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**ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN WAR
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIA**

by

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ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN WAR AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

In September 2020, tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into a full-scale war that ended with a tripartite ceasefire agreement on November 9, 2020. The consequences of the war have significantly changed the status quo and the strategic environment of the South Caucasus. Many believe that Russia has reaped significant benefits from the war, enabling Moscow to extend Russia's military presence in the region and broaden its influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan. But an in-depth analysis of the war's outcomes proves the initial perceptions of Russian gains are likely inaccurate.

Drawing on open-source material and scholarly research, the thesis demonstrates that Russia lost significantly in terms of exerting influence in the region. The study finds that the basis for Moscow's influence over Yerevan was shaken while the factors contributing to Russia's influence over Baku have diminished considerably. Moreover, the emergence of Turkey as a regional power as well as Iran's attempt to influence the developments in the South Caucasus have amplified the negative effects of the war for Russia.

Understanding the war's consequences should be paramount for regional countries as well as for those with strategic interests in the region. Russia's reduced influence over the region might push Moscow to take assertive steps to reverse the war's effects. The findings documented in this thesis can help policymakers review existing security and defense policies and adapt to new realities.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	anti-access/area denial
ADS	air defense system
CIS	The Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EW	electronic warfare
FSB	The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
GDP	gross domestic product
IDP	internally displaced persons
MALE	medium-altitude long-endurance
MAM-L	lightweight smart micro munition
MANPADS	man-portable air defense system
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SA	surface-to-air
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SS	surface-to-surface
UAE	The United Arab Emirates
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations

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I. INTRODUCTION

The South Caucasus region, encompassing Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, rests on the crossroads merging the borders of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. The region, although small in territory and population, attracts the interest of powerful countries from all four directions that are actively involved in framing its strategic environment. Russia sees the region as its backyard; Iran and Turkey have their own attachments to it from their imperial pasts. At the same time, there is significant U.S. interest vested in the region as it relates to Euro-Atlantic security as well as upholding democratic values. Moreover, China's attention has been growing incrementally due to the region's transit importance. Further, its strategic context has become increasingly unstable as it is home to three territorial conflicts: Georgia currently has two territories occupied by Russian armed forces while the other two countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are engaged in a territorial conflict.

Among the three conflicts, the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh has demonstrated the most fluctuation in tensions over time. The conflict escalated into a full-scale war in September 2020, which ended with a tripartite ceasefire agreement on November 9, 2020.¹ The consequences of the war and the provisions set forth within the ceasefire agreement have changed the status quo and established a new reality affecting the strategic context of the region. This thesis embarks on an assessment of the implications of the war for Russian power in the region.

Many articles have been devoted to post-war assessment. Most of the analysts agree that Russia gained significant benefits from the war's outcomes, including an extension of Russian military presence in the region and broadened control over Armenia and Azerbaijan. The outcomes of the war and the complexity of the strategic context of the region, however, require re-examination to understand how exactly the war affected Russian power in the region.

¹According to some accounts the agreement was signed on November 10, 2020. The discrepancy is caused by the time difference between Moscow, where the agreement was signed on November 9, 2020, according to local time, and Baku and Yerevan. The agreement entered into force on November 10, 2020, by all accounts.

This thesis questions the conventional wisdom that Russia benefited significantly from the war. It seeks to demonstrate just the opposite: that Moscow lost considerably, particularly, in terms of exerting influence in the region. In support of this claim, the thesis briefly explores the conflict's roots to help understand the dynamic that led to the outbreak of the war and attempts to unfold the new realities established by the outcomes of the war. Russia's power abilities—to influence and shape the foreign and security policies of Armenia and Azerbaijan—are analyzed. These abilities are then contrasted with the new realities established during the war and its aftermath in order to assess the impact of the war from this perspective. Further, the thesis examines the emergence of Turkey as a regional power as well as the activation of Iran as part of the outcomes of the war. To dispel the myth of Russia's gain, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is evaluated and contrasted with the effects of the Russian deployments in the previous conflicts. Finally, the analysis focuses on challenging the discourse on undefeated Russian weapons-systems, as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War reveals the disgrace of Russian equipment, namely its famed air-defense systems, which proved useless against modern drones.

Understanding the outcomes of the 2020 Azerbaijan-Armenian War for Russia is important for all the regional countries as well as for those with strategic interests in the region (including the United States). The importance of the thesis lies exactly in dispelling the misperception that Russia was “victorious” in the Karabakh war. The loss of or at least reduced influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the establishment of Turkey as a regional power, might push Russia to take assertive steps to restore its prior influence in the region. The thesis attempts to portray the negative implications of the war for Russia in order to assist observers and policymakers in contemplating the policies and steps Russia might undertake to balance its losses and prevent further setbacks. Understanding the outcomes of the war shall also help policymakers of the regional countries to review existing security and defense policies and implement steps in accordance with the new realities.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

The thesis builds on studies of prominent research centers in the West as well as scholarly articles originating from the studied region in English, Georgian, and Russian languages. While there is extensive scholarly literature on the nature of power and influence in international relations, the same is not true of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. At this stage there is still little in-depth scholarly research on the consequences of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, although there are plenty of media and policy articles, expert opinions, and op-eds from both within and beyond the region. There is, however, extensive scholarly literature on the First Karabakh War and the genesis of the conflict as well as historical precursors that date back to the early 19th century and even to ancient times, as the parties would claim.² This thesis draws on such literature. This review first addresses the question of power and influence and then turns to the literature on the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

The concept of power is central to the analysis of international relations. Consequently, a large place in the literature relevant to international relations is devoted to the understanding of power and the study of its essence. The notion and definition of power can be said to have developed significantly over the past few centuries. If 18th and 19th century scholars viewed the power of a nation-state as a combination of different elements, such as territory, population, and armies (the element of power approach), the understanding of power from the second half of the 20th century became arguably deeper and more complex.³ Somewhat fundamental was Robert Dahl's approach to find a common denominator to different interpretations of understanding power. For Dahl, it was not the combination of the elements of power that mattered in determining power, but rather its ability to achieve certain aims. Particularly, Dahl's notion of power captures the ability of A to cause B "to do something that B otherwise would not do," where "A"

²Timothy R. Mayer, "Intractability and Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013), 28, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA621631.pdf>.

³Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Riise, and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, DC: SAGE Publications, 2013), 274.

is the actor exercising influence while “B” is the actor being, or potentially being, influenced.⁴

Such an approach, since the second half of the 20th century, reflects an evolution from the “elements of national power” to the new “relational power approach” and features a multidimensional perspective.⁵ The most important dimensions of power, according to this approach, are Scope, Domain, and Weight. “Scope” implies that the power of an actor in relation to another actor can vary across different sectors, such as the economic and military ones. In short, being powerful in economic terms does not necessarily mean being powerful militarily and vice versa. The “domain” of the power refers to the importance and number of actors who are subjected to it. And the “weight” of the power indicates the probability that the exercise of such power will yield a change of behavior of the actor subjected to that power.

According to Baldwin, as described in the *Handbook of International Relations*, four main mechanisms of the exercise of power are commonly explored: symbolic, military, economic, and diplomatic.⁶ The symbolic mechanism involves appealing to various normative notions, such as ethnic or religious unity. Good examples of the use of economic mechanisms are the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia over its military aggression in Ukraine. On the other hand, military intervention or the threat of the use of military force illustrates the use of the military means of power. Meanwhile, negotiations or peace talks are examples of the diplomatic mechanism of power.

To apply Dahl’s understanding of power to the analysis of the implications of the Second Karabakh War, the scope is limited to the military and political area of power as the effects of the war are mainly reflected in these areas of the exercise of power. At the same time, the domain of power encompasses not only Armenia and Azerbaijan but the South Caucasus region as a whole, where the exercise of such power may be contested by the neighboring countries, such as Turkey and Iran, as well as global powers and various

⁴Carlsnaes, Riise, and Simmons, 273.

⁵Carlsnaes, Riise, and Simmons, 275.

⁶Carlsnaes, Riise, and Simmons, 275.

political and military organizations. Moreover, the focus of this analysis is concentrated mainly on military as well as diplomatic mechanisms of influence.

Evaluating Russia's power after the Second Karabakh War requires establishing what Russia's power was before it began. This is the subject of Chapter II of this thesis. Here it can be summarized as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represented an important source of influence for Russia, which employed mainly military means, among others, including arms provision to both conflicting parties and military presence in Armenia. Moreover, Russia significantly invoked diplomatic means of power exercise by engaging in the work of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group as well as the trilateral format of the conflict resolution negotiations. The conflict enabled Russia to keep the power domain that encompasses Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the entire South Caucasus region impervious to outside powers. Nevertheless, the war seems to have undermined the means of Russian influence likely affecting the scope, domain, and weight of its power—an observation that needs to be closely explored.

Several important trends are evident in the policy literature on the outcomes of the Second Karabakh War. First, it is worth noting that several authors consider Russia to have gained significantly from the Azerbaijan-Armenia war. These authors, who represent the policy analyst community, observers, politicians, and experts, form a mainstream consensus with regards to the consequences of the war. Yet, some authors are somewhat at odds with the consensus that Russia benefited from the war, as they emphasize Turkey's active role during the war and the gains Ankara made.⁷ In this case, the gain for the one power should be regarded as a loss for the other since both countries represent "fierce," zero-sum competitors, not only in the South Caucasus but also in the Middle East.

An important study, a research paper published by the Russian Center for Strategy and Technology, edited by R.N. Pukhov, contradicts the mainstream argument and views the consequences of the war as a loss for Russia.⁸ The paper finds that as a result of the

⁷Alexander Gabuev, "Viewpoint: Russia and Turkey - Unlikely Victors of Karabakh Conflict," *BBC News*, November 12, 2020, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54903869>.

⁸D. Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, ed. R.N. Pukhov (Moscow: ACT-Centre, 2021), 41.

war, Russia's general influence in the Caucasus fell, while Turkey's influence increased not only in the South Caucasus but also across the Turkic-speaking countries.

A second widely held view in the literature is that the West played no role in bringing the Second Karabakh War to an end, which was regarded as a significant win for Russia.⁹ This view seems largely valid, as the research discussed in the following paragraphs demonstrates. Moscow managed to control the conflict resolution process and kept the West out of "its backyard." The United States and France, co-chairs of the OSCE's Minsk Group, failed to make enough efforts to reach an effective ceasefire agreement among the conflicting parties.

Third, there is a broadly held view among the observers that weapons systems used by Azerbaijan enjoyed a greater advantage over the Russian-made armaments of Armenia. Particularly, Turkish and Israeli-made drones proved highly effective against Armenian (Russian-made) military equipment and manpower, which in accordance with some experts, decided the fate of the war. This thesis evaluates the impact of these weapons systems on the outcome of the conflict and consequently for Russian power.

To summarize, although there is not much thorough and comprehensive scholarly research around the consequences of the Second Karabakh War, there are numerous articles and opinion pieces from reputable observers, experts, and research centers that provide a sufficient basis for in-depth analysis.

B. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Given the consequences of the war and the strategic interests of Russia, the literature reviewed allows us to identify two hypotheses that this thesis will evaluate. The first proposition, that Russia emerged with more power from the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, serves as the "null hypothesis" that this thesis seeks to disprove. The second proposition, that Russia emerged as less powerful after the war, serves as the alternative hypothesis. These hypotheses are evaluated through careful analysis of several

⁹Célestine Bohlen, "Armenia's Postwar Crisis: What to Know," Council on Foreign Relations, March 25, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/armenias-postwar-crisis-what-know>.

important areas identified in the literature as indicators of Russian power. These areas are:

- Influence, in other words the scope and reliability of Russia's power over Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- Russia's ability to prevent other countries from becoming involved in the security of the region, thus maintaining the power domain;
- Means of Russian power/influence, including through military presence and demonstration of effectiveness of Russian weaponry.

Using this rubric, various outcomes of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War can be hypothesized to diminish, sustain, or increase Russian power in the South Caucasus. These are first developed with respect to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russian peacekeeping operations between the warring parties, and the effectiveness of Russian military equipment in the war.

The thesis examines whether Russian power has been maintained, increased, or decreased as a result of the war. If, as a result of the war, Armenia were to escape from the Russian sphere of influence and Turkey were to become a regional security actor, then this be a rather severe blow to the scope and geographic domain of Russian power. If the consequences of the war allow Armenia, traditionally a close ally of Russia, to distance itself from Russia, creating conditions to reject its influence, in the long run, it would be possible to conclude that Russia lost power in this war. In theoretical terms, the scope and geographic domain of Russia's power would be significantly diminished. As Armenia is the only country in the region that Russia could rely on and influence significantly prior to the war, the loss of Armenia would signal a collapse of Russia's regional policy. The only counterbalance to this loss from the war would be if Russia could neutralize a Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance. Such an increase in Russian influence over Azerbaijan would represent an expansion of the geographic domain of Russian power. On the other hand, if Turkey were to emerge from the war as an equal regional player or one with significant weight in shaping outcomes without offset benefits to

Russia, the war could be assessed as a loss of power for Russia even if Moscow retains influence over Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Another hypothetical outcome might be that Azerbaijan would further distance itself from the Russian orbit as a result of the war. This would suggest a decrease in the geographic domain and weight of Russian power in the South Caucasus, though not as severe as in the case of Armenia. Furthermore, Russia may face significant costs in seeking to maintain its pre-war influence over Azerbaijan, as it may face significant opposition from the international community as well as Turkey.

From the perspectives of Russia's power before and after the war, if the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers in the conflict area is ineffective for furthering Russian influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan, this would represent a failure of Russia's attempt to extend the scope of and acquire a means for exercising its power. Such an outcome of the war can be assessed as negative for Russia since it relates to the incurred costs of deployment as well as to the implementation of the peace commitment (material as well as non-material costs, such as reputation and prestige of a peacekeeper or regional power).

Finally, any damage to the reputation of Russian-made weaponry can be assessed as a negative result of the war with respect to the scope and means of Russian power. Moreover, it should have further ramifications as Russia relies heavily on weaponry such as A2/AD in other conflicts and regional politics as means of exercising and demonstrating power, namely in Georgia, Syria, Ukraine, Libya, and over the Black Sea. Such a revelation could be an important harbinger of what might happen in the recent Russian invasion in Ukraine or even in future Russian military campaigns, particularly, considering the Western sanctions on provisions of advanced technologies to Russia.

If the analysis confirms the loss of power by Russia because of the war, one may expect regional developments would be detrimental to Russian interests. These may include but are not limited to Armenia's effort to move out of Russia's sphere of influence; the furthering of Azerbaijan's ability to conduct totally independent foreign and security policy; the emergence of Turkey as considerable regional power.

Alternatively, if the analysis proves that Russia gained more than it lost from the war, one may expect that Russia acquired additional means to exert power over Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, it may indicate the strengthening of Russia's dominant role in the South Caucasus region.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is based on the evaluation of alternative propositions regarding the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in terms of the Russian power over the conflicting countries and in the region. Since there are no all-encompassing analyses of the effects of the war on the Russian interests, the thesis addresses the different components of the research question individually in order to assemble a comprehensive study of the topic. The methodology of the research comprises a) a historical analysis of the origins of the conflict leading to renewed escalations; b) an analysis of the 2020 conflict and Russia's influence over the parties involved before and after the conflict; c) a study of the Russian political and military posture and the regional implications of the war. The research addresses the strategic interests of the countries involved, the rationale behind the emergence of Turkey as regional power, as well as the nature of the Russian peacekeeping and use of military as means to advance its strategic interests. To assess the implications of the war, the Russian interests to influence and shape the foreign and security policies of Armenia and Azerbaijan are analyzed and contrasted with the established new realities.

The thesis starts with an exploration of the historical background and roots of the conflict to help understand the dynamic that led to outbreak of the war. The background also features an analysis of how the conflict was managed and exploited by Russia during the post-Soviet era. The next section deals with the 2020 War and the new realities established by the trilateral ceasefire agreement. The second part of the thesis concentrates on the analysis of Russian gains and losses consequent to the war and includes sections on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, the regional context, and the military implications. The thesis ends by summarizing and comparing Russia's gains and losses,

leading to the conclusion about whether Russia appears on the winning or losing side of the war.

The complex nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is impossible to unpack without looking back to its historical roots. Thus, the next chapter provides insights on historical background and the genesis of the conflict and sets the stage for the analysis of the Second Karabakh War of 2020.

II. ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT AND THE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

For understanding the outcomes of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War it is important to gain knowledge of the historical background and roots of the conflict that explains what led to the outbreak of the war. Moreover, the analysis of how the conflict was managed and exploited by Russia prior to the war of 2020 allows deriving conclusions on Russia's possible losses and gains as a result of the war's outcomes. The present section reviews the background of the conflict and develops around the sources of the Russian influence.

A. BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has roots as far back as the first Russo-Persian War of 1804–13 when a mass movement of different ethnic groups, including Armenians and Azerbaijanis from neighboring territories, took place in the area of the South Caucasus.¹⁰ Developments within the Ottoman Empire, as well as the divisive policy of the Soviet Union much later, further added to the complexity of the root causes of the problem.¹¹ Although Nagorno-Karabakh is described as a tiny Armenian enclave in Azerbaijani territory, it serves a significant role in generating identity and establishing legitimacy for both Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹² Therefore, giving up the territory means infringing on national identity and interests and would require enormous courage from the political elite on both sides to make compromises. According to different sources, initial hostilities among Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region began in February 1988 with demands by the region for unification with Armenia, which were followed by the region's self-proclaimed independence in

¹⁰Christopher R. Rossi, "Nagorno-Karabakh and the Minsk Group: The Imperfect Appeal of Soft Law in an Overlapping Neighborhood," *Texas International Law Journal* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 56.

¹¹Rossi, 57–59.

¹²Tobias Schumacher, *Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Why the 'Black Garden' Will Not Blossom Any Time Soon*, Policy Brief No. 17 (Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2016), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06643>.

1991.¹³ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a full-scale war broke out that led to the defeat of Azerbaijan. Armenia occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and seven regions outside the boundaries of the autonomous entity, including Lachin, Kelbajar, Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrail, Qubadli, and Zangezur.¹⁴ In 1994 Russia brokered a truce that ended the hostilities. There is a general understanding that from an international legal perspective Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven regions are integral parts of Azerbaijan. The United Nations Security Council, the General Assembly, and the European Parliament called for Armenian withdrawal from the occupied territories and never recognized the self-declared status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The status was not recognized by Armenia either.¹⁵

The 1994 OSCE Budapest Summit established the Minsk Group with the mission to facilitate a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. The group is co-chaired by the Russian Federation, France, and the United States and includes Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan as well as the OSCE Troika as permanent members.¹⁶ The Minsk Group produced a roadmap for the resolution of the conflict known as the Madrid Principles (proposed in 2007, refined in 2009), that calls for

return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.¹⁷

¹³Ayça Ergun and Anar Valiyev, “An Account on Karabakh War: Why Now and Then What?,” *Panorama* (blog), November 10, 2020, <https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2020/11/10/an-account-on-karabakh-war-why-now-and-then-what/>.

¹⁴Ergun and Valiyev.

¹⁵Rossi, “Nagorno-Karabakh and the Minsk Group,” 59.

¹⁶Rossi, 67.

¹⁷Rossi, 67.

The roadmap was never implemented, and negotiations within the format of the Minsk Group did not produce tangible results. Similarly, Russia-mediated negotiations in a trilateral format did not achieve any resolution.¹⁸

B. THE CONFLICT AS A SOURCE FOR RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

The aftermath of the ceasefire deal of 1994 allowed expanding the scope, domain, and weight of Russian power and provided Moscow with the upper hand to influence Armenia and Azerbaijan. It was easily achieved through Russian manipulation of the opposing sides which were in a “constant state of insecurity” and through Russian interference in the peace process.”¹⁹

One of Russia’s main regional goals is to maintain a dominant role in the region, which it accomplishes effectively through a carrot and stick policy.²⁰ The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict provides fertile ground for the implementation of this policy, which ensures Moscow’s influence over Azerbaijan and Armenia for achieving regional objectives. An important source of such influence is Russia’s supply of weapons to Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is critical for the conflicting parties and can serve as both a punishment and an encouragement mechanism.

Military spending by Azerbaijan and Armenia can provide a good idea on the importance of arms supply and, consequently, the two countries’ degree of dependence on Russia and how the dependence is effectively translated into the prospects of manipulation by Moscow. As Tobias Schumacher points out, the military expenditures of Azerbaijan and Armenia were quite large and rapidly increasing.²¹ Baku’s military spending, for example, increased by 95 percent between 1994 and 2012, while the defense budget for 2016 reached around 5 percent of GDP. By contrast, Armenia’s military spending was relatively modest in the same period, though it increased to 4.3

¹⁸Ergun and Valiyev, “An Account on Karabakh War.”

¹⁹Schumacher, *Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 4.

²⁰İlhami B. Değirmencioglu, “Nagorno Karabakh Conflict and the Holistic Analysis of the Intractability,” *Alternatif Politika* 11, no. 2 (June 2019): 354–55.

²¹Schumacher, *Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 3.

percent of GDP by 2015, far exceeding the corresponding spending of most North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states.

These figures acquire more meaning considering that Armenian arms imports from Russia accounted for 94 percent of all its arms imports during 2015–19 while Azerbaijani imports were 80 percent during 2009–13, which fell to 31 percent in 2015–19.²² Based on the data, one may assume that Russia could successfully implement the carrot and stick policy vis-à-vis Baku and Yerevan by manipulating the arms delivery to the opposing sides. Moscow could stop arms delivery to Yerevan if the latter “misbehaved” or if pressure was needed to obtain concurrence with former’s interests. For instance, in 2013, Armenia turned away from joining the Association Agreement with European Union that is largely linked to Russian arms sales and its ensuing pressure.²³ Similarly, Russia could intensify arms sales to Yerevan or halt the weapons delivery to Azerbaijan in order to subdue Baku to its interests. However, this mechanism of influence has lost some of its clout with Azerbaijan due to the ability of the latter to diversify its arms suppliers.

