on norms and principles of international law was fully supported by the NAM as the latter became the most important international movement that showed open and direct support to Azerbaijan before, during and after the 44-day Karabakh War. NAM backed Azerbaijan both by adopting its own resolution on the matter and extending support within the United Nations. As Esmira Jafarova mentioned, during the 44-day Patriotic War, NAM countries demonstrated a persistent and principled position within the UN Security Council in support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity that prevented the adoption of a biased document.⁵¹

1. *Russia and the West's Policy Toward Post-Soviet Conflicts*

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left a series of problems behind. The separatist movements and occupations affecting the internationally recognized territories and borders of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova have created insecurity and instability in the region for the past 30 years. For the solution of these problems, various mediation forums involving international actors served to freeze the problems rather than solving them, and the countries were advised to make peace with the new reality.

Some politicians and experts around the world stated that the existing realities in these countries were irreversible and that the states had to accept the situation and make concessions regarding their territorial integrity. At this point, especially after the military operations initiated by Georgia in the separatist regions of South Ossetia in 2008 resulted in the harsh military intervention of Russia, the hopelessness had increased considerably.

With the annexation of Crimea to Russia in 2014, this hopelessness increased a little more, as Ukraine joined the ranks of these countries. Since that time, the mediation activities of Russia and the West have failed. According to Taras Kuzio, the aim of the West is to approach the problem in the region with a logic that delays and freezes it.⁵²

Therefore, neither the West nor Russia was willing to solve the problems faced by these countries. In general, the members of international mediation bodies have established bargaining tools among themselves. Moreover, these have sometimes turned into tools of geopolitical struggle among these parties. The Minsk Group, which was established to resolve both the old Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Crimea issue, actually caused the diplomatic deadlock. For the newly independent states, there were generally not enough opportunities and resources to counter this situation.

51 Esmira Jafarova, "Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement", Azerbaijan's Non-Alliance, *AIR Center Report*. 2022.

52 "Taras Kuzio, Ukraine Can Learn From Azerbaijan's Recent Victory", <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-can-learn-from-azerbajjans-recent-victory/>, (accessed: 17.11.2020).

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, one of the affected countries, on the one hand made diplomatic moves, and on the other increased its military power to show that it would not reconcile with the invasion by Armenia. The Four Day War between Azerbaijan and Armenia in April 2016 also demonstrated that Azerbaijan would not accept the occupation as a reality. Although this war ended with the mediation of Russia, it was not diplomacy that ended the occupation. This deadlock caused a new war in the region in 2020.

2. *Azerbaijan's Patriotic War and Influence in Ukraine*

In 2020, during the 44-day Karabakh War, Azerbaijan ended 30 years of Armenian occupation with a successful military operation. Azerbaijan's successful military and diplomatic operation created hope and opportunities to change the situation not only in the South Caucasus but also in the whole Eurasian space and in the regions where such problems exist. Azerbaijan had been successful both militarily and diplomatically, and thus presented a different model for those states that faced occupation. After this war, politicians and experts from many countries began to think about the possibility of resolving their conflicts and cited Azerbaijan's just war as an example.

In particular, comparisons began to be made, in various aspects, between the Russia–Ukraine war that started in 2022 and the 44-day Karabakh War. Now, Ukrainian experts are looking to protect their lands based on the Azerbaijani military model. President Ilham Aliyev answered a Ukrainian expert's question, "What would you suggest to Ukraine as an occupied state?" thus: "Never acknowledge the invasion, trust yourself and never trust the decisions of international organizations."⁵³ This means that, on the way to the 44-day Karabakh War, Azerbaijan determined its path by relying on its own strength.

The most important difference between the just war of Azerbaijan and the war in Ukraine is that Azerbaijan took into account the regional balance. Azerbaijan established a strategic relationship with Türkiye, one of the strongest states in the region, and was able to get its serious support. Moreover, the members of the Azerbaijani army, who received military training in Türkiye and actively participated in military exercises, also manifested particular success in this war. In this sense, Türkiye's political backing has been a great support to Azerbaijan in terms of political, geopolitical, psychological, and military aspects. Some experts suggest, by drawing lessons from the Karabakh war, that Kyiv should establish regional geopolitical alliances with the nation and to develop relations with Türkiye and Israel, similar to Azerbaijan at the same point.⁵⁴

The 44-day Karabakh War coincided with a period when relations between Türkiye and Russia were good, and Azerbaijan's relations with Türkiye and the Karabakh Victory were not seen as a threat to Russia. Despite the strong propaganda of the Armenian diaspora and lobby in Russia, Moscow did not see the Azerbaijan–Türkiye cooperation as a threat to itself. In fact, Azerbaijan and Türkiye demonstrated that this cooperation

53 Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference Themed "South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation" at ADA University, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55909>, (accessed: 29.04.2022).

