
EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING TÜRKİYE-RUSSIA RIVALRY IN THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Second Karabakh War in line with the policies of state and non-state actors with interests in the region. In this context, the study examines the policies of international organisations such as the UN, EU, OSCE and OIC, as well as actors such as the US, France, Iran and Israel. The study uses case analysis, a qualitative research method. In this context, official information, documents and comments from these actors, as well as periodicals on the subject, were used in the study.

Key words: Karabakh, Türkiye, Russia, Rivalry, International Actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to comprehensively analyse the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, the role of systemic factors should also be taken into account. Based on the neoclassical assumption, addressing the actors related to the region will increase the validity of the findings. In this respect, in addition to the policies of international actors, a very important factor to be taken into account in the period

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of the Battle of Homeland is the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the whole world. This case, which resulted in the international community's self-isolation, including the disruption of the global supply chain, is one of the possible factors that encouraged Armenia to launch the attack that started the war on 27 September 2020. However, this situation did not only benefit Yerevan, but also provided a relative advantage for Azerbaijan. In addition, Armenia may have taken into account that the dose of Türkiye's response would be low in the current pandemic situation. However, Ankara's decisive and deterrent attitude from the first minutes of the war surprised both Armenia and the actors supporting it. On the other hand, the period during which the Battle of the Homeland took place was also the beginning of the economic crisis caused by the global pandemic. In this period, the priorities of states, including Armenia's supporters, were their national interests. The failure to fulfil Yerevan's expectations after the attacks pushed it to attempt to extend the war beyond Karabakh in order to enforce CSTO engagements.

It can be said that there are many actors with interests in the region in the Second Karabakh War. However, it is more important to analyse the actors that have any direct or indirect connection with the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. In this context, these actors are classified as international organisations and states. Within the scope of the aforementioned classification, the UN, EU, OSCE and OIC are included as organisations, while the USA, France, Iran and Israel are included as states. In this context, it will be useful to first examine the contribution of the policies carried out by the actors of the international community during the Second Karabakh War to the Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

1.1. Literature Review

Although there are sufficient sources in the literature on the role of external actors in the Second Karabakh War, few of them can be associated with the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. In this direction, the United States is one of the leading external actors affecting the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. Ibrahimov and Oztarsu (2022) state that the United States focused all its resources on its domestic agenda due to the elections in 2020 and therefore did not have the expected level of influence during the Second Karabakh War (Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022). Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the United States, through various statements, displayed an attitude that was not in Ankara's favor.

Another actor that could be influential in the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War is the European Union. On the other hand, Almond (2020), in his commentary, emphasizes that it is incorrect to reduce the issue solely to the U.S. elections, noting that the deeper reason for the inability of Western actors to respond to states using military force lies elsewhere.

It is well-known that the EU's primary motivation for its initiatives in the Caucasus is energy policy. Chitadze (2024) argues that the EU's role in the Second Karabakh War was limited to post-war rehabilitation and development programs. However, he also asserts that soft power-based policies in the Caucasus are insufficient. Additionally, Iran emerges as an important external actor in the Second Karabakh War, particularly in relation to the Türkiye-Russia rivalry. Some analysts contend that Iran's policies during the war supported Russia (Goble, 2020).

Another extra-regional actor that played an influential role in the war was France. Some experts have argued that France was behind the Armenian attacks that led to the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War (Koçak, 2020). Given that France's stance in the conflict was directly opposed to Türkiye's, these allegations seem even more plausible. On the other hand, according to Shikhaliyev (2020), the nullification and invalidation of the Minsk Group's mediation efforts excluded France from the post-war peace process.

The current research discovers strong evidence that external factors like international organisations' policies, behaviors of major states, and systemic factors like the global effects of the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic played a crucial role in Türkiye's and Russia's rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. These considerations not only influenced the dynamics of the conflict, but also drew attention to the limits of international mediation and the intricacies of regional power relations. It is maintained that the interplay between these outside factors and the domestic political issues in Türkiye and Russia ought to be an object of future research, and that it should also address the long-term consequences of such an interplay for regional stability in the Caucasus.

1.2. Research Question

The present article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, with a particular focus on the external factors that influenced this rivalry. The research will examine how international actors, including global organisations and states, shaped or impacted

the dynamics of this rivalry. A key part of the analysis will involve considering how the global context influenced the actions of the involved parties, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and their international allies.

The purpose of the research is to understand the role of external factors in the Second Karabakh War and how these factors affected the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. The research will explore the impact of international organisations (such as the UN, EU, OSCE, and OIC) and key states (like the USA, France, Israel, and Iran) on the Türkiye-Russia competition during the war. This includes the analysis of how these actors' policies may have either aligned with or opposed Türkiye and Russia's strategic interests.

The research question the article is attempting to answer can be summarised as follows: How did the policies and actions of international organisations and key states influence the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia during the Second Karabakh War? This question addresses the broader context of systemic factors (global and political) in shaping the interactions and rivalries in the Caucasus region during the Second Karabakh War.