As Azerbaijan’s growing economic and military potential exceeded Armenia’s capabilities, the latter became even more vulnerable to Russian pressure to maintain military balance with the adversary and to obtain security guarantees. Yerevan endeavored to address both objectives through the deployment of a Russian military base on Armenian territory and integration of Armenia in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which also came about as a result of Moscow’s pressure.²⁴ Russia’s security guarantees to Yerevan and Armenia’s CSTO membership, as well as the Russian military base with its offensive and defensive capabilities (including A2/AD), have certainly played a deterrent role against Azerbaijan. But one may assume it came at a high cost of concessions by Yerevan on both domestic and foreign policy. Closer

²²Hovhannes Nazaretyan, “Arms Supplies to Armenia and Azerbaijan,” EVN Report, February 17, 2021, <https://evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/arms-supplies-to-armenia-and-azerbaijan/>.

²³ Robert M. Cutler, “Russian Arms Sales to Armenia and Their Geopolitical Effects,” *Geopolitical Monitor* (blog), September 9, 2020, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/russian-arms-sales-to-armenia-and-their-geopolitical-effects/>.

²⁴Schumacher, *Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 3.

engagement with Yerevan presumably allowed Moscow to exert some degree of influence vis-à-vis Azerbaijan as well, though not to the same extent as in the case of Armenia.

Moreover, Russia's active participation in the Karabakh peace process served as a mechanism for gaining influence over the conflicting parties. Since 1994, Russia has been the permanent co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the format responsible for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. According to some observers, the role of mediator provided Moscow the extensive opportunity to exert additional pressure and political influence.²⁵ Conflict resolution, including options on the return of occupied territories to Azerbaijan and determination of the status of Karabakh, "empowered" Moscow to put significant pressure on the conflicting countries to yielding significant concessions.

Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represented an important source of influence for Russia through different means, including the provision of arms to both sides, establishing its military presence in Armenia, and engagement in the work of the Minsk Group. That is why, in the opinion of some, Russia has always been in favor of an incomplete resolution of the conflict that would allow the deployment of peacekeepers in the conflict zone and the establishment of a manipulative (rather than final) peace.²⁶

²⁵Değirmencioğlu, "Nagorno Karabakh Conflict and the Holistic Analysis of the Intractability," 354–55.

²⁶Kavus Abushov, "Russian Foreign Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?," *East European Politics* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2019.1579711>.

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III. THE 2020 WAR AND NEW REALITIES

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was largely characterized by sporadic tensions that were followed by periods of stability and shifts to a frozen phase. Nonetheless, there was a general sense and expectation that sooner or later a large-scale confrontation would become inevitable, as the existing status quo did not serve the interests of either of the parties and the conflict resolution mechanism could not achieve its goal.

Many researchers and analysts agree that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represented an “archetypical intractable conflict,” which is extremely difficult to resolve in the absence of a “zone of possible agreement.”²⁷ The term “intractable conflict” basically means that efforts invested in the resolution process are in vain, achieving no tangible results.²⁸ According to Timothy R. Mayer, although all conflicts are essentially unique, they still share similarities.²⁹ He identifies a number of factors that prevent conflicts from being resolved peacefully. Such factors include the reluctance of the elites to end the conflict as they are not harmed from confrontations and may even benefit from the status quo. It is also likely that compromises are impossible to make and only a full-fledged victory is an acceptable solution for either or all conflicting parties. Confidence in own military might of each of the conflicting sides and accumulated military capabilities also hinder the peaceful resolution of a conflict. Among other factors, such as the lack of security arrangements on the ground, third countries (i.e., non-conflicting but influential ones) may have a vested interest in perpetuating the conflict, which impedes the resolution process.

Mayer’s theoretical framework is quite useful for understanding the underlying reasons for the intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict before the 2020 war. There were salient factors about the conflict indicating that peaceful resolution was not possible and that recourse to a military standoff was almost the sole option to serve the

²⁷Değirmencioglu, “Nagorno Karabakh Conflict and the Holistic Analysis of the Intractability,” 341.

²⁸Mayer, “Intractability and Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” 19.

²⁹Mayer, 19.

parties' interests. To begin with, it should be stressed that the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh with its historical and cultural biases is among the defining factors of national identity for both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and thus an element of national solidarity and unity.³⁰ Moreover, the argument revolved around two basic but contradictory concepts of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the right of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination.³¹ Therefore, it became increasingly difficult for the opposing parties to find a compromise solution despite the attempts to do so in a variety of formats, most notably within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. The problem was further complicated as Russia, an active participant in the conflict resolution process—both in trilateral and Minsk Group formats—was not interested in solving the conflict. On the contrary, Russia earned benefits from protracting the conflict, as it represented a mechanism for pressing the conflicting parties to comply with Moscow's interests and to fend off outside powers willing to engage in regional affairs.³²

Finding a compromise between the parties was also hampered by the growing military potential of each party. Azerbaijan's increasing military-technological advantage was balanced by Yerevan's intensified military acquisition programs as well as political-military alliances with Russia and the Russian-led CSTO. In 2008–18 alone, Azerbaijan purchased \$24 billion worth of arms from Moscow, while Armenia bought equipment worth only \$4 billion from Russia, albeit at rather discounted prices.³³ This trend certainly contributed to the rising military rhetoric. Azerbaijan was open about its intentions to resolve the conflict by force if the peace process failed to provide tangible results. The Armenian side did not lag behind in the military rhetoric, which reached new

³⁰Değirmencioğlu, "Nagorno Karabakh Conflict and the Holistic Analysis of the Intractability," 351–52.

³¹Sandro Samadbegishvili, "Mtiani Karabaghis Shualeduri Dasasruli, Rogorc Saetapo Movlena Kavkasiis Regionistvis (Intermediate End to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict as a Landmark Event for Caucasus Region)," *Geocase* (blog), accessed March 2, 2022, <https://geocase.ge/ka/publications/305/mtiani-yarabaghis-konfliqtis-shualeduri-dasasruli-rogorc-saetapo-movlena-kavkasiis-regionistvis>.

³²Değirmencioğlu, "Nagorno Karabakh Conflict and the Holistic Analysis of the Intractability," 355.

³³M. Hakan Yavuz and Vasif Huseynov, "The Second Karabakh War: Russia vs. Turkey?," *Middle East Policy* 27, no. 4 (2020): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12529>.

heights under Prime Minister Pashinyan. His statement, “Karabakh is Armenia, period,” undoubtedly exacerbated tensions.³⁴

The factors just mentioned and the intensified military rhetoric of the parties have, of course, reduced the space for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. As the perspective of a peaceful conflict resolution gradually faded away, the military rhetoric gained salience for both sides, although the existing status quo played into hands of Armenia. In September 2020, the rhetoric escalated into active hostilities in which the Azerbaijani side gained a clear advantage. Azerbaijan acquired control over several regions occupied by Armenia and took the strategically important city of Shusha, which is only a few kilometers away from Stepanakert (Khankendi), the administrative center of Nagorno-Karabakh. Shusha overlooks Stepanakert.³⁵ It became clear that if the fighting continued, the fall of Stepanakert would only be a matter of time. As a former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Matthew Bryza, pointed out, it took only several hours after Shusha was taken to persuade Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to negotiate peace.³⁶ On November 9, 2020, the parties signed a ceasefire agreement mediated by the Russian president, under which Azerbaijan takes control over all seven Armenian-occupied regions around Nagorno-Karabakh; Russian peacekeepers (1,960 military personnel in total) deploy on the line of contact and in Lachin corridor connecting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh; the Peacekeeping Center for Controlling the Ceasefire is established to increase the effectiveness of the monitoring process of the peace implementation; all cargo transit and movement communications are ensured; and all internally displaced persons (IDP) are returned under the supervision of the UN.³⁷ The status of Nagorno-

³⁴Yavuz and Huseynov, 107.

³⁵Matthew Bryza, “Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace Deal Could Be the Diplomatic Breakthrough the Region Needs,” *Atlantic Council* (blog), November 11, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/azerbaijan-armenia-peace-deal-could-be-the-diplomatic-breakthrough-the-region-needs/>.

³⁶Bryza.

³⁷“Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajjanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii (Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation),” President’s Office of the Russian Federation, accessed February 26, 2021, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>.

Karabakh is not mentioned in the document and that seems to leave room for future negotiations as well as controversies and manipulations.

IV. ANALYSIS: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON RUSSIAN GAINS AND LOSSES

Most of the analysts and observers, both from within the region and outside, regard the outcomes of the war as providing significant advantages for Russia. According to a former U.S. co-chair of the Minsk Group, Matthew Bryza, at the end of the war, “Russia did well”; Putin is “the kingmaker in the situation.”³⁸ Thomas De Waal, a senior fellow with Carnegie Europe suggests Russia gained more influence over both countries as Russian troops were deployed in the conflict area for the first time.³⁹ Yet, suggestions of such advantages for Russia are not substantiated by in-depth analysis and represent a mere listing of possible benefits. In general terms, possible gains believed to be made by Moscow can be expressed as follows: Russia’s role in the South Caucasus region is strengthened because Russia has stationed its troops now even in Azerbaijan besides the presence in Georgia, as well as in Armenia. Moreover, Russia has taken another step towards the role of a major player in the South Caucasus region as it facilitated the ceasefire and peace while the West was completely out of the game. Other potential benefits, observers argue, are that it has acquired additional levers to control Azerbaijan while Russia also gained Armenia’s increased dependence and punished undesirable Armenian leader, Nikol Pashinyan. Moreover, Russia did not allow Azerbaijan to take the city of Stepanakert (Khankendi) and the rest of Nagorno-Karabakh with it. This is described as yet another successful effort by Moscow to freeze the long-running Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If Azerbaijan ever takes a radical step against Russia’s interests in the Caucasus, Russia can immediately revive the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and tilt it towards Armenia and thus, punish “disobedient” Azerbaijan. The same logic is applied to Armenia as well.

³⁸Mike Eckel, “As Guns Fall Silent in Nagorno-Karabakh, There’s One Winner in the Conflict You Might Not Expect,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed June 29, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/as-guns-fall-silent-in-nagorno-karabakh-there-s-one-winner-in-the-conflict-you-might-not-expect/30940966.html>.

³⁹Thomas de Waal, “Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict,” Carnegie Europe, accessed August 30, 2021, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/02/11/unfinished-business-in-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-pub-83844>.

In order to challenge the assumption of a triumphant Russia and, moreover, to argue that Russia has lost a lot from the war, one should analyze the whole picture piece by piece. Hence, it is necessary to understand Russia's interests within the region, and to compare Russia's pre-war and post-war posture with its declared regional aspirations to gain enough confidence to judge whether Russia gained or lost from the war.