54 Taras Kuzio, "Ukraine Can Learn From Azerbaijan's Recent Victory", <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-can-learn-from-azerbajjans-recent-victory/>, (accessed: 17.11.2020).

between them is not against Moscow. Both states have taken into account Moscow's sensitivities on certain issues. They did not exclude Moscow in solving problems and did not hesitate to cooperate with it.

The bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Russia also affected the results of the 44-day Karabakh War. Although Russia continued to provide arms to Armenia during the war, Moscow generally tried to show a balanced stance. Azerbaijan fought directly with Russia's strategic ally Armenia, but Russia did not intervene directly. In fact, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin said that, according to international law, Karabakh is the territory of Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ This was perhaps the biggest difference between the Azerbaijan and Ukrainian wars. Azerbaijan's relationship with Russia was, for years, the most important factor in Russia's neutrality within a certain framework. The fact that Russia did not directly intervene in the war caused the war to be short. Armenia became isolated in the military field and the conflict ended with the victory of Azerbaijan.

In fact, perhaps the most important difference was that, in practice, Azerbaijan did not receive a particularly fair approach in the international arena. Even before the war, unlike the situation in Georgia and Ukraine, many Western politicians or international organizations did not support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in the face of the occupation. In terms of international law, all these countries faced invasion but the aid shown to Ukraine was not delivered to Azerbaijan. Since 1993, Western countries had imposed a military embargo on Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijan was unfairly and without evidence accused of bringing fighters from abroad, a large number of foreign fighters have been allowed to come to Ukraine from abroad.

3. International Reaction to the 44-day Karabakh War and the War in Ukraine

While Ukraine's plight has gained international support, Azerbaijan has been subject to deep injustice in this regard. Despite the resolutions of the UN Security Council and the European Court of Human Rights, in Azerbaijan's case the aggressor, Armenia, was never sanctioned. International law does not support an attack on a sovereign state, a member of the UN. During Azerbaijan's self-defense operation in the 44-day Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's legal actions were presented as illegal by the Western media. And actions that the global community accepts as unlawful in Ukraine war were apparently lawful for Armenia in the 44-day Karabakh War.

During the 44-day Karabakh War, Human Rights Watch investigated missile, rocket, and artillery attacks by Armenian forces⁵⁶ that struck cities, towns, and villages in Aghdam, Barda, Fizuli, Ganja, Goranboy, Naftalan, and Tartar in Azerbaijan. The Human Rights Watch report examined 18 of these strikes that killed 40 civilians and wounded dozens more. A government agency, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action, found that unguided Smerch artillery rockets and Scud-B ballistic missiles were used in attacks on Ganja between October 4 and 17, killing 32 civilians. Scud-B missiles, which are capable

55 "Nagorno-Karabakh Inseparable Part of Azerbaijan, Putin Says", <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/nagorno-karabakh-inseparable-part-of-azerbaijan-putin-says>, (accessed: 23.11.2020).

56 "Armenia: Unlawful Rockets, Missile Strikes on Azerbaijan", <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/armenia-unlawful-rocket-missile-strikes-azerbaijan>, (accessed:11.12.2020).

of carrying 985-kilogram high-explosive warheads, can miss their intended target by at least 500 meters.

In addition to causing civilian casualties, the Armenian attacks damaged homes, businesses, schools, a health clinic, and contributed to mass displacement. According to the Azerbaijani prosecutor general's office,⁵⁷ 98 civilians were killed and 414 wounded during the armed conflict. While Armenia was attacking civilian areas of Azerbaijan with ballistic missiles, not even a small rocket was fired into the territory of Armenia by Azerbaijan.

The same Iskander type missile fired at Ukraine was fired at the city of Shusha,⁵⁸ the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. The aim of the Armenian administration, which realized that it was losing the war, was to create fear and panic by causing more people to die.