1.3. Methodology

To analyze the external factors affecting the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the Second Karabakh War, a qualitative research methodology is appropriate, given the complex and multifaceted nature of international relations in the region. The study will adopt a neoclassical realist framework, focusing on both systemic (global geopolitical shifts) and domestic factors (such as economic crises and national interests) to understand how international actors influenced the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. The central research question is: How did the policies and actions of international organizations and key states shape the dynamics of the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War?

The primary data collection will involve document analysis of statements, resolutions, and official reports from major international organizations such as the UN, EU, OSCE, and OIC, as well as from states such as the USA, France, Iran, and Israel. This will include reviewing UN Security Council resolutions, EU Council communications, and diplomatic statements issued during the conflict, which reflect the political stances and interventions of these actors. In addition, media reports, particularly from both regional and international outlets, will be examined to understand the public and political discourse surrounding the war and how these international actors positioned themselves in relation to Türkiye and Russia.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, comparative analysis will be employed to assess how different international actors influenced the rivalry. This includes examining the EU's tacit support for Armenia, the UN's neutral yet problematic stance, and how the COVID-19 pandemic altered the global political environment. The analysis will also consider how these external policies interacted with the domestic policies and strategies of Türkiye, Russia, and Armenia. For example, Armenia's calculation of a "low-cost" response from Türkiye due to the pandemic will be juxtaposed with Türkiye's surprising deterrent actions at the onset of the war. Similarly, the role of Russia's support for Armenia will be analyzed in light of its rivalry with Türkiye in the broader Caucasus region.

Finally, the research will synthesize the findings using discourse analysis to interpret the language used in diplomatic exchanges, policy statements, and media reports. This will help reveal how the global context, including the pandemic and systemic geopolitical factors, shaped the foreign policies of key international actors, and how these policies, in turn, influenced the dynamics of the Turkish-Russian rivalry during the war. The methodology will allow for a nuanced understanding of how external actors either aligned with or opposed the strategic interests of Türkiye and Russia in the context of the Second Karabakh War.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this analysis is based on neoclassical realism, a theory in international relations that integrates both systemic factors and internal state dynamics to explain foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism builds on the foundational assumptions of classical realism by incorporating the influence of domestic variables, such as leadership, national identity, and domestic political processes, alongside external structural constraints. According to scholars like Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016), neoclassical realism recognizes that while states' behaviors are shaped by the international system's distribution of power, their ability to respond is also conditioned by internal factors, such as the political and economic environment. In the context of the Second Karabakh War, this framework helps explain how the global power balance between Türkiye and Russia interacted with internal pressures—particularly those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crises that ensued. The pandemic, which disrupted global supply chains and shifted international priorities, notably influenced Armenia's calculations in initiating the conflict and shaped Türkiye's and Russia's responses. Armenia, for example, may have calculated that Türkiye's reaction would

be subdued due to the global health crisis, while Azerbaijan's geopolitical interests and external support from Türkiye offered a significant advantage. Neoclassical realism, thus, underscores the importance of understanding both the external systemic factors and the internal factors, such as national leadership and domestic imperatives, that shaped the actions of all parties involved in the conflict.

Furthermore, this study incorporates theory of international organizations (IOs) to explain the role of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in influencing the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. International organizations are not merely neutral bodies but often reflect the strategic interests of their most influential members, as articulated by Mearsheimer (2019) in his critique of liberal institutionalism. In the case of the Second Karabakh War, the UN's position, which vacillated between calls for a ceasefire and ambiguous stances that could be interpreted as tacit support for Armenia, highlights the way international organizations serve as arenas for broader geopolitical competition, influencing the rivalry between Türkiye and Russia. Similarly, the EU's calls for peace, while framed in neutral terms, have often been interpreted as favoring Armenia, thus complicating Türkiye's regional objectives and fueling the rivalry with Russia, which has maintained strong ties with Armenia. Keohane (1984) argued that IOs are important platforms for reinforcing power dynamics, and in this case, the EU's stance furthered the narrative that Western powers, through their support for Armenia, were counteracting Türkiye's influence in the South Caucasus. This framework allows for an understanding of how IOs contribute to shaping the actions of states like Türkiye and Russia, especially when these states seek to align international norms with their strategic interests.

By combining neoclassical realism with the theory of international organizations, this research will explore how both global and regional actors—shaped by systemic forces and domestic conditions—interacted to influence the competition between Türkiye and Russia during the Second Karabakh War. This approach provides a comprehensive analysis of how international dynamics and institutional politics, alongside domestic pressures and the global context, shaped the behavior of the key players involved in the conflict.