Russia's complex geopolitical interests are well expressed in the foreign policy exercised vis-à-vis the South Caucasus region. As Andrey Sushentsov and Nikita Neklyudov claim, the policy is derived from the realist school of thought seeking to balance threat, which explains Moscow's denial of access to outside powers in the region.⁴⁰ The approach is effectively translated into coercive policy against regional countries to restrict them pursuing independent foreign policy and choosing their own alliances. That seems the reason why Russia is cautious about Georgia's aspiration for NATO integration and any pro-Western ambitions of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, concern with the pro-Western aspirations is linked not only to the realist school but also to constructivism reflected in Moscow's fear of regime change instigated by the democratic processes. The Russian elite is resistant to democratic processes in surrounding countries in order to avoid a domino effect in Russia undermining the existing authoritarian regime. The fear is well expressed in Putin's comment on popular protests in Russia linking them to the color revolutions. "In the modern world extremism is being used as a geopolitical instrument and for remaking spheres of influence. We see what tragic consequences the wave of so-called color revolutions led to," he underlined. "For us this is a lesson and a warning. We should do everything necessary so that nothing similar ever happens in Russia."⁴¹

Those interests are best served through the exertion of Russian influence over the regional countries with political and military pressure as well as by denying further expansion of a Western foothold in the region. Considering Russia's interests, the effects

⁴⁰Andrey Sushentsov and Nikita Neklyudov, "The Caucasus in Russian Foreign Policy Strategy," *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 2 (May 3, 2020): 128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1759888>.

⁴¹Darya Korsunskaya, "Putin Says Russia Must Prevent 'Color Revolution,'" *Reuters*, November 20, 2014, sec. Europe News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-security-idUSKCN0J41J620141120>.

of the Nagorno-Karabakh war can be divided into three main dimensions: first, the consequences on the level of the Russian influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan, hence on the scope, domain and reliability of Russian power; second, consequences from the Russian effort to keep external powers out of “Russia’s backyard,” mainly referring to the domain of the power; and third, the implication of the expansion of Russian military presence in the region, along with the perception of unchallenged military might, addressing the scope and the means of exercising power.

A. INFLUENCE OVER THE CONFLICTING COUNTRIES

The pre-war Russian influence over Armenia and Azerbaijan varied in its success. Specifically, Russia enjoyed greater influence over Armenia, determined by the status-quo expressed in the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories and by the threat from Azerbaijan to take back control of those territories. On the other hand, the influence over Azerbaijan was loose, determined by a number of factors including Ankara’s support to Baku and Azerbaijan’s vast energy resources.

1. Influence over Armenia

Russia has suffered from the Second Karabakh War in terms of losing ground for influence over Armenia, particularly from a long-term perspective. Armenia’s attitude towards Russia was determined by the Russian security guarantees against Azerbaijan’s attack. The Russian security guarantees created absolute dependence of Yerevan on Moscow that was effectively translated into Russian control over the country, including with regard to the shaping of foreign policy. Andrew C. Kuchins and Jeffrey Mankoff rightfully claim that Yerevan’s security dependence on Moscow kept Armenia away from establishing tight links with the West.⁴² Another core element of Russia’s powerful grip on Armenia, as some authors suggest, was the establishment of authoritarian regimes in

⁴²Andrew C. Kuchins and Jeffrey Mankoff, *The South Caucasus in a Reconnecting Eurasia: U.S. Policy Interests and Recommendations*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23368>.

Yerevan.⁴³ Russia has pursued promotion of authoritarian regimes in order to exercise greater political and economic influence in its “backyard.” The policy was successfully implemented in Armenia and achieved substantial compliance from the established authoritarian regimes. However, in 2018, the Velvet Revolution replaced the authoritarian regime in Armenia with a democratically elected government and brought pro-Western Nikol Pashinyan into power, much to the displeasure of Moscow.⁴⁴ The change should be assessed as a double-edged problem for Russia. First, Moscow has lost the authoritarian client regime it relied upon to ensure Armenian compliance with Russian policy. Second, Armenia demonstrated its ability and will to pursue the democratic path that Russia’s elite is fearful of. The democratic shift in Armenia should have generated similar sentiments in the Kremlin, which views democratic changes in Ukraine as “a direct attack on Russia’s imperial identity and an existential threat to the country’s authoritarian system of government.”⁴⁵ Many observe that this reckless misbehavior, from the Russian perspective, of Armenia’s political shift and its stated openness to Western agents (i.e., NGOs) were among the main reasons Russia dragged its leg in supporting Armenia when Azerbaijan started its offensive.⁴⁶ Russia blatantly demonstrated to Armenia and effectively to other states within its “privileged interests” that divergence from Moscow-imposed policy is punishable and the price is high. Nevertheless, the question is to what extent the outcomes of such punishment played into Russia’s hands. Did it help to re-establish authoritarianism in Armenia, facilitating Russian influence or abandon democratic moves “threatening” Moscow? Did it help strengthen the perception of Russia as a security guarantor of Armenia against the Azerbaijani threat, another source of influence? In many respects, the answer seems negative.

⁴³Aram Terzyan, “The Anatomy of Russia’s Grip on Armenia: Bound to Persist?,” *Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi* 10, no. 2 (2018): 246, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/198543>.

⁴⁴Alexander Baunov, “Why Russia Is Biding Its Time on Nagorno-Karabakh,” Carnegie Moscow Center, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/82933>.

⁴⁵Peter Dickinson, “Vladimir Putin Fears Ukrainian Democracy Not NATO Expansion,” *Atlantic Council* (blog), December 16, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-worst-nightmare-is-ukrainian-independence-not-nato-expansion/>.

⁴⁶Baunov, “Why Russia Is Biding Its Time on Nagorno-Karabakh.”

Russia was viewed as a strategic ally and, principally, the security guarantor of Armenia both within and outside of the region since the deployment of a Russian military base and its troops on Armenian soil. That perception was further strengthened with the signing of the treaty of 1997 on friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance, which stipulated the possibility of military assistance in case of aggression against either signatory of the treaty.⁴⁷ Moreover, Armenia acceded to CSTO, a Russian-run security organization, with the intent to obtain security assistance through organizational means in the event of Azerbaijani aggression.⁴⁸ However, the security guarantees turned futile, neither Russia nor the Russian-controlled CSTO rushed to the rescue of Armenia, which resulted in its dire defeat in the Second Karabakh War. One point became clear for most Armenians and particularly for Pashinyan: Russia lost its credibility as security guarantor. The reluctance of Russia to help Armenia has generated huge disappointment among Armenians. Moreover, since Russia mediated and imposed a humiliating truce agreement on Armenia, it has encouraged many in Armenia and its diaspora to call for a dramatic shift away from Russia.⁴⁹

Moreover, Moscow failed to replace the pro-Western government with an authoritarian, pro-Russian regime in Yerevan. In fact, it became clear that authoritarianism in Armenia is synonymous with incompetence, which is still supported by Russia, but is not the way forward for Armenians. This disappointment was well expressed during the snap elections of June 2021 when Armenians once again elected Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party with over 50 percent of votes and rejected the pro-Russian opposition.⁵⁰ It is important to consider that the snap elections were held after political turmoil erupted around the effectiveness of Russian weapons. Prime Minister Pashinyan publicly disgraced Russia referring to its highly touted short-range ballistic

⁴⁷Elena Teslova, "Armenia Seeks Russian Military Help under 1997 Treaty," Anadolu Agency, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/armenia-seeks-russian-military-help-under-1997-treaty/2422446>.

⁴⁸Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 40.

⁴⁹Yavuz and Huseynov, "The Second Karabakh War."

⁵⁰"Armenia Election: PM Nikol Pashinyan Wins Post-War Poll," *BBC News*, June 21, 2021, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57549208>.

missile, Iskander, as *ineffective* during the war.⁵¹ The Russian reaction was to immediately decline the use of Iskander-M by Armenia during the war. Azerbaijan rejected the use of such system initially, but later, President Aliyev confirmed that an Iskander-M was launched against Azerbaijan and they held evidence of it.⁵² Internally, Pashinyan's statement entailed unrest among the Armenian militaries that requested the prime-minister's resignation and eventually led to the snap elections.⁵³ The election of Pashinyan's pro-Western party right after the domestic turmoil over the disappointment with the Russian weaponry and after the defeat in the war is likely to be a sign of a broader occurrence. It is undoubtedly a demonstration particularly of displeasure with the policy vis-à-vis Russia and Erevan's dependence on Moscow as well as of the strong will for democratic, pro-Western development.

The aftermath of the war posed another problem for Russia, which can be considered a paradox, but it gave Armenia leverage over Russia in terms of maintaining the new status-quo. Stopping the advance of Azerbaijan and establishing the ceasefire agreement effectively made Russia a guarantor of the existence of what remained of Nagorno-Karabakh with pre-war status. However, some observers suggest, and there is logic in it, that in order to maintain the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia requires full compliance by Pashinyan's regime with a ceasefire and peace, which in turn gives leverage to Armenia to guarantee the new status quo.⁵⁴ The resumption of hostilities could first lead to more Turkish presence in the region; second, to Western interference in the conflict (particularly from Minsk Group members like the United States and France), which was successfully avoided during the Second Karabakh War; and third, the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh completely as a means for manipulation and influence. The paradoxical leverage Armenia obtained should make Russia loosen its tight grip over that

⁵¹“Contrary to Previous Claims, Evidence Shows Iskander Missiles in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War,” *Caspian Policy Center* (blog), accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/contrary-to-previous-claims-evidence-shows-iskander-missiles-in-the-second-nagorno-karabakh-war/>.

⁵²“Contrary to Previous Claims, Evidence Shows Iskander Missiles in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.”

⁵³Bohlen, “Armenia’s Postwar Crisis.”

⁵⁴Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 43.

country, which could signify the accommodation of the democratic, pro-Western regime in Yerevan.

Hence, it is evident that the decisive Armenian defeat in the war, and with it the demise of the myth of Russia being a security guarantor, have shaken Russia's influence over Yerevan. Furthermore, the demonstration by Armenia of the firm will to pursue a more democratic and pro-Western path, thereby acquiring some leverage over Moscow, also eroded Russia's influence over Armenia. This, in terms of power analysis, suggests that Russia's power has decreased in weight to achieve desired effects in Yerevan in accordance with Moscow's interests. Moreover, it may entail decrease of power in terms of scope and domain as well. It is possible to assume that Yerevan will seek for further escape from Moscow's influence if the hostile environment around Armenia lessens and/or possibilities for new security arrangements open. Some signs of such prospects are already unfolding as Turkey, for instance, has declared that it will start operating direct flights from Istanbul to Yerevan with further potential of normalizing relations through specially appointed envoys.⁵⁵ Moreover, Iran has already demonstrated its intention to support Armenia if its internationally recognized borders are endangered. Iran deployed its regular armed forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps to patrol borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia in an effort to prevent any change in internationally recognized boundaries of Armenia.⁵⁶ It is even conceivable that over time as the Azerbaijani threat decreases, Armenia will be able to pursue a more flexible foreign policy. Such decrease in threat may occur as President Aliyev has managed to achieve the long-awaited national goal of regaining control over the occupied territories, secured a victorious image of the country and, most importantly, strengthened the rule of his regime. In this respect, one may assume that in terms of Russian influence over Armenia, the implications from the war could be more drastic in the long term.

⁵⁵“Turkey-Armenia Flights to Start Operating in Early February,” DuvaR.english, January 13, 2022, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkey-armenia-flights-to-start-operating-in-early-february-news-60132>.

⁵⁶Vali Kaleji, “The 2020 Karabakh War’s Impact on the Northwestern Border of Iran,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 17, no. 181 (December 18, 2020), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-2020-karabakh-wars-impact-on-the-northwestern-border-of-iran/>.