Azerbaijan faced a hybrid attack in Karabakh. On the one hand, the Armenian army attacked civilian residential areas of Azerbaijan with ballistic missiles; on the other hand, it tried to create fear and panic by attempting to hit strategic infrastructure such as Azerbaijan's water dams⁵⁹ and energy lines.⁶⁰ If Azerbaijan's missile defense system had not worked well, there would have been an ecological catastrophe in the country.

Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones played an active role in the liberation of Azerbaijan's territories from occupation. During the 44-day Karabakh War, Azerbaijan destroyed or took as trophies⁶¹ 125 artillery pieces, 366 tanks, 7 S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, more than 50 other anti-aircraft missile systems, 52 trucks, and other equipment. Some of these were destroyed by Bayraktar TB2s. However, during the 44-day Karabakh War, the Armenian diaspora and supporting lobbyists in many countries, including the U.S.A.⁶² and Canada,⁶³ succeeded in imposing sanctions on the Turkish arms industry because of the success of this weapons systems. Thus, the Bayraktar TB2 was presented as a "weapon of unacceptable aggression"⁶⁴ when used in the 44-day Karabakh War; however, when it performed the same function in Ukraine,⁶⁵ it was accepted as a savior.

After the November 10 Declaration, Azerbaijan returned all the Armenian prisoners of war⁶⁶ (POW) captured during the 44-day Karabakh War. The country returned over 1,700

57 "Civilian Death Toll in Armenian Attacks Reaches 98", <https://www.azernews.az/aggression/173321.html>, (accessed: 30.11.2020).

58 "Armenian PM says Russian Missiles Don't Work", <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/armenian-pm-says-russian-missiles-don-t-work-44516>, (accessed: 25.02.2021).

59 "Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Mingachevir Dam Targeted", https://www.ooskanews.com/story/2020/10/armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-mingachevir-dam-targeted-reports_180206, (accessed: 15.10.2020).

60 "Azerbaijan Prevents Armenian Attacks on Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipelines", <https://thefrontierpost.com/azerbaijan-prevents-armenian-attack-on-baku-tbilisi-ceyhan-pipeline/>, (accessed: 03.03.2022).

61 "Ilham Aliyev Attended Opening of Military Trophy Park in Baku", <https://president.az/en/articles/view/51067>, (accessed: 12.04.2021).

62 "US Senator Moves to Ban Turkish Drone Export", <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/us-senator-moves-to-ban-turkish-drone-exports-azerbaijan-aid>, (accessed: 05.12.2021).

63 "Canadian Export Freeze on Türkiye Extend to UAV Engines", <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/defence-notes/canadian-export-freeze-türkiye-extends-uav-engines/>, (accessed: 26.10.2020).

64 "Trench Warfare, Drones and Covering Civilians: on the Ground in the Nagorno Karabakh", <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/oct/13/trench-warfare-drones-and-covering-civilians-on-the-ground-in-nagorno-karabakh>, (accessed: 13.10.2020).

65 "Fresh Supplies of Bayraktar Drones TB2 Arrives in Ukraine", <https://www.defenseworld.net/2022/03/02/fresh-supply-of-bayraktar-tb2-drones-arrives-in-ukraine.html#.YiOxfjFBw2w>, (accessed: 02.03.2022).

66 "Azerbaijan Releases all POWs to Armenian Side", https://tass.com/world/1266031?utm_source=google.com.tr&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com.tr&utm_referrer=google.com.tr, (accessed: 15.03.2021).

dead bodies of Armenian servicemen⁶⁷ left in the liberated areas after the war. However, after the November 10 Declaration, Armenian militias, having passed through the Lachin Corridor, attacked Azerbaijan and even killed civilians. As these Armenian militia groups attacked Azerbaijani civilians after the November 2020 trilateral declaration was signed, they are not considered to be POWs. However, Armenian allies in the West and Armenian diaspora representatives have been manipulating this issue as a means of pressure against Azerbaijan.

After the de-occupation, the massacres committed by Armenia in the Azerbaijani territories emerged clearly. They came to light after the war when the destruction in the cities of Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil,⁶⁸ as well as of the cultural heritage and religious places, became vividly evident. The sensitivity shown to Ukraine on a similar issue was never extended to Azerbaijan.