2. POLICIES OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The UN is one of the most prominent international actors in terms of its policies in the Second Karabakh War. As seen in the first war, the UN, albeit a little late, took

a stance in favour of Azerbaijan's rightfulness and territorial integrity. However, the organisation's lack of sanctioning power led to the Security Council resolutions on the Karabakh issue being ignored by Armenia. Nevertheless, it is certain that the aforementioned resolutions of the UN have created a legitimacy in the global public opinion about the fact that Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory. In this context, the activities of the UN in the Battle of Homeland are also important.

2.1. United Nations (UN)

The UN showed its first reaction in the Second Karabakh War within the scope of the Tovuz attacks, which were the footsteps of the war. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' statement on 13 July 2020, which has become a UN tradition, expressed "deep concern" about the tension and called for 'refraining from provocative rhetoric' [United Nations, 2020]. Although it is clearly seen and known that Armenia is both the party that launched the Tovuz attack and the party that officially voiced the discourse of 'new territories in exchange for a new war' through the Minister of Defence, the emphasis on the UN's call to 'the parties' is also the product of a strange UN tradition. The UN displayed a similar 'concerned' attitude on 27 September, and the UN Secretary-General Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric stated that Secretary-General Guterres would meet with the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia [United Nations, 2020b].

On 28 September 2020, UN Secretary-General Guterres held a meeting with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev via video conference. During the meeting, Aliyev, who informed the UN Secretary-General about the Armenian attacks, stated that 'Armenia, in his speech at the general debate of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, spoke of its preparation for a new war' [Press Service of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020]. However, it is noteworthy that Guterres did not make any statement about the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia, against which there are four UN Security Council resolutions.

Based on the statements of the UN, it is seen that it is trying to follow a delicate balance policy between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, the statement made the day after Armenia's attacks on Ganja on 4 October 2020 stated that it was 'seriously concerned about reports of the spread of hostilities, including the targeting of densely populated areas', while avoiding direct reference to Ganja [United Nations, 2020c]. On 18 October, when Armenia renewed its attacks on the same region, the UN mentioned the attacks on Ganja in

its statement condemning the attack. However, the aforementioned statement included Armenian propaganda that Azerbaijan had also attacked Khankendi [United Nations, 2020d]. Although the UN tried to prove its so-called 'neutral' approach to the issue by including the Armenian name of the city in its statement, it can be said that this attitude benefited Armenia and Russia. In this context, it is observed that the UN's policy in the "War of Homeland" did not manifest itself in favour of Ankara in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

2.2. European Union (EU)

In the Second Karabakh War, the EU's approach to the war did not go beyond ritualised calls for peace. Similar to the UN's stance, the EU, despite trying to create the perception that it was 'neutral' in the war, could not hide its supportive attitude towards Armenia. On 1 October 2020, the EU Council issued a statement calling on the parties to a peaceful settlement, 'expressing its support to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and asking the High Representative to review further EU support for the settlement process' [Council of the European Union, 2020]. The Council's stance, which did not mention either Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories or the Armenian aggression that led to the war, was considered as support for Yerevan rather than neutrality. On the other hand, in the statement issued by the EU High Representative the day after the ceasefire agreement was reached after a 10-hour meeting in Moscow on 10 October 2020, it was emphasised that the organisation welcomed the agreement reached. In addition, the statement underlined that 'the EU calls on the parties to strictly abide by this agreement and calls on all actors, including external parties, to refrain from any action that could lead to further loss of life' [Council of the European Union, 2020b]. In fact, it should be emphasised that the hidden subject of the aforementioned call is Türkiye.

One of the indicators of the EU's tacit support for Armenia in the Second Karabakh War has been the anti-Türkiye and especially anti-President Erdoğan attitude of some deputies in the EU Parliament. This situation has become more evident when combined with the propaganda content of some media outlets and the support of the Armenian lobby. As a matter of fact, DW, one of the aforementioned agencies, claimed that during the Karabakh War, 'the European Parliament wanted the EU to take action on Nagorno-Karabakh, but the organisation failed to do so' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. The German propaganda apparatus DW backed up its unsubstantiated claims that 'in general, most MEPs seem to be in favour of

sanctions against Türkiye' with the following statements made by EU High Representative Josep Borrell in the parliament: 'I think your message was clear, it was repeated 65 times with different voices, but it expressed the same concerns and the same demand for action' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. Firstly, in the 720-seat EU Parliament, the 65 MPs who want the EU to take action account for about 9 %, which represents a small minority, not a 'majority of MPs'. Secondly, it is important to note that Borrell reminded these parliamentarians that 'the Council of Europe has made it clear that it considers that the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs are the framework for mediation and action in this conflict' [Deutsch Welle, 2020]. This shows that the EU takes Ankara into consideration even though it does not agree with Türkiye's interests. The perception of Russia as a threat to European security plays a major role in the organisation's approach.

Despite all the above-mentioned developments, it should be emphasised that the EU's policy in the Battle for the Homeland is based on preventing Türkiye from getting stronger in the region. Even if this situation is not entirely in Russia's favour in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus, it certainly does not benefit Ankara. However, considering Türkiye's policy of full independence, which Türkiye has been trying to implement at great cost and has been relatively successful in recent years, it can be said that the EU's aforementioned approach does not go beyond a declaration of will. The situation in Russia's favour here is that the EU, like the UN, still hopes to benefit from the OSCE's efforts.