2. Influence over Azerbaijan

Russia also suffered significantly from the Karabakh war in terms of losing influence over Azerbaijan. As in the case of Armenia, Russia's source of influence over Azerbaijan derived from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moscow effectively shaped Azerbaijan's political aspirations by manipulating political and military support to Armenia. According to Azerbaijani researchers, Ayca Ergun and Anar Valiyev, for Russia, resolution of the conflict would free Azerbaijan to join Western alliances.⁵⁷ Despite the pressure from Russia's manipulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan has enjoyed more flexibility to pursue an independent policy due to two important factors. First, Russia's influence is balanced by Turkey, a strategic ally to Azerbaijan, which has become increasingly active in the region. Second, Azerbaijan's vast oil and gas reserves, which supply energy resources to the West with embedded significance to U.S. interests, provide considerable economic and political counterbalance to the Russian influence. Such flexibility has permitted Azerbaijan to reduce its dependence on Russia in terms of military armaments and to diversify its supplies. Azerbaijan has established successful military cooperation with, for example, Israel and Turkey that has allowed its Armed Forces to acquire modern weaponry. Turkish and Israeli drones and loitering munitions are widely believed to have played a decisive role in ensuring Azerbaijani success in the war.⁵⁸

Azerbaijan's victory in the war further undermined the already weakened Russian influence in Baku for several reasons. First, it becomes obvious that in taking back most of the previously occupied territories, Azerbaijan has closed the opportunity for Russian manipulation through political and military assistance to Armenia. Moreover, exploiting the status of Nagorno-Karabakh would allow Russia to realize only a minimal benefit since President Aliyev has demonstrated readiness to negotiate the status, as some

⁵⁷Ergun and Valiyev, "An Account on Karabakh War."

⁵⁸Michael Kofman, "A Look at the Military Lessons of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Russia Matters*, December 14, 2020, <https://russiamatters.org/analysis/look-military-lessons-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

observers claim.⁵⁹ The fact that the ceasefire agreement does not mention the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and leaves room for further negotiations likely confirms this assumption.

The other important aspect that could signal Moscow's influence over Baku has weakened is the strengthening of Turkish influence in the South Caucasus region. As a result of the war, Turkey has managed to emerge as a considerable power, one that heavily intervened during the war and deployed a group of militaries on the territory of Azerbaijan to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire along with Russia. Given the strategic partnership between Turkey and Azerbaijan and Turkey's role in the Second Karabakh War, where Turkey did not shy away from openly supporting Azerbaijan against Russia's ally Armenia, as well as Turkey's new positioning in the region, it is possible to assume that Moscow will have even less room to exert influence on Baku. Moreover, as in case of Armenia, Azerbaijan through its alliance with Turkey has acquired the leverage to put pressure on Russia to maintain Nagorno-Karabakh and the new status quo.⁶⁰ This pressure can be easily applied both through manipulating with adherence to (or violation of) the ceasefire and renunciation of the peacekeeping mission when its five-year term expires. The possibility of termination of the peacekeeping mission by either party is stipulated within the ceasefire agreement.⁶¹

Moreover, the course of war should have undermined Azerbaijan's trust in Russia significantly. It is widely observed that shortly before the end of the war, in order to convince Azerbaijan to negotiate a ceasefire, Russia encouraged and supported Armenia to launch an Iskander ballistic missile aimed at Baku.⁶² However, the missile was shot down by an Israeli-made Barak-8 missile defense system.⁶³ In addition, Azerbaijanis

⁵⁹Bryza, "Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace Deal Could Be the Diplomatic Breakthrough the Region Needs."

⁶⁰Barry et al., *Burja Na Kavkaze*, 42.

⁶¹"Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajjanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rossijskoi Federacii."

⁶²Mansij Asthana, "Did Azerbaijan 'Shoot-Down' Armenia's Russian-Origin Iskander Missile During Nagorno-Karabakh War?," *The Eurasian Times*, March 2, 2021, <https://eurasianimes.com/did-azerbaijan-shoot-down-armenias-russian-origin-iskander-missile-during-nagorno-karabakh-war/>.

⁶³Asthana.

remain concerned that although they won the war, they have not assumed full control of Nagorno-Karabakh region due to Russian involvement.⁶⁴

Consequently, the outcomes of the war, enhanced leverages to balance the Russian pressure, and Baku's increased distrust of Moscow suggest that Russia suffered significant losses from the war and will exert only minimal influence, if any, over Azerbaijan. Going forward, Azerbaijan is likely to pursue more independent foreign and domestic policy backed by Turkey. This, in terms of power analysis, suggests that Russia's power has decreased in scope and reliability. Moreover, it is highly relevant to assume that domain of power has reduced, shifting Baku towards Turkey's power domain.

B. IMPLICATIONS IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Finally, Russia has significantly lost in terms of its efforts to ensure sole dominance over the South Caucasus. In that sense, the Nagorno-Karabakh war has demonstrated a kind of a paradox about Russia's strategic calculus which allowed Turkey to return to the South Caucasus as a considerable power after a hundred years.⁶⁵ Moreover, the aftermath of the war has encouraged Iran, a significant power with a minimal footprint in the region, to pursue its regional interests more actively. The emergence of these two powers in the South Caucasus will substantially undermine Russia's influence in the region.

1. The Return of Turkey

The return of Turkey to the South Caucasus is confirmed by two major occurrences. First, the return of Turkey is demonstrated with its active political and military involvement in the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh War. As some experts point out, Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was unprecedented; none of the previous conflicts in the South Caucasus or in the entire territory of the former Soviet

⁶⁴Yavuz and Huseynov, "The Second Karabakh War."

⁶⁵RagipSoylu, "Why Turkey Returned to the Caucasus after a Hundred Years," Middle East Eye, December 11, 2020, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-azerbaijan-armenia-caucasus-return-why>.

Union saw such a large-scale outside intervention.⁶⁶ Even in the 2008 and 2014 conflicts, the West and the United States were limited to political pressure and some demonstration of military power. Turkey, on the other hand, was vocal about its support to Azerbaijan’s rightful fight for territorial integrity on several occasions. “We say again to our Azerbaijani brothers that we stand by them in their holy struggle until victory,” declared Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on October 5 during the heavy fighting.⁶⁷ Moreover, Turkish support was not limited to political declarations only. After the Armenia-Azerbaijan border skirmishes of July 2020, Turkey conducted joint exercises with Azerbaijan on the latter’s territory and may have left numerous equipment and personnel in Azerbaijan, according to some observations.⁶⁸ As Gustav Gressel claims, Turkey based several F-16 fighters in Azerbaijan in October 2020 that were used later against Armenian ground-attack aircraft.⁶⁹ Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan confirmed to *The Washington Post* that a Turkish F-16 shot down an Armenian warplane.⁷⁰ Besides, according to some sources, Turkish officers were engaged in guiding drone attacks against Armenian military assets, playing a critical role in winning the war.⁷¹ An important aspect of Turkish engagement in the war is that Russia did not allow Armenia to use its newly received Russian Su-30 interceptors to challenge Turkish F-16s and Azeri drones.⁷² It seems that Russia did not want Armenia to engage Turkey proper, so as to avoid even greater Turkish involvement in the war, probably in the form

⁶⁶Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 31–32.

⁶⁷“Heavy Metal,” *The Economist* 437, no. 9215 (October 10, 2020): 31–32, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/2449666566/abstract/B94EF06C0E444DC6PQ/1>.

⁶⁸Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. R41368 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 24, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R41368>.

⁶⁹Gustav Gressel, “Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh: Reason for Europe to Worry,” *European Council on Foreign Relations ECFR* (blog), November 24, 2020, <https://ecfr.eu/article/military-lessons-from-nagorno-karabakh-reason-for-europe-to-worry/>.

⁷⁰“Erdogan’s Reckless Intervention Is Fueling Fighting in Azerbaijan and Armenia: A Frozen Conflict Gets Hot.,” *The Washington Post (Online)*, October 2, 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2448148258/citation/41869000FD704D60PQ/1>.

⁷¹Gabuev, “Viewpoint.”

⁷²Gressel, “Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh.”

of ground forces. That would have been too damaging to Russian prestige and would have dragged Russia directly into the fight.

Several factors have been emphasized that presumably led to such a large-scale Turkish intervention in the “backyard” of Russia. The most important of those factors are Turkey’s increased ambitions and assertiveness on international arena. It is evident in Ankara’s tense relations with the West, as well as in its military activities and positioning in the Middle East, and now even in the South Caucasus. In Iraq, Libya, and Syria, Ankara has demonstrated its readiness to use force to change the status quo without looking back at its NATO allies, leading regional powers (Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia) and Russia.⁷³

According to some experts, the rivalry between Russia and Turkey in the Middle East is one of the reasons for Turkey’s active engagement in the Karabakh war and represents the continuation of their competition in other geographic areas.⁷⁴ As Andrew Kramer claims, after Russia openly confronted Turkey in Syria and killed Turkish troops, Turkey became more active on all fronts where Russia could have been vulnerable.⁷⁵ According to this view, developments in the Middle East will directly affect the South Caucasus, making peace in the region and Russia’s dominant role even more vulnerable. The connection between the two regions is also indicated by the fact that, according to various sources, Turkey has secured the involvement of pro-Turkish Syrian forces in the Karabakh war. Russian prestige was undermined, as evidence mounted about Turkey sending Syrian fighters for support of the Azerbaijani forces. There is even a report from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group that 72 Syrian fighters were killed in action during the Nagorno-Karabakh War.⁷⁶ However, surprisingly, this information went unremarked by Russia, even when the French president expressed concern over it

⁷³Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 31–32.

⁷⁴Andrew E. Kramer, “Armenia and Azerbaijan: What Sparked War and Will Peace Prevail?,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/armenian-azerbaijan-conflict.html>.

⁷⁵Kramer.

⁷⁶“Heavy Metal.”

publicly.⁷⁷ The lack of an adequate response from Russia becomes even more difficult to explain when such an action by Turkey could have caused even greater repercussions for Russia, extending well beyond the confines of the Nagorno-Karabakh War onto Russian soil. Besides inflicting damage to Russia's prestige, Turkey, by placing Sunni-Arab Syrians in predominantly Shia Azerbaijan, may have intended to exacerbate sectarian tensions among Russia's own Muslim population in the North Caucasus.⁷⁸ Russia's tolerance of Turkey's "misconduct" in the South Caucasus may indicate at least two things: first, Russia expects to trade gains on interests of even greater importance for concessions from Ankara in another theatre (most notably in the Middle East); second, Russia has lost control over the developments in the South Caucasus. In either case, Russian dominance in the South Caucasus has been undermined.