This unfair approach and accusations in the international arena against Azerbaijan encouraged those who defended the aggressor. In this sense, some Armenian scholars have compared the 44-day Karabakh War with the Ukraine war. The purpose of this comparison is to undermine the legal context of the military operation of Azerbaijan, which was conducted fully in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter (self-defense).

Azerbaijan even provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine⁶⁹ during the war and supported the peaceful resolution of the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states. The President of Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, thanked Azerbaijan for this and suggested Baku as a place where Ukraine could meet with Russia.⁷⁰

4. *Summing up*

Armenia occupied Azerbaijani territories for 30 years, ignoring UN Security Council resolutions. As a result of the First Karabakh War, more than 1 million people became refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). The reason for the outbreak of the 44-day Karabakh War was Armenia's withdrawal from the previously agreed principles in the negotiations within the OSCE Minsk Group⁷¹ and its desire to seize more Azerbaijani lands.⁷² The aggressor in this war was Armenia, and Azerbaijan liberated its lands using its right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.⁷³ Azerbaijan did not attack

67 "Azerbaijan FM: Bodies of up to 1600 Armenian Servicemen Handed Over to Opposite Side", <https://apa.az/en/xeber/foreign-politics/azerbaijani-fm-bodies-of-up-to-1600-armenian-servicemen-handed-over-to-opposite-side-349623>, (accessed: 19.05.2021).

68 "UNESCO Turns Blind Eyes to Armenia's Barbarism in Karabakh", <https://www.azernews.az/nation/189556.html>, (accessed: 21.02.2022).

69 "Ukraine Envoy Thanks President Aliyev for Humanitarian Aid", <https://www.azernews.az/nation/192646.html>, (accessed: 21.04.2022).

70 "Ukrainian President Offers Baku as Negotiation Platform with Russia", <https://www.azernews.az/nation/189891.html>, (accessed: 27.02.2022).

71 "Armenia's Aggression, Minsk Group's Failure Causes of Clashes Over Occupied Nagorno-Karabakh", <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/armenias-aggression-minsk-groups-failure-causes-of-clashes-over-occupied-nagorno-karabakh>, (accessed: 02.10.2020).

72 Eduard Abrahamyan, "Rationalizing the Tonoyan Doctrine: Armenia's Active Deterrence Strategy", <https://jamestown.org/program/rationalizing-the-tonoyan-doctrine-armenias-active-deterrence-strategy/>, (accessed: 02.03.2020).

73 Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no27220-statement-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-enru>, No:272/20

the Armenian civilian population; Armenia fired rockets at civilian cities, killing dozens of civilians.

In terms of similarities between the war in Ukraine and the 44-day Karabakh War, certainly both countries were attacked, the territorial integrity of both was violated, civilian settlements in both countries were attacked with missiles, and both countries fought to protect their territorial integrity and sovereignty. When it comes to differences, it is clear that, while international support was shown for Ukraine, the necessary support was not given to Azerbaijan's just war. While sanctions were imposed on Russia because of the war in Ukraine, Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan was never punished. Bayraktar TB-2 UAVs were presented as the "angel of death" in the war of Azerbaijan, while being regarded as "saving angels" during the Ukraine war.

VI. Energy Resources as an Important Component of Azerbaijan's Independent Foreign Policy

Shahmar Hajiyev

In the 21st century, energy resources are one of the key factors for economic growth, and political and social stability. Diversifying energy supplies, securing access to energy-rich regions, as well as ensuring the safe export of energy resources to global energy markets are among the most important objectives of energy producers and consumers. Nowadays, relations between states are being shaped by factors deriving from the national interest and the national security agenda. Many countries have shifted their foreign policies towards an economization strategy, that is, assigning particular importance to the economic priorities and instruments in foreign policy, as in the case of Azerbaijan, bordered by large neighbors and influenced by yet larger powers.⁷⁴

It is worth noting that the broader Caspian Basin—a region at the center of what has been called the “strategic energy ellipse” between Russia and the Persian Gulf—remains an important alternative source of oil and natural gas for European and Asian markets. The Republic of Azerbaijan, as a resource-rich country with deep ties to several international powers on its borders, is uniquely situated to play a pivotal role in regional affairs.⁷⁵ Exploration of energy resources and their export to global energy markets played a crucial role in the economic growth of the country. During the Soviet era, the country's foreign policy and energy strategy were formed in accordance with the overall direction of Soviet ideology. Azerbaijan's crude oil was exported through the Soviet infrastructure network. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan became an independent nation and consequently started implementing an energy policy that supported its national interest. Energy revenues played a crucial role in socio-political and economic growth. Using massive revenues from crude oil and natural gas exports, the country developed other sectors of the economy and, most importantly, invested energy earnings in human capital.