2.3. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE, which emerged in the First Karabakh War with the hope of a solution to the Karabakh Issue, later evolved into a different mechanism with the creation of the co-chairmanship office as a result of the competition with Russia on the solution of the problem. After the co-chairs were allocated to three countries supporting Armenia's position, the organisation lost its will for a possible solution. In the process that started with Armenia's ceasefire violations in the following period, the organisation turned into a structure known for its statements in which the words 'concern', 'restraint' and 'peace' were used extensively.

On 29 September 2020, following the Armenian aggression that started the Second Karabakh War, the OSCE Permanent Council held a special meeting on developments in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the meeting, which took place in Vienna under the Albanian presidency with the participation of representatives of 57 countries, 'representatives of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs

(France, the Russian Federation and the United States of America) reiterated the Co-Chairs' call on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and resume negotiations to find a sustainable solution to the conflict' [OSCE, 2020]. The fact that the OSCE made 8 identical statements within 44 days of the war gives an idea about the OSCE's nearly thirty-year working adventure. Azerbaijani President Aliyev evaluates the biased approach of the organisation in favour of Armenia as follows:

"The activity of the Minsk Group is obvious. After a certain period of time, the countries co-chairing the Minsk Group almost concentrated all the powers in their own hands, they almost monopolised this issue, the Minsk Group was paralysed as a group and three countries started to deal with this issue. But did this result in anything? No. Not for us, but for Armenia. Armenia wanted this result, it wanted the negotiations to continue, it wanted them to deceive us all the time, it wanted this issue to be frozen, it wanted our territories to remain under captivity forever, it wanted our territories to remain under occupation forever. And what is the activity of the Minsk group? Was it able to put pressure on the occupier? No! Did it want to put pressure? No! I have repeatedly raised this issue with them: 'If you want the conflict to be solved, impose sanctions on Armenia. This is in your hands. You are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, you can solve any problem'" [Press Service of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020b].

As the President of Azerbaijan stated, there was no excuse that the 'Minsk Group' could produce. Instead of solving the Karabakh conflict, Russia used the Minsk Group as a tool in its competition with Türkiye. The biggest proof of this was the lack of any progress on the resolution of the issue, which was constantly pointed to the table. Despite Vice President Fuat Oktay's assessment of the establishment of a Minsk Group without Türkiye as a 'historical negligence' [News.ru, 2020], the events throughout the process reveal that this was a highly conscious move beyond negligence. The aforementioned 'omission' can be explained in the context of Russia's rivalry with Türkiye.

2.4. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

It is known that the OIC had an attitude supporting Azerbaijan's just position both in the First Karabakh War and in the period leading up to the "War of Homeland". It is observed that the organisation maintained the aforementioned approach in the Second Karabakh War. Already during the Armenian aggression in July, the OIC

General Secretariat condemned Armenia's ceasefire violation and referred to the OIC and relevant UN Security Council resolutions demanding the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying power from Azerbaijani territory and supporting the peaceful settlement of the conflict [OIC, 2020]. The organisation demonstrated the aforementioned decisive and clear stance in the Battle for the Homeland, reiterating its condemnation of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and violation of the ceasefire in its statement on the second day of the war, and called for 'the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories and the settlement of the conflict between the two countries on the basis of respect for Azerbaijan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability' [OIC, 2020b].

The organisation, which expressed its solidarity with Azerbaijan on 14 October 2020 following Armenia's missile attacks on civilian settlements in the Azerbaijani city of Ganja [Azerbaijan.az, 2024], clearly showed its support for Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War. Although the OIC's stance in the war supported Ankara and Baku's position, it can be argued that Türkiye-Russia 'competitive cooperation' also served the cooperative dimension. One indication of this is Russia's participation in the OIC as an observer since 2005. It can be said that the relationship of the Russian Federation with the OIC, where approximately 15 % of the population consists of Muslims, is also a supportive factor for Russia-Türkiye relations. In this context, the fact that Russia did not make any official comments on the statements of the OIC during the Second Karabakh War supports the aforementioned perception. Another branch of the systemic factors that have a direct or indirect impact on Türkiye's rivalry with Russia in the Second Karabakh War is the policies of the states that are closely interested in the issue. In this respect, four states come to the fore.

3. POLICIES OF STATES

Although the number of countries with interests in the Caucasus is gradually increasing, the number of states directly related to the Second Karabakh War is small. In this context, the most prominent non-regional states are the US and France, which are the non-Russian member states of the 'Minsk Trio'. On the other hand, the role of Iran, which is neighbouring the region and to some extent has a rivalry with Türkiye, in the Second Karabakh War is also important. Israel is another country that has interests and influence in the region in connection with

Iran to a certain extent in the Homeland War. In this respect, it is useful to analyse the role of these countries in the Second Karabakh War.