Turkish President Erdogan has linked active meddling in the South Caucasus to the "noble" act of supporting ethnic Turkic kin, the Azerbaijanis, a claim voiced on several occasions before, during, and after the 2020 war. Speaking ahead of the NATO summit on June 13, 2021, President Erdogan called "the Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood the basis for peace and prosperity in the Caucasus."⁷⁹ Appellation to kinship and such framing should not be overlooked and dismissed. The kinship in itself cannot be considered as a major factor for Turkey's active meddling in the region. Under the same fraternity argument, Turkey did not intervene in the first Karabakh War even though Russia looked much weaker after the Soviet collapse and was not as assertive as it is today. Therefore, other factors previously mentioned should have mattered more. However, this statement may indicate far-reaching aims targeting the Turkic-speaking countries in Central Asia. As some researchers observe, Turkey aspires to reach out to Turkic countries of Central Asia by gaining a foothold in Azerbaijan.⁸⁰ Therefore,

⁷⁷Rose Irish and John Michel, "France Accuses Turkey of Sending Syrian Jihadists to Nagorno-Karabakh," *Reuters*, October 1, 2020, sec. AMERS, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-putin-macron-idUSKBN26L3SB>.

⁷⁸Zanotti and Thomas, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, 25.

⁷⁹Barry et al., *Burja Na Kavkaze*, 31–32.

⁸⁰Barry et al., 33.

Erdogan's messaging may be read as a call to Central Asian countries for friendship with Turkey that can bring them as much success as it has brought to Azerbaijan.

Erdogan's statements that the Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood is "the basis for peace and prosperity in the Caucasus" should have provoked Moscow. At minimum, the statement presents Turkey as a guarantor of peace in the "backyard" of Russia and as an assertive power aspiring global recognition. Surprisingly, it was left unchecked. Russia's turning a blind eye to Turkey's activities can be explained by Moscow's previously mentioned desire to punish Pashinyan and the desire to maintain the status quo achieved in the Middle East. Russia may want to avoid further complications with Turkey that could challenge its position. According to Waal, during the conflict there was speculation that the Russian and Turkish presidents were negotiating a "condominium deal" for the South Caucasus to achieve a compromise on co-existence, as they have done in Libya.⁸¹ By this logic, Turkey's involvement in the Second Karabakh war is not of a one-time nature, but indicates its establishment as a regional power able to leverage its engagement in the Middle East for the gains in the Caucasus, certainly against Russia's interests. If true, this reinforces the argument that Turkey gained more from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than Russia, which has had to accept Turkey as a regional power in an area that was once under its sole control.

The second and the most important expression of the Turkish return to the South Caucasus region was the deployment of Turkish military personnel in the conflict zone to monitor the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement of November 9, 2020. Despite the opposition from Armenia and reluctance from Russia, the recognition of the Turkish military's role in the war in some form suggests Turkey's emerging influence in the region. On November 11, 2020, the Turkish and the Russian Defense ministers signed an agreement to establish a joint ceasefire-monitoring center.⁸² A joint observation center to monitor the ceasefire operates in the Aghdam region, where one Turkish general and 38 personnel are stationed along with Russian military personnel (according to some

⁸¹Waal, "Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict."

⁸²Yavuz and Huseynov, "The Second Karabakh War."

sources, 60 military personnel from each side).⁸³ Although the center does not provide for Turkish engagement in active “peacekeeping” and is only limited to observation of the ceasefire, it bears significance. The center establishes the Turkish military presence in a region where it had been absent for the last 100 years.⁸⁴ Moreover, while the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers in the conflict area is limited to a five-year term, with the possibility of further extension upon approval from Armenian and Azerbaijani sides, the joint observation center seems to be free from such time limitations.⁸⁵ In the absence of specific and detailed information on the operation of the center, some sources indicate that it was established “to protect the ceasefire regime until a lasting peace is achieved.”⁸⁶ This may mean that, theoretically, the center may outlast the Russian peacekeepers. Upon their withdrawal, the center may become a means of retaining the Turkish footprint in the conflict area.

As some researchers observe, the Second Karabakh War showcased Turkey’s increasing role in the South Caucasus.⁸⁷ This role was well symbolized on December 10, 2020, as Turkish President Erdogan, alongside Azeri President Aliyev, attended the victory parade in Baku. The war established a new reality in the region where Moscow is no longer the only major power.⁸⁸ The new reality is well recognized in Moscow, as reflected in the comments of high officials. Dmitri Medvedev, the deputy chairman of the national Security Council, admits openly to journalists that Russia needs to recognize the changes in the region that now demand discussing as relevant regional matters with Turkey.⁸⁹ In this regard, it is definite that Russia will have to consider and accommodate

⁸³Joshua Kucera, “Russia and Turkey Open Joint Military Center in Azerbaijan,” Eurasianet, February 2, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/russia-and-turkey-open-joint-military-center-in-azerbaijan>.

⁸⁴Soylu, “Why Turkey Returned to the Caucasus after a Hundred Years.”

⁸⁵“Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajjanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii.”

⁸⁶Tutku Dilaver, “Turkish Russian Joint Monitoring Center Became Operational at Aghdam,” Center for Eurasian Studies, February 17, 2021, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/TURKISH-RUSSIAN-JOINT-MONITORING-CENTER-BECAME-OPERATIONAL-AT-AGHDAM>.

⁸⁷Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 26.

⁸⁸Gabuev, “Viewpoint.”

⁸⁹Kucera, “Russia and Turkey Open Joint Military Center in Azerbaijan.”

mounting Turkish ambitions in the region. However, those ambitions have already started to transform into additional challenges to Russian interests. One such ambition is the potential establishment of a Turkish military base in Azerbaijan, about which Moscow responded it would have to take steps to ensure Russia's own security.⁹⁰

2. Emergence of Iran

Besides the return of Turkey to the South Caucasus, it seems that the outcome of the war has opened a Pandora's box in that it has encouraged the pursuit of regional ambitions for other countries such as Iran. Iran now seeks to achieve its share of interests vis-à-vis the region in a manner that seemed inconceivable a decade ago. The South Caucasus is still regarded among Iranian intellectuals as a former part of the Persian Empire and, consequently, "a legitimate domain for Iran to project its influence."⁹¹ However, the historical past is not the main determinant of Iran's interest in the region. There are about 20 million Iranian Azeris living in the northern part of Iran, whose separatist aspirations could turn into a threat to Iran's territorial integrity. Considering the threat, Iran has sought to hamper the strengthening of Azerbaijan that could awaken a desire for Iranian Azeris to join into a Greater Azerbaijan.⁹² At the same time, Armenia represents a significant partner for Iran in light of U.S. economic sanctions. Tehran's political-economic cooperation with Erevan is underscored by its gas supply to Armenia as well as the annual trade volume reaching \$364 million (2018 figure).⁹³ Moreover, Israel gaining a foothold in Azerbaijan has become a matter of increasing concern among the Iranians, given the Azerbaijani-Israeli military cooperation. Iranians fear that Israel may use Azerbaijan as a springboard for an attack on Iran.⁹⁴

⁹⁰"Russia Monitoring Talk of Turkish Military Base in Azerbaijan, Says Kremlin," *Reuters*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-monitoring-talk-turkish-military-base-azerbaijan-says-kremlin-2021-06-18/>.

⁹¹Josef Kraus and Emil Souleimanov, "A Failed Comeback? Understanding Iranian Policies in the South Caucasus," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 5 (July 5, 2016): 448–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2016.1196024>.

⁹²Kraus and Souleimanov.

⁹³"Iran-Armenia Trade Hits Record High," *Financial Tribune*, February 26, 2019, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/96903/iran-armenia-trade-hits-record-high>.

⁹⁴Kraus and Souleimanov, "A Failed Comeback?"

The Second Karabakh War negatively impacted Iran on all three of these major concerns for Iran. The war inspired Iranian Azeris who openly supported Azerbaijan's actions in Karabakh; Armenia was severely damaged by the potential negative implications of the economic cooperation between Iran and Armenia; and the war demonstrated the superiority of Israeli military equipment and success of Israeli-Azerbaijan cooperation. Moreover, and most provocative for Iran, Turkey gained influence in the region, which Russia did not and could not resist. The previously described implications of the war and, importantly, Turkey's success in gaining a foothold in the region, have encouraged Iran to actively implement a regional policy contributing to its national interests. Evidence of Iran's proactive engagement in the region comes in the deployment of regular Iranian Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps to patrol its borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia. This move is believed to represent an Iranian effort to prevent any change in the internationally recognized boundaries of Armenia.⁹⁵ Moreover, the recent exercise named "Khyber Conquerors" is thought to be a message to Azerbaijan's Israeli partners.⁹⁶ However, it can also be considered a significant signal to Turkey, Russia, and Azerbaijan demonstrating that Iran is ready and capable to defend its vital interests in the South Caucasus if threatened. The fact that Iranian maneuvers on Azerbaijan's borders were observed for the first time since the demise of the Soviet Union underscores Tehran's determination in its intent.⁹⁷

In the light of Turkey's return as well as Iran's practical and likely proactive engagement in the region, we may conclude that Russia's interests in the South Caucasus have been severely damaged.

In response, Russia must either accept the new reality or take steps to balance the consequences for its regional interests. One such step could be Russia's new initiative to establish a regional 3 + 3 platform. Within the platform, the three South Caucasus

⁹⁵Kaleji, "The 2020 Karabakh War's Impact on the Northwestern Border of Iran."

⁹⁶Abbas Qaidari, "Iranian War Games on the Border with Azerbaijan Were Really a Message to Israel," *Atlantic Council* (blog), October 8, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iranian-war-games-on-the-border-with-azerbaijan-were-really-a-message-to-israel/>.

⁹⁷Qaidari.

countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) and their three larger neighbors (Turkey, Iran, and Russia) shall work closely together ensuring regional security and unfolding regional economic potential.⁹⁸ Iran has given consent to the initiative while Turkey is actively pushing for its implementation. Nonetheless, there is little chance that the initiative will gain support from all the Caucasian countries, given the illegal Russian occupation of Georgia's territories. The initiative may suggest that Russia has come to terms with the post-war reality in the region and is looking for ways to engage with newly emerged regional powers. At the same time, the initiative could be a tactical maneuver by Russia to ensure that Turkey is even further distanced from the West by creating an anti-Western regional bloc. Moreover, it would ensure the suppression of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and eventually its democratic strife if Tbilisi accepts the initiative. That would be a rather significant achievement for Kremlin, which fears spillover of democratic tendencies in authoritarian Russia capable of taking down the regime. In this respect, the initiative, if activated, would render Russia significant gains both on the regional as well as on the global scale. This would allow Russia to balance the consequences of the Second Karabakh War.

Given the developments during and after the Karabakh war, one may assume that domain of Russian power has shrunk significantly as shifting of Baku towards Turkey's power domain is observed. It is certain that we will observe increasing competition in the region that is unlikely to contribute to its security and stability. If Russia aims to strengthen its status of a global power, first it will need to reestablish its regional dominance in the South Caucasus, and that will not be easy to achieve.

C. PEACEKEEPING AND MILITARY IMPLICATIONS

As previously mentioned, many observers view the deployment of Russian military peacekeepers in the conflict area as the main gain of Russia. This perspective is seemingly based on the history of Russian peacekeeping, as Russian peacekeeping operations were used to advance Russia's strategic interests in the Commonwealth of

⁹⁸“Russia Offers 3+3 Format Caucasus Regional Platform,” Daily Sabah, October 6, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/russia-offers-33-format-caucasus-regional-platform>.

Independent States (CIS) area. This section explores Russian peacekeeping operations and their implications.