1. *The Geo-political Importance of the “Contract of the Century”*

Azerbaijan ensures energy security at both regional and global levels. The energy factor has also become a key aspect of a country's foreign policy. The crude oil and natural gas factor shaped the relationship between Azerbaijan and the West. The “Contract of the Century” signed on September 20, 1994, between the government of Azerbaijan led by Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003) and a consortium of Western energy companies has created a backbone for energy strategy and facilitated economic growth. It is worth noting that energy resources can be useful and profitable when it is possible to attract foreign capital investment and identify potential buyers for energy resources. The “Contract of the Cen-

⁷⁴ R.S. Yadav, “Energy Diplomacy in Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy”, *THINK INDIA (Quarterly Journal)*, Vol-22-Issue-3 (July-September, 2019), p. 570

⁷⁵ Shahmar Hajiyev, “America's Need for a Stronger Partnership with Azerbaijan”, *Stratfor*, April 10, 2013, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/americas-need-stronger-partnership-azerbaijan> (accessed: 25.07. 2022).

ture” attracted huge foreign capital investment to the country’s energy sector, and the ‘oil factor’ provided key leverage for addressing important issues such as the strengthening of independence and the development of the national economy. In fact, using energy resources, the country started implementing a foreign policy course that supported its national interests and increased its geo-political importance in the region.

Today, the appropriate and effective energy policy successfully implemented by the government of President Ilham Aliyev has strengthened Azerbaijan’s position in the world as a reliable energy partner. On September 14, 2017, an amended and restated “Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli Joint Development and Production Sharing Agreement” was signed in Baku. This marked a new stage in the development of the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field. According to the amended document, which was extended until 2050, BP remains the operator of the project while SOCAR’s share has increased from 11 to 25 percent and Azerbaijan’s direct share in profitable oil amounts to 75 percent.⁷⁶

The Azerbaijani government continued its successful energy policy and, in 2019, ACG sanctioned the Azeri Central East development project. This \$6 billion development includes a new offshore platform and facilities designed to process up to 100,000 barrels of oil per day.⁷⁷ The signing of this “Contract of the New Century” resulted from an effective energy strategy that further strengthened Azerbaijan’s position as a leading state in the region. The significant aspect of the “Contract of Century” was the fact that, along with crude oil, natural gas would also be extracted, and all quantities of gas extracted would belong solely to Azerbaijan. With this in mind, it is necessary to emphasize that natural resources thus became a historically important factor in the future development of the country, as well as forming an important step towards the country’s improved future performance in the international arena.

2. *Crude Oil and Natural Gas Projects*

Taking into account that the Caspian Sea is landlocked, and its energy resources are located at a great distance from the world’s major energy consumers, building pipelines to export such resources was always high on the agenda. The “Contract of the Century” created an opportunity for the realization of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) Main Export Oil Pipeline, which opened a gateway to the Mediterranean region. This interregional project ushered in a new era of economic development and allowed Azerbaijan an opportunity to export its oil without transiting Russia, relying instead on Georgia and Türkiye to connect it with Western energy consumers.

From a geopolitical point of view, BTC was the first project connecting the region with the Western world. This project has been instrumental in developing and strengthening the so-called East–West Energy Transit Corridor.⁷⁸ The BTC project was used effectively

⁷⁶ Oil sector, available at: <https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/contract>, (accessed: 20.06.2022).

⁷⁷ “BP and Partners Sanction \$6 Billion Azeri Central East Development Offshore Azerbaijan”, 19 April 2019, available at: <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/bp-and-partners-sanction-6-billion-dollar-azeri-central-east-development-offshore-azerbaijan.html>, (accessed: 10.07.2022)

⁷⁸ S. Cornell and F. Ismailzade, “*Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West, 2005*”, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program*, 2005, available at: https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/2005_01_MONO_Starr-Cornell_BTC-Pipeline.pdf pp. 34-38 (accessed: 20.07.2022).

as a defensive tool of Azerbaijan's foreign policy because it gave impetus for economic, political, and security cooperation with Türkiye and fast integration with Europe. Also, Israeli–Azerbaijani energy cooperation has become of vital importance for Israel's energy security while, on the other hand, it has given Azerbaijan the opportunity to build a special relationship with Israel and the Jewish diaspora. Azerbaijan's strong ties with Türkiye and Israel make the country an ideal partner on a range of geopolitical issues.