3.1. United States (US)

Washington, which is the only country that still meets the criteria of a superpower in the international relations literature, is present in the Karabakh Issue both as the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power, and as the locomotive country of NATO. However, despite all these labels, it cannot be said that the US influence on the issue is directly proportional to its power. While this can be explained by the US governments' interest in the region and Russia's reservations, the Pentagon's prioritisation is another factor to be taken into account.

The United States was one of the first countries to react verbally to the Second Karabakh War, which started with Azerbaijan's response to Armenia's attacks in self-defence. On 27 September 2020, the US State Department condemned the escalation of violence and stated that Washington held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia and urged the parties to refrain from rhetoric and actions that increase tensions on the ground [U.S. Department of State 2020]. The US, as Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, remains committed to helping the parties find a peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict, the statement said, adding that it is believed that the involvement of external parties in the escalating violence would be extremely unhelpful and would only exacerbate regional tensions [U.S. Department of State 2020]. In fact, although Washington diplomatically refrains from directly emphasising Türkiye, it is quite obvious that the term 'external parties' refers to Ankara. It is known that such references of the US, which are incompatible with the law of alliance with Türkiye, were also made during the First Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, as it has been emphasised before, when Türkiye's possible intervention within the scope of guarantorship was on the agenda in May 1993 when Armenia intensified its attacks on Nakhchivan, the US opposed it. Unlike the Demirel government, which took into account the US opposition to intervention in the First Karabakh War, Ankara's 'despite the US' stance in the Battle of Homeland can be considered as a step towards a fully independent Türkiye. Moreover, the pro-Armenian stance of the US should not be overlooked in light of the above-mentioned statements of the US State Department condemning the attack without describing the attacker. While one

reason for this may be the effectiveness of the Armenian diaspora harboured by the US, another reason is the competition with Russia.

The US-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus both during the First Karabakh War and in the period between the two Karabakh wars has been mentioned in the previous sections on various occasions. It can be said that a similar situation recurred in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, after Russia brought the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides together for a ceasefire in Moscow on 9 October 2020, a similar step was taken by the United States approximately two weeks later. The aforementioned ceasefire was violated by Armenia on the day the decision was taken, and it was tried again about ten days later, and Yerevan again did not stick to its commitments. Thus, on 25 October 2020, Washington announced that the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia was established on the initiative of the United States. Emphasising that the parties 'reaffirmed their commitment to implement and abide by the humanitarian ceasefire agreed and reaffirmed in Moscow on 10 October', the statement said that 'the United States facilitated intensive negotiations between the Foreign Ministers and the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to bring Armenia and Azerbaijan closer to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict' [U.S. Department of State 2020b].

Nevertheless, when the pro-Armenian stance of the US and the winking approach of the Pashinyan administration towards the US come together, it can be said that the relationship between Türkiye and Russia, which is characterised as 'competitive cooperation', relatively serves the 'cooperation' dimension. On the other hand, another important point is that after the Karabakh victory, it is observed that there has been a change in the uniform attitude of some federal states of the US towards the Karabakh Issue. The most prominent example of this is the decision of the Governor of the US State of Minnesota on 23 February 2021 to declare 25 February, the eve of the anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide, as 'Azerbaijan Day', indirectly recognising the genocide committed by Armenians in Karabakh [Office of Governor Tim Walz, 2021].

In recent years, one of the policies of the United States contrary to the law of alliance with Türkiye in various foreign policy areas has been its stance in the Second Karabakh War. By opposing its 'ally' Ankara's strong presence in the Caucasus, Washington displayed an attitude that is extremely difficult to explain rationally. In this respect, the aforementioned attitude of the United States can be explained by the presence of the Trump government, a head of state who is not widely believed to have given rational responses in the aforementioned period.

Indeed, in a joint statement on 1 October 2020, the United States, Russia and France called for an immediate cessation of hostilities between the ‘relevant’ military powers [U.S. Embassy in Türkiye 2020]. ABD’nin It should be noted that the ‘relevant’ actor in the aforementioned statement, which was also published on the Turkish Embassy’s website, again refers to Türkiye. Ankara must have realised this, as President Erdoğan responded to the call in absentia by saying ‘Considering that the US, Russia and France have neglected this problem for nearly 30 years, it is unacceptable for them to seek a ceasefire’ [Reuters, 2020].