1. Peacekeeping

The experience of Russian “peacekeeping” operations on the territory of the former Soviet Union includes engagement in the conflicts on the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as on the territories of Moldova and Tajikistan. However, when drawing parallels and comparisons, this discussion focuses on the conflicts in the Black Sea region due to its geographical proximity to Nagorno-Karabakh. Importantly, conflicts in Georgia and Moldova as well as Nagorno-Karabakh share proximity to the West and, hence, a threat perception by Russia of the area’s susceptibility to Western influence. Moreover, unlike other conflicts, the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh are similar in that Russia has thwarted the attempts of the capitals to regain control of the breakaway regions.

According to various researchers, Russia used peacekeepers within the CIS to advance its own strategic interests of maintaining a military presence beyond its borders and reinstating, as Dov Lynch notes, “clear hierarchical power relations in the CIS region.”⁹⁹ At first glance, from the previous experiences of Russian peacekeeping, one may conclude that Russia will benefit significantly from engaging in its peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, such a conclusion is premature. Given the peculiarities of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the nature of Russian peacekeeping involvement in the conflict, it can be argued that the Nagorno-Karabakh peacekeeping mission has no significant value for Russia’s interests and even incurs some negative effects.

In order to assess the value of the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is important to consider the general characteristics of the peacekeeping in previous conflicts and the factors that distinguish them from the new mission. First, it is important to look at what national interests the deployment of

⁹⁹Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, 1st ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780333984215>.

peacekeepers in the conflict regions serves for Russia, as well as how the particulars of the new peacekeeping mission differ from the previous practices.

Studies of Russian peacekeeping missions, such as those of Lynch, Vidal, and Mackinlay, identify several Russian national interests that were served through the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in conflict regions in the early 1990s. One such major interest was reestablishment of Russian influence over the countries of the former Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ Achieving this goal was facilitated by the active involvement of Russia in all conflicts within the former Soviet Union, including in Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan. Russian military units engaged in the conflicts by providing combat support to one of the conflicting parties. Charles Dobbie describes the biased role of Russian peacekeepers in such conflicts well, labeling Russia a “player” and not a “referee.”¹⁰¹ Substantial Russian military engagement in these confrontations allowed establishment of control over the course of the conflict, which was then successfully used to put pressure on the young governments of the respective countries for various concessions. Siding with the Russian-speaking break-away minority in Tiraspol in the Moldovan conflict demonstrates the success of the Russian strategy of “armed suasion.”¹⁰² Partisan engagement of Russian “peacekeepers” in the conflict compelled the Moldovan government to make concessions to Russia, including membership in the CIS.¹⁰³ A similar pattern of engagement and “peacemaking” was applied in the case of Georgia. The Russian military forces were directly involved in the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia provided military assistance to these separatists, which ensured their success during the confrontation. As in the case of Moldova, manipulation of the conflict through military engagement and support to separatists allowed Russia to extort a range of concessions from the Georgian government. Importantly, it led to Georgia’s

¹⁰⁰John Mackinlay and Peter Cross, *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping* (Geneva: United Nations University Press, 2002), 14, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=253812>.

¹⁰¹Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 179.

¹⁰²Lynch, 4.

¹⁰³Nicholas Vidal, “Ideas, Institutions, Intervention, and Ethnic Conflict: A Constructivist Analysis of Russian Peacekeeping in the Former Soviet Union,” UVM Honors College Senior Theses, January 1, 2018, 82, <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/hcoltheses/270>.

membership in Russia's CIS, one of the major mechanisms for gaining influence over the former Soviet republics.

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the conclusion that applying "armed suasion" over the opposing sides allows Russia to exert decisive or enhanced influence over their governments is highly unlikely for several reasons. First, the number of Russian peacekeepers and their armament in Nagorno-Karabakh is inadequate to gain forceful control over the future course of the conflict. The ceasefire agreement of 2020 limits Russia's deployment to 1,960 peacekeepers with firearms, 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 units of motor vehicles and special equipment, intended for self-defense purposes.¹⁰⁴ The peacekeeping unit is far smaller in strength than the strength of the conflicting parties. For comparison, the pre-war strength of Azerbaijan was 67,000 active personnel, with 665 tanks, 1,637 armored vehicles, and 740 artillery pieces, while Armenia's strength consisted of 45,000 active personnel with 529 tanks, 1,000 armored vehicles, and 293 artillery pieces.¹⁰⁵ Such a weak contingent of peacekeepers would be unlikely to control the course of the conflict through, for example, suppressing fighting or changing it to the advantage of either party. Therefore, Russia's peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh in its existing form should not allow Russia to repeat its successes in Georgia and Moldova.

This pattern of advancing Russian interests through manipulation with and use of "armed suasion" was facilitated by the very nature of the conflicts. In particular, in the cases of Georgia and Moldova the conflicts were distinctly of an intra-state nature. These are "new wars," as Mackinlay differentiates them from Clausewitzian "old wars" or the wars among states. New wars are less intense in kinetic terms. New wars are, however, more complicated than old wars as they are "less defined in time and space" and tend not to have definite front lines.¹⁰⁶ The vague nature and limited scale of these conflicts do not attract commitment from the international community; as a result, they lack candid

¹⁰⁴"Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajjanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rossijskoi Federacii."

¹⁰⁵"Infographic: Military Arsenals of Armenia and Azerbaijan," Aljazeera, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/1/infographic-military-arsenals-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan>.

¹⁰⁶Mackinlay and Cross, *Regional Peacekeepers*, 2.

oversight and checks on Russian peacekeeping. Although the UN and OSCE have operated observer-missions in the former-Soviet conflict areas, one could suggest that they were successfully manipulated by Russia's membership in the organizations blocking any alarming reports on misconduct of Russian peacekeepers. The failure to raise the alarm was facilitated by the broad mandate of these peacekeeping missions and their ill-defined rules of engagement as well.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the presence of the UN and the OSCE in the conflict zones could be seen as part of Russian effort for de facto justification of the way Russia kept the peace.¹⁰⁸ In addition, in some conflicts involving Russian-speaking minorities, Russian military units were advantageous to take control of the conflict with even more ease by providing relatively unobtrusive military assistance to the Russian-speaking separatists. It may explain why the 14th Army could supply the Transnistrian separatists with not only weapons, infrastructure, and training, but in some cases with entire units covertly.¹⁰⁹ The same pattern could be observed later in Ukraine in the form of little green men. Hence, an unconstrained and, in some cases, advantageous environment allowed Russia to engage in partisan war-fighting under the guise of a peacekeeper and to advance its strategic interests exploiting the conflicts.

Contrary to the cases of Georgia and Moldova, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is a vivid expression of an "old war"; in other words, an inter-state conflict, although it started off as a secessionist conflict. This seems to be the reason why it garnered considerable regional interest, as demonstrated by the Turkish military support to Azerbaijan and the establishment of the joint Turkish-Russian ceasefire monitoring center in the Aghdam region.¹¹⁰ Moreover, unlike the conflicts in Moldova and Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict does not involve a Russian-speaking minority that could facilitate unobtrusive maneuvering of the Russian peacekeepers. Given these differing factors, it is unlikely that any actions committed by Russian peacekeepers that are out of line with its peacekeeper mandate will be left unchecked. Any biased act by Russian

¹⁰⁷Mackinlay and Cross, 20.

¹⁰⁸Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 13.

¹⁰⁹Mackinlay and Cross, *Regional Peacekeepers*, 146.

¹¹⁰Yavuz and Huseynov, "The Second Karabakh War."

peacekeepers to the advantage of Armenia is likely to be seen as a hostile step by Azerbaijan and Turkey. It may consequently provoke escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict or even tensions in the Middle East, given Turkey's assertiveness. This is unlikely to serve Russia's interests. At the same time, Russia's prestige and its reputation as a peacekeeper would be called into question. This might be damaging for a country that is engaged in numerous contentious areas both within the borders of the former Soviet Union and beyond. Russia's prestige and reputation would be damaged if the peacekeeping mission ceases as a result of "misconduct" by Russian peacekeepers. Such a prospect is likely, as either party of the ceasefire agreement is eligible to decide not to prolong the operation of the peacekeeping mission on the grounds of "misconduct."¹¹¹

Russian peacekeeping will be further undermined if the mission fails to maintain the ceasefire and skirmishes continue to occur, creating the potential for conflict escalation. Such a development cannot be ruled out if we consider the casualty statistics after the 2020 ceasefire agreement. According to the data set tracking the casualties of the conflict, at least 171 military personnel from both sides were killed and wounded since the ceasefire.¹¹² It is noteworthy that two Russian peacekeepers were among the victims—one killed and one wounded. The number of casualties is significant, given that over the period of 2015–2020 (excluding April 2–11, 2016) the parties suffered only 280 dead and wounded. Therefore, Russia faces significant challenges in safeguarding the fragile peace on the ground while every violation of the ceasefire directly hits its credibility as a peacekeeper.

It is possible to conclude therefore that forceful manipulation of the conflict is unachievable and even risky for Russia; deployment of its peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is therefore unlikely to generate substantial Russian influence over the conflicting parties. Consequently, the assertion that Russia gained significantly in

¹¹¹"Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajjanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rosiiskoi Federacii (Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation)."

¹¹²"The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer," Crisis Group, October 27, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>.

increasing its influence over the parties through the deployment of peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is doubtful.

The second critical interest that Russia pursued through deploying peacekeepers in the conflict zone was the establishment of forward operational bases (forward-basing). According to Lynch, forward-basing serves four main purposes for the Russian Ministry of Defense: a) maintaining control of important military infrastructure, b) preventing external actors from influencing the conflict area, c) supporting conflict resolution through posting peacekeepers, and d) deploying the Immediate Reaction Force on a permanent basis to counter threats.¹¹³ The need for forward-basing arose in alignment with Russia's Cold-War-era military planning and deployment, when high-readiness units were stationed in various Soviet republics. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia found its former bases and troops in the territories of independent countries. However, in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union, Russian strategic thought maintained that Russia would be best protected by retaining the existing infrastructure and related forces in these post-Soviet countries. In addition, Russia should defend the outer border of the CIS with the corresponding host-country forces, such as in Tajikistan on its Afghan and Pakistani borders. Where this was not possible through cooperation, the goal was achieved through the deployment of peacekeepers in conflict areas. These peacekeepers were established in the existing fully functional Soviet military bases, such as in Abkhazia of Georgia and in Transnistria of Moldova. In other places, such as in South Ossetia region of Georgia, Russia built new bases without the consent of the host country.