Moreover, the pipeline provided insurance for Western consumers and a guarantee that Western energy markets will no longer depend only on a single large supplier of energy resources. From a strategic point of view, the BTC pipeline is a very important project not only for Azerbaijan but also for all involved parties. It provides energy security for consumers and, as they got access to a new energy-rich hub, they diversified respective supply routes, which contributes positively to meeting the growing energy demand and developing their economies. For other parties, the project opened a new opportunity for economic development, huge money sources from export and transit, as well as the opening of new workplaces. In addition, the BTC project can also be seen as a guarantee of regional security because, by having close economic relations and interdependence, the states are expected to choose cooperation.

Another important aspect of the project is the fact that BTC stimulated the development of another vital project for Azerbaijan—the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), exporting natural gas from Azerbaijan to Türkiye via Georgia. The BTC project was strategically important because it gave impetus for cooperation among the post-Soviet Republics in the region. Azerbaijan and Georgia in particular established very close political and economic bilateral relations as well as strengthening their political, economic, and security links with Türkiye and Europe.

Briefly, the BTC project established close ties between energy suppliers and consumers, contributing to their economic development as well as energy security. As Jonathan Elkind argues, “being states in search of their political and economic identities, BTC provides the participating states with a basis for their strategic role of suppliers and transit countries of the world's most important commodity: energy.”⁷⁹

3. *The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC)*

As mentioned previously, the BTC project opened a new era in regional energy cooperation. As a net gas exporter, Azerbaijan needed the necessary transit infrastructure to export natural gas to European energy markets, therefore, the availability of infrastructure is one of the main factors determining the effective management of energy resources for the country.

It was very important for Azerbaijan to ensure the operation of the “Southern Gas Corridor” (SGC) by providing state support to the effective implementation of the full-field

79 J. Elkind, “Economic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West”, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program*, 2005, available at: https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/2005_01_MONO_Starr-Cornell_BTC-Pipeline.pdf p. 39 (accessed: 20.07.2022).

development of the Shah Deniz gas-condensate field (“SD2”), the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCPX), as well as the implementation of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) projects. All segments of the SGC are significant energy infrastructure projects that open new opportunities not only for Azerbaijan but also for the Caspian region to export natural gas to European energy markets.

One of these important energy projects is the TANAP pipeline. TANAP can claim to be the longest (1,811 km) and largest-diameter (56 in.) natural gas pipeline in Türkiye, the Middle East, and Europe and was built to transport the natural gas extracted in Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz Region first to Türkiye and then to Europe. TANAP could be expanded up to 31 bcm transmission capacity, which would support the energy security of involved states.⁸⁰ This project is an important segment of the SGC and has established a strong basis for the TAP project, which is the final section of the SGC for delivering Azerbaijani gas to the European energy market.

It is clear that this is an interregional energy project that supports connectivity and regional cooperation. TANAP plays a very crucial role as the project has both economic and geopolitical significance. Azerbaijan exports natural gas to the European energy market, which is highly dependent on Russian gas sources, and the security of supply and sources is a sensitive issue for EU energy security. By delivering new gas sources from the Caspian Sea to European energy consumers, Azerbaijan will contribute to EU energy security. TANAP is also important for Türkiye, which will be able to meet both its own growing natural gas demand and become a transit country. Energy projects make Türkiye a regional energy hub and increase its geopolitical importance.

For many years, Azerbaijan supplied natural gas to Georgia and Türkiye via the SCP and TANAP. However, the success of Azerbaijan’s energy strategy and the availability of its resources opened an opportunity for delivering Caspian gas directly to European energy consumers. The TAP, with an initial capacity 10 bcm/y, is the European leg of the SGC that transports gas to Europe from Azerbaijan’s offshore Shah Deniz Stage Two (SD2) project. Connecting with the Trans Anatolian Pipeline at the Greek–Turkish border, TAP crosses Northern Greece, Albania and the Adriatic Sea before coming ashore in Southern Italy to connect to the Italian natural gas network. A future expansion will increase the pipeline’s throughput capacity to 20 bcm/y.⁸¹ TAP is a mega energy project that involves several countries, international energy companies, and financial institutions such as ADB, EBRD, and EIB. The TAP project became a reality due to the cooperation of all involved actors.