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the presence of the US under the Trump presidency, which did not go beyond verbal statements during the Second Karabakh War, did not restrict Türkiye’s room for manoeuvre. This issue, on the other hand, has brought to the fore a group of people on both the US and the Armenian side who are of the view that Washington was ineffective in the Second Karabakh War. For example, when the presidents of Russia and France issued a joint statement on the issue in the early days of the war, this was interpreted as the US being ‘uncoordinated’ with the Minsk Group co-chairs. As a matter of fact, Carey Cavanaugh, the former US representative to the Minsk Group, described his country’s role in the Second Karabakh War as ‘heartbreaking’, while Thomas de Waal, one of the most important experts on the Karabakh Issue in the US, stated that ‘Americans have withdrawn from the Karabakh Issue’ [The Guardian, 2020]. From all the above, it can be concluded that the US role in the Second Karabakh War, despite its practices incompatible with the alliance law, has partially produced results in Ankara’s favour in terms of Türkiye-Russia ‘competitive cooperation’. Another state that should be taken into account in this respect is France, Washington’s working partner in the Minsk Group.

3.2. France

It is not only their joint co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group that ‘encourages’ France to be active in the region together with the USA. The other common aspect of both powers is that they host the largest Armenian diaspora. In this case, it should not be surprising that both countries are on the side of Armenia in the Karabakh Issue. However, what is interesting is that both countries insist on mediation within the OSCE even though it is obvious that they are not neutral. As for the Second Karabakh War, it can be said that France did not ‘deviate’ from its traditional pro-Armenian line. In a statement dated 3 October 2020, Matthew Bryza, former co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and former US Ambassador to

Azerbaijan, stated that France took Armenia's side in the Second Karabakh War and therefore lost its mediation potential. Bryza explained the reason for the aforementioned attitude of French President Emmanuel Macron as follows:

‘...Because Türkiye is not following France's lead on issues as diverse as Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean. That is why Macron is directing his personal anger at President Erdoğan. And now he is doing it in the Caucasus, thus making it impossible for France to be a neutral mediator, especially in the Minsk Group’ [Haber Global, 2020].

First of all, Bryza's statements are correct but incomplete. When we consider the statements that France has lost its neutrality, it is very difficult to find evidence that Paris has had a neutral stance at least throughout the last three decades of the Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, as Bryza says, behind France's support for Armenia is Macron's personal anger towards Türkiye and President Erdoğan. Indeed, in a speech he gave in Latvia on 30 September 2020, the fourth day of the Second Karabakh War, Macron stated that ‘Türkiye's “belligerent” rhetoric encourages Azerbaijan to recapture Nagorno-Karabakh and this is unacceptable’, revealing both his open support for Armenia and his anger towards Türkiye [Reuters, 2020b]. Ankara's response to Macron's pro-Armenian comment was not delayed, and on the same day, then Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that France's solidarity with Armenia meant supporting the Armenian occupation in Azerbaijan [Reuters, 2020c]. On the other hand, Macron's embrace of Armenian propaganda accusations such as “Türkiye is sending jihadists to Karabakh” can also be evaluated in this context. Macron, voicing the aforementioned baseless allegations, “Calling on all NATO partners to confront the behavior of a NATO member” He also stated that he would call President Erdoğan [France 24, 2020]. Aside from the paradox that the same person who stated a year ago that “NATO is brain dead” [The Economist, 2019] is the same person who calls for “NATO member behavior” a year later, the fact that Türkiye is the subject of both comments reveals France's rivalry with Ankara.

It should be emphasized that Nagorno-Karabakh is not the only region where France's interests clash with Türkiye; Paris is also engaged in a struggle for influence with Türkiye in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, it can be said that France came to the forefront as an instigator during the escalation of Armenia's aggression that led to the war. In this context, Paris' role in the Second Karabakh War has both advantages and disadvantages for Ankara in the Turkish-Russian rivalry. France's pro-Armenia, anti-Türkiye policy during the

Battle for the Homeland did not only end with baseless accusations against Ankara, but Paris was also in close contact with Moscow, its counterpart in the Minsk Group. It has been mentioned above that the two even issued a joint statement excluding the US. This is not a development in Türkiye's favor. On the other hand, Paris is also uncomfortable with the policy of "competitive cooperation", which includes partial cooperation between Russia and Türkiye in the Second Karabakh War. As a matter of fact, in a statement issued by the French Presidency on November 20, 2020, it was stated that "France seeks international supervision for the implementation of a ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict out of concern that Russia and Türkiye may reach an agreement to exclude Western powers from future peace talks" [Reuters, 2020d]. However, France's attempt to overpower Russia while acting as the protector of Armenia had unexpected consequences that indirectly favored Türkiye. In this respect, it is concluded that France's contradictory stance in the Battle of the Homeland, even though it was foreseen to take place to Türkiye's detriment, also brought unexpected complex results.