The SGC, with all its sections, is a very important inter-regional energy project and a great achievement for Azerbaijan. The SGC widened economic, political, and security cooperation with Türkiye, as well as establishing strong relationships with European partners. From a geopolitical standpoint, TAP is the first pipeline supplying Caspian gas to Europe. Taking into account the volatility in oil markets, it was highly important for the country to be a net gas exporter. TAP demonstrated cooperation and integration between

80 “TANAP”, available at: <https://www.tanap.com/en/>, (accessed: 15.06.2022)

81 “TAP”, available at: <https://www.tap-ag.com/>, (accessed: 15.06.2022)

Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and European countries. In addition, the pipeline contributes to the economic, political, and energy security of all involved actors.

For Türkiye, the realization of the SGC was also very important. The Turkish leg of the SGC, TANAP, diversified Turkish gas sources. According to Azerbaijan's Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov, "Azerbaijan plans to increase gas exports to Europe to 9.1 bcm by 2022. Since the launch of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, 9.7 bcm of gas have been exported to Europe. In 2022, gas exports to Türkiye will increase to 8.2 bcm and to Europe to 9.1 bcm."⁸²

As can be seen, Türkiye managed to decrease its high gas supply dependence using Azerbaijani gas. In addition, as one of the key actors of the SGC, Türkiye is interested in becoming an energy hub to support EU energy security. The energy cooperation between Türkiye and Europe will contribute positively to mutual cooperation and dialogue.

For Europe, first of all, the TAP pipeline provides diversification of gas sources and supply routes. Azerbaijani gas supplies will reach south-eastern, central, and western Europe, and those regions have high gas dependence on a few suppliers. In general, analysis of the European gas markets shows that EU gas consumption will increase, therefore 10 bcm/year of gas volume is important for European consumers. Additionally, the European Green Deal aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the Pact indicates natural gas as one of the main energy sources for the future.

In the South Caucasus, the end of the 44-day Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan has brought new realities and economic perspectives to the region. Azerbaijan also welcomes Central Asian countries to join the SGC network to supply gas to Europe. Azerbaijan has achieved its strategic goals by pursuing an effective energy policy, and the country's role as a net energy exporter as well as an exporter of energy security is growing year by year. Access to new energy markets for natural gas exports, and increasing those exports, are among the priorities of the country's energy strategy. It is especially noteworthy that neither the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic nor the 44-day Karabakh War prevented Azerbaijan from completing the SGC project. The finalization of all these energy projects supports regional economic integration and energy security.

4. *Summing up*

Analyzing Azerbaijan's energy strategy as an important component of foreign policy, it is worth noting that there are essentially two layers of interests in Azerbaijan: The first are the interests of regional powers such as Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. The second concerns non-regional powers such as Europe and the United States. Türkiye, as a strategic partner of Azerbaijan, supports mutual cooperation in all areas, and energy cooperation with Ankara played a critical role in finalizing all the above-mentioned energy projects. In contrast, non-regional powers are mainly interested in the Caspian Basin's energy re-

⁸² "Azerbaijan Plans to Increase Gas Supplies to Europe to 9.1 Billion Cubic Meters", *APA*, 12 March 2022, available at: <https://apa.az/en/energy-and-industry/azerbaijan-plans-to-increase-gas-supplies-to-europe-to-91-billion-cubic-meters-370849>, (accessed: 01.07.2022).

sources and their own relations with regional powers.⁸³ Azerbaijan has proved itself to be a reliable energy partner in all projects and with all partners. The country can potentially increase gas deliveries to Europe by using its reserves in the Caspian Sea and accessing hydrocarbon sources from other countries. So far, Azerbaijan has managed to realize the objectives of its energy strategy successfully. All the energy projects discussed clearly illustrate that Azerbaijan successfully implements its energy policy, supporting regional cooperation and connectivity, as well as strengthening the national economy.