The developments that took place after the Karabakh victory also show Paris' hostile attitude towards Azerbaijan's victory, which was won with the intense support of Türkiye. Another step of France in this context was the adoption of a resolution by the French Senate on November 26, 2020 supporting the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Upon this development, the Milli Mejlis of Azerbaijan called for France to be stripped of its mediation role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict [Al Jazeera, 2020]. At the same time, Türkiye reacted strongly to the decision as follows:

"...The French Senate's call for Azerbaijan to withdraw from its territories liberated from occupation is a manifestation of a ridiculous, partisan and unrealistic understanding that cannot be taken seriously. This decision, which is devoid of common sense and cannot be explained by any reasonable justification, also limits France's ability to contribute to the solution of the issue in a real sense. It is thought-provoking, if not surprising, that the resolution, which is seen to contain elements that the French Government would also find unacceptable, reflects the obsession with Türkiye, which is frequently seen in France in recent times. It is a fundamental necessity for the sake of our relations that Türkiye's principled positions on the side of right, law and legitimacy in its neighboring geography are perceived in France in an unprejudiced and objective manner and that extremely erroneous references to history or unrelated issues are avoided" [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020].

In the aforementioned statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was emphasized that France is now hoped to draw the right conclusions and adopt a constructive stance for the stabilization of the region [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020]. Apparently, Ankara is also aware of France's "obsession with Türkiye". In this context, it is observed that France's Second Karabakh War policy, which is full of paradoxes, is partially effective in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus.

3.3. Iran

Iran has been an important regional country that has made a name for itself due to its policy during the Karabakh conflict. Seeking influence in the Caucasus, Tehran is also known to compete with Türkiye in the region. When it comes to the Second Karabakh War, two different Iranian positions can be mentioned. These are the "delicate balance" that calls the parties to restraint and the supportive policies that adopt Azerbaijan's approach. The development that determined the difference between the two elements was Azerbaijan's position during the war. In this context, on the first day of the Second Karabakh War, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Said Khatibzadeh emphasized that "Iran calls on both sides to show restraint and demands an immediate end to hostilities and the start of dialogue between the two states." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020]. A similar call was echoed by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in his telephone conversations with his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts on the same day [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020b]. On the other hand, Spokesperson Hatibzade, who made a similar "restraint" statement on October 12, 2020, during the period of Armenia's attacks on Ganja, expresses Iran's "neutral" stance in his statement without distinguishing between the aggressor and the attacked side as follows:

"The Islamic Republic of Iran deplores the violation of the ceasefire declared during the recent clashes between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, calls on both sides to show more restraint, condemns the missile attacks on vital infrastructure, residential areas in cities and the killing of civilians and expresses condolences to the bereaved families." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020c].

The aforementioned attitude of Tehran, which was perceived as passive support to Armenia, not only lacked a sound assessment of the issue, but was also misleading

about the content of the events. Iran's stance in the war continued in this vein until near the end of October. In the early days of the war, some images of weapons and military equipment being transferred from Iranian territory to Armenia appeared on various media platforms. In response, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh made a statement on September 29, 2020, stating that the transit of non-military conventional goods to neighboring countries through Iran has always continued and emphasized that the trucks in question also passed within the same framework. "The Islamic Republic of Iran carefully monitors and controls the transportation and transit of goods (through its territory) to other countries and does not allow our territory to be used for the transportation of weapons and ammunition in any way", he said [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2020d]. Khatibzadeh reiterated a similar emphasis at a press conference on the Karabakh war held at the Foreign Ministry building on October 5, 2020, stating that the route between Iran and Armenia will continue to be used only for humanitarian supplies, but that "the route between Iran and Armenia will never be allowed to be exploited and used for military means" (Kurşun, 2010). It is certain that the above-mentioned allegations are in need of confirmation. Nevertheless, spokesperson Khatibzadeh's insistence on the continued use of the aforementioned route gave the impression that Iran was siding with Armenia and triggered distrust of Tehran on the part of Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

It can be said that the perception of Iran on the Azerbaijani and Turkish sides was shaped by the aforementioned trucks throughout October. Although the Iranian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly denied this, the fact that the aforementioned route will continue to be used could not remove the question marks of Baku and Ankara. However, by the end of October, after it became apparent that Azerbaijan was the winning side of the war, a partial change of attitude was observed in Iran. One of the most obvious reflections of this is the following statements made by Iran's religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in his speech broadcast on Iranian state television on November 3, 2020: "The lands captured by Armenia must be returned and liberated. This is an important condition. These lands belong to Azerbaijan and it has every right over them" [France 24, 2020b].

It is observed that Iran has resorted to actions opposing Türkiye and Azerbaijan after the Karabakh victory. In particular, Tehran initially supported Armenia's position on the Zangezur Corridor issue, which was one of Ankara's important achievements in the Karabakh victory and was included in Article 9 of the

November 10 Agreement. However, Ankara has regularly emphasized cooperation with Iran to overcome this situation. One of the main reasons for Iran's appearance to the detriment of Türkiye in the Türkiye-Russia rivalry in the Caucasus is both the radical elements within Iran and the provocative policies of Iran's opponents who have interests in the region [İnat, 2021]. In this context, Israel is undoubtedly one of the most prominent actors, and perhaps the first. In this context, it is useful to examine Israel's approach in the Second Karabakh War.

3.4. Israel

In the Second Karabakh War, Israel's name started to be mentioned more frequently with the Karabakh Issue. It is known that Israel supported Azerbaijan with military technologies from the Tovuz attacks throughout the Battle of Homeland. The role of Israeli UAVs in the war is also noteworthy, even if it is not at a level to determine the fate of the war, such as Bayraktar TB2. It has been stated before that this detail has been recognized even by Israeli military analysts. In this context, it should be recalled from the previous chapters that Eado Hecht attributed the success of Azerbaijan's UAV army in the war entirely to Bayraktar TB2, despite Armenian General Balayan's claim that they shot down a dozen Israeli UAVs in the Tovuz clashes. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that Israeli drones also took part in the war. This was also stated in a statement by the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister [Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021]. On the other hand, when Armenia twice struck Baku in November 2020 with Russian-made Iskander-M ballistic missiles, the sale of which is prohibited by international treaties, with the intention of extending the war beyond the region, Azerbaijan used the Israeli air defense system Barak-8 to neutralize these attacks [Mehdiyev, 2021]. In addition, while the Armenian side admitted the use of these missiles, Russia said that these missiles were not used in the war [TACC, 2021].

Israel's other support to Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War was social support, in which Azerbaijani Jewish communities played a leading role [Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021]. Idan and Shaffer note that the successful integration of Turkish and Israeli UAVs on the battlefield during the Battle of Homeland made direct communication between Turkish and Israeli experts a possibility [Idan & Shaffer, 2021]. In this context, it can be said that Israel's role in the Second Karabakh War was a facilitator for Ankara in terms of Türkiye-Russia rivalry.

Israel's support for Azerbaijan should be read in the context of creating an image of cooperation with a Muslim country, as well as commercial gain. However, the most important point here should not be forgotten that Israel is in a struggle for influence against Iran. In this context, it would be a mistake to read Tel-Aviv's support for Baku as a mere support for the Jewish communities in Azerbaijan, independent of Israel's national interests. For this reason, the public opinion in Azerbaijan and Türkiye in particular should avoid the approach that categorizes Iran as completely pro-Armenian while emphasizing Tel-Aviv's support for Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War. Indeed, the aforementioned lack of restraint may unwittingly turn the parties into actors in a situation that serves Israel's purpose.

4. CONCLUSION

When the Ankara-Moscow rivalry in the Second Karabakh War is analyzed in terms of system-level variables, it is difficult to identify a radical shift in the attitudes of international actors compared to the First Karabakh War. The primary factors that have evolved are Türkiye's enhanced material power capacity, the transformation of the Turkish state's strategic mindset, and the emergence of a political will that prioritizes its interests in the Caucasus. Despite these changes, Western or Western-dominated organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the OSCE maintained a familiar posture during the Second Karabakh War, expressing "concern" and issuing calls for restraint directed equally at both the aggressor and the attacked parties. For instance, Washington's statements, which emphasized that "the involvement of outside parties in the escalating violence would be extremely unhelpful" and implicitly targeted Ankara, failed to deter Türkiye from its assertive policy. This demonstrates Türkiye's growing ability to act independently, even "in spite of the United States", reflecting its broader efforts in recent years to achieve full strategic autonomy.

The role of Iran, a regional state sharing a direct border with Karabakh, further complicated the Türkiye-Russia rivalry during the Second Karabakh War. Tehran's policies did not favor Ankara; instead, they revealed a competitive tendency, particularly evident in its opposition to the Zangezur Corridor following Azerbaijan's victory. Iran's actions underscored its unease with Türkiye's growing influence in the Caucasus and its desire to maintain its own strategic foothold in the region. On the other hand, Israel, a non-regional state, gained prominence for its support of Azerbaijan during the war. While Israel's backing of Baku was significant, it is

important to recognize that its approach was driven by its own strategic calculations, particularly its rivalry with Iran. This multifaceted support for Azerbaijan, despite the complex regional dynamics, highlights the intricate web of alliances and rivalries that shaped the conflict. Türkiye's steadfast support for Azerbaijan, even in an environment where system-level variables were not entirely favorable, underscores the value of Ankara's commitment and its determination to assert its influence in the Caucasus.

Ankara's role in the Second Karabakh War has undeniably strengthened its position in the region, marking a significant shift from its relatively passive stance during the First Karabakh War. However, much like after the first conflict, Armenia and its supporting forces have not fully accepted the new status quo, leaving the region in a state of fragile stability. In this context, the Ankara-Baku alliance must remain vigilant and proactive to ensure that the strategic cooperation epitomized by the Shusha Declaration remains robust and adaptable to evolving challenges. Recent developments, such as deepening military and economic ties between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as well as joint infrastructure projects, are promising indicators of a sustained partnership. Nevertheless, the potential for renewed tensions and external interference necessitates continuous efforts to reinforce this alliance and safeguard the gains achieved in the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War. By doing so, Türkiye can consolidate its influence in the Caucasus while contributing to long-term regional stability.

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