Summing up, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has again raised concerns over global energy security. Naturally, this means that further escalations between the West and Russia could hit global energy markets even harder. To this end, energy politics will be high on the agenda over the coming years. In fact, energy projects have raised Azerbaijan's geopolitical importance in the world, and energy strategy will continue to be an important component of the country's foreign policy.

83 Shahmar Hajiyev, "America's Need for a Stronger Partnership with Azerbaijan", *Stratfor*, April 10, 2013, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/americas-need-stronger-partnership-azerbaijan>, (accessed: 25.07.2022).

VII. Conclusion

This work is dedicated to the study of Azerbaijan's non-aligned and balanced foreign policy course and has studied several related topics. The aim has been to enable readers to better understand the reasoning behind Azerbaijan's choices in favor of remaining a non-bloc, non-aligned country with a staunch preference for a multi-pronged foreign policy that also entails building good neighborly relations and lasting partnerships, while at the same time standing for universal norms and values, and abidance to the norms and principles of international law.

In the theoretical part, different theories related to neutrality (non-alignment) and scholarly debates in this regard were discussed. Section II suggests that there is a consensus amongst international relations scholars that neutrality (nonalignment) is the optimal strategy for smaller states that are stuck between great-power rivalries. This allows such states to maintain ties with rival great powers and increases their chances of preserving their independence and security. Having juxtaposed different theoretical assumptions in this regard, the section concludes that Azerbaijan's choice for neutrality and non-alignment is best explained by neoclassical realism (i.e., the perceptions of the political elite, their ability to mobilize societal resources to implement foreign policy, and domestic political dynamics).

In the section that focuses on Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy and its relations with the NAM, the country's choice to remain non-aligned and neutral was discussed in greater detail. It is asserted that Azerbaijan is consistent in pursuing its multi-vectored foreign policy that stems from the assessment of its national interests and finding equilibrium in its interactions with diverse geopolitical realms. The country has established itself on the path of pursuing a balanced and multi-pronged foreign policy that seeks equidistance from all political and military blocs and integration initiatives. Azerbaijan has endorsed a pragmatist foreign policy that prioritizes nurturing good-neighborly relations with its regional neighbors and striking the right balance in its interactions with its partners.

In this regard, Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus region to have become a full member of the NAM. This was a logical move, as Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that pursues a multi-vector, balanced foreign policy course without seeking close association with any competing political-military blocs. Azerbaijan's belief in the values of international cooperation and multilateralism became the driving force behind its chairmanship of NAM, which, although originally set to run from 2019–2022, was extended by one more year, until 2023.⁸⁴

Thus, the success of Azerbaijan's foreign policy lies in its ability to look in many directions and embrace its increasing global role as chair of the NAM, pragmatic partnerships, and being a land of tolerance and interfaith dialogue. This delicate balancing act is the essence of its multi-vectored foreign policy, which is likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future.

⁸⁴ Political Declaration, "Non-Aligned Movement at the center of multilateral efforts in responding global challenges", 13-14 July 2021, available at <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2021/nam0714.pdf> (accessed 12.07.2022), p.10

Section IV discussed the similarities and differences between the war in Ukraine and the 44-day Karabakh War in the context of the benefits of non-alignment, while the next section focused on Azerbaijan's posture in the Russia–Ukraine war. It is underscored that the launch of Russia's war against Ukraine sent shockwaves across wider regions, including in the South Caucasus. However, Azerbaijan, nevertheless found more room for maneuver thanks to the country's economic independence, traditionally balanced approach, non-alignment in foreign policy, and recently reinforced strategic alliance with NATO member Türkiye.

Last but not least, the final section of the work focused on Azerbaijan's energy strategy and political and economic gains from its international energy cooperation. This section argued that it is thanks to an effective and thoughtful energy strategy and economic foresight that Azerbaijan was able to maintain and stay faithful to its choice of non-alignment. Self-sufficiency and economic success made this choice workable for the country without having to bandwagon with any competing geopolitical bloc. Azerbaijan's contribution to Europe's energy security is already appreciated by the European Union and, today, the country's energy policy is aimed at modernizing the energy sector and adapting policy instruments and the regulatory framework to rapidly changing global energy markets. Developments in global energy markets, mainly the future of natural gas in the decarbonization effort of Europe, will affect Azerbaijan's energy relations with its partners.



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