Considering the returns of the previous forward-basing experiences, we can boldly conclude that benefits from the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh will be minimal or negligible to Russia as it already has significant forward-basing infrastructure in Armenia. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely to serve the interest of freezing the conflict. Contrasting the possible outcomes of the Karabakh peacekeeping mission with the four main forward-basing objectives identified by Lynch, it is likely the

¹¹³Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 83.

conclusion just stated is well supported. According to Lynch, one of the purposes of the Russian peacekeeping deployment was supporting conflict resolution. This goal may be considered as noble, but it necessarily implied resolving the conflict according to Russian terms.¹¹⁴ Moreover, in the case of Moldova and Georgia, with the support of Russian peacekeepers, not only was the conflict resolved, also it was frozen indefinitely. Consequently, the question is whether it is in Russia's best interest to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to determine the role of peacekeepers in this regard. Given that in Russia's hands the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a mechanism for influencing both Armenia and Azerbaijan and curbing their Western ambitions, we may assume that it is in Russia's interests not to resolve the conflict, but rather to freeze it, and continue to manipulate it. From this perspective, peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh will likely serve the interest not of resolving the conflict, but of freezing it, which can be accomplished by maintaining a ceasefire between the parties. Accordingly, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh for the purpose of freezing the conflict could be considered a Russian gain, though it is important to see how achievable the goal is. It is possible to assume that the peacekeeping mission in its existing form and mandate will not be effective for maintaining a ceasefire to freeze the conflict, as this implies the establishment of forceful control over the course of the conflict. However, as discussed earlier in relation to armed suasion, control is not achievable by the peacekeepers with their given mandate and capabilities. It is well-evidenced by the multiple violations of the ceasefire following the signing of the 2020 agreement and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone. At the same time, the establishment of forceful control over the conflict by Russian peacekeepers would be even more troublesome as Turkish personnel monitor the peacekeeping process. Given Turkey's assertiveness in the Caucasus and the Middle East, we may assume that it will not allow or dismiss the violation of mandates by Russian peacekeepers. Importantly, the course of the conflict will always depend on the domestic political conjuncture of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and both could escalate conflict to mobilize the respective public around the interests of the governing regimes. Therefore, the goal of freezing the conflict through maintaining the

¹¹⁴Lynch, 96.

ceasefire is likely unattainable for the Russian peacekeepers. Thus, it can be concluded that “resolving the conflict” on Russian terms implies the freezing of the conflict, for which the deployment of Russian peacekeepers can be considered a gain, but achieving its purpose in the long run is unlikely.

Another Russian interest served through peacekeeping deployment in post-Soviet space is maintaining control of important military infrastructure, usually of Soviet legacy.¹¹⁵ Yet, deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh did not entail acquisition of control over Soviet legacy military infrastructure as none existed. Moreover, establishment of new significant infrastructure in Nagorno-Karabakh or in the vicinity on Armenian soil is not expected either for two main reasons. First, it is unlikely that Azerbaijan would give consent to the establishment of a major Russian military base in Nagorno-Karabakh given the experience of Gabala Radar Station. In 2012, Russia had to leave the only Russian-operated military installation on Azerbaijani soil as the parties did not manage to agree on the officially declared lease fee.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, one may suggest that Azerbaijan got rid of Russian military basing in the country considering the implications of such presence in Georgia in 2008 and earlier in Moldova. Moreover, Russian military basing on Azerbaijan territory would be inconsistent with the aspiration of possible deployment of a Turkish military base in the country. The idea was scotched in media coverage by the Turkish president sometime after the Ceasefire Agreement of 2020; however, it still prompted a harsh Russian reaction, warning that Russia would have to take appropriate measures to secure its interests.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, establishing of a new Russian military base near the conflict zone on Armenian soil is unlikely as Russia already deploys the 102nd military base in Gyumri in Armenia. Construction of a new base seems to make no sense and is financially unjustified considering the operation and capabilities of 102nd base. While, in theory, construction of a new base on Armenian territory cannot be ruled out, Armenia’s top leaders seem to

¹¹⁵Lynch, 83.

¹¹⁶AnarValiyev, “Russia to Cease Using Gabala Radar Station,” Jamestown Foundation, December 14, 2012, <https://jamestown.org/russia-to-cease-using-gabala-radar-station/>.

¹¹⁷“Russia Monitoring Talk of Turkish Military Base in Azerbaijan, Says Kremlin.”

be negatively inclined toward such a development. Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan noted that while there is potential for expansion of the current Gyumri base, there is no need for a second military base.¹¹⁸ Hence, the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh fails to benefit Moscow in terms of acquiring control of a Soviet military base as there is none and the Kremlin lacks the prospect of establishing the new one.

Given the Russian 102nd base and FSB Border Guards operating in Armenia, Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh provide minimal or no benefits to Russia in terms of countering external threats and controlling CIS outer borders. The 102nd military base, along with the deterrence of a possible Azerbaijani attack on Armenia, provides for all the features of forward-basing: The base houses up to 5,000 Russian military personnel, 74 tanks, 160 armored vehicles, 84 artillery pieces, 18 MiG-29 fighters, and over 200 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), surface-to-air (SA), and surface-to-surface (SS) missile complexes (including the S300 and Iskander).¹¹⁹ Some of the Russian air assets, among others the Mi-24 attack helicopters and Mi-8 transport helicopters, are located at Erebuni airport in Erevan as an integral part of the 102nd base. The 102nd base is operated by Russia until 2044 according to the agreement between the two countries.¹²⁰ So the 102nd base holds sufficient capabilities to support an attack and repel a hostile offensive. It can also be considered as part of the Russia's A2/AD system over the Black Sea together with the assets deployed in Abkhazia/Georgia, Crimea/Ukraine, Krasnodar/Russian Federation, Mozdok/Russian Federation, and onboard the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation. Moreover, Armenia hosts 4,500 Russian Border Guard troops to protect the so-called outer border of the CIS, including around 330 km of borders with Turkey and around 45 km with Iran.¹²¹ In contrast, the 1,960

¹¹⁸“Why Armenia Rejected the 2nd Russian Military Base in the Country?,” *The Eurasian Times*, February 23, 2021, <https://eurasianimes.com/why-armenia-rejected-the-2nd-russian-military-base-in-the-country/>.

¹¹⁹Hovhannes Nazaretyan, “Russia’s Increasing Military Presence in Armenia,” EVN Report, March 4, 2021, <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/russia-s-increasing-military-presence-in-armenia>.

¹²⁰Nazaretyan.

¹²¹Nazaretyan.

peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, which are equipped merely with self-protection and some logistic capabilities including firearms, 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 units of motor vehicles and special equipment, could not be considered as a considerable gain for Russia.¹²² The contingent cannot provide significant contribution to the war-fighting functions of the 102nd base, nor can these peacekeepers control the outer borders, as that is already implemented by the Russian Border Guard units.

Finally, the Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh fails to deliver on one of the most important functions related to forward-basing, namely on preventing the influence of other external actors in the conflict area by filling the power vacuum. Even more, the mission has ensured the establishment in the South Caucasus of Turkey, which is a member of NATO, a bloc that has been declared an enemy by Russia. Turkey was not only actively involved during the war against Russia's strategic ally, Armenia, but gained a foothold in the region through dispatching its observers at the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Center. As much as this deployment was a triumph for Turkey in the region, it was as much a blow to Russia. Thus, the function of the peacekeeping mission has proved a double-edged sword from this perspective as well; the deployment of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh has failed to prevent the intervention of an external force in the conflict settlement process and created ground for anchoring Russia's rival power in its backyard.

To conclude, the idea that Russia has gained significant benefits from the deployment of peacekeepers in the conflict zone is largely unfounded. Through comparison with the previous conflicts where Russia deployed peacekeeping missions, it becomes clear that the new peacekeeping mission lacks the ability to serve Russia's interests of manipulating the conflict, guarding the CIS outer border, and acquiring new military infrastructure. Instead, the mission poses a risk to Russia's reputation as a peacekeeper, as it is highly likely that the mission will be unable to prevent violations of the ceasefire agreement, which will lead to a new escalation. Moreover, this mission has turned out to be detrimental to Russia's interests. The establishment of a peacekeeping

¹²²“Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Azerbajanskoi Respubliki, Premier-Ministra Respubliki Armenia i Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii.”

mission in Nagorno-Karabakh ensured Turkey's involvement in the ceasefire monitoring process. This could be said to have legitimized Turkey's presence in the South Caucasus as a rival regional power for Russia. Thus, for Russia, the Nagorno-Karabakh peacekeeping mission can be regarded not as beneficial, but rather harmful and an irrational investment. In sum, the deployment of the peacekeepers not only failed to deliver on expanding the Russian means of exercising the power but contributed to reducing Russia's power domain.

2. Military Implications: UAV versus ADS

The 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh ended with unexpected results from the point of view of most analysts and observers. It can be said that Armenia, which, as many believed, enjoyed a geographical advantage, suffered a crushing defeat. The victory of Azerbaijan is largely attributed to drones, which disgraced the Russian-made air defense systems (ADS) of Armenia. If we simplify the hypothesis, the Azerbaijani-owned drones won the war against the Russian air defense systems. Comparison of drones and ADSs is a rather complicated matter and must entail several factors outside mere technical characteristics. Nonetheless, the analysis of the available data allows us to conclude that the drones had a clear advantage over the Russian-made ADSs as those systems were mainly dated. Moreover, Armenia owned few modern Russian-made ADSs which were supposed to counter drones; however, those ADSs did not meet those expectations and harmed the reputation of Russian systems.

To demonstrate that the Second Karabakh War observers had good reason to doubt the effectiveness and reliability of the Russian air defense systems and, conversely, to recognize the superiority of drones, it is important to look at the characteristics of the respective systems and their achieved effects during the war. Moreover, it is important to look at how successful these systems have been in other conflict areas to decide whether their effects in Nagorno-Karabakh War were an exception or part of the pattern.

Azerbaijan used rather modern, mainly Turkish and Israeli produced unmanned aerial assets, including drones and loitering munitions, during the war to take the advantage of the opposing side. These assets are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Unmanned Aerial Assets of Azerbaijan¹²³

Bayraktar TB2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAV purchased from Turkey • Equipped with light munitions (MAM-L) • Endurance: 24 hours
Harop (known also as Harpy 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loitering munition purchased from Israel • Endurance: up to 6 hours • Mission range: 500 to 1,000 km
Orbiter 1K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loitering munition purchased from Israel • Endurance: Up to 2.5 hours • Mission range: Up to 100 km
Orbiter -3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loitering munition purchased from Israel • Endurance: 7 hours • Mission range: 150 km
SkyStriker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loitering munition purchased from Israel • Endurance: 2 hours • Mission range: 20 km
Hermes -900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAV (MALE) purchased from Israel • Endurance: up to 36 hours • Service Ceiling: – 30,000 ft (9.144km)
Hermes -450	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAV (MALE) purchased from Israel • Endurance: 17 hours • Service Ceiling: 18,000 ft (5.49km)
Heron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAV (MALE) purchased from Israel • Endurance: 30 hours • Service Ceiling: 45,000 ft (13.7km)
Aerostar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAV (surveillance) purchased from Israel • Endurance: up to 12 hours • Mission range: up to 250 km
Antonov An-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soviet Era single-engine biplane • Repurposed as UAV

Armenia relied mostly on Soviet and Russian made systems to protect itself from Azerbaijani aerial assault. These systems are summarized in Table 2.

¹²³Shaan Shaikh and Wes Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh: Lessons for the Future of Strike and Defense,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 8, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/air-and-missile-war-nagorno-karabakh-lessons-future-strike-and-defense>.

Table 2. Air Defence and Electronic Warfare Systems of Armenia¹²⁴

9K33 - Osa (SA-8)	Soviet-developed mobile, low altitude short-range ADS
9K35 Strela-10 (SA-13)	Soviet-developed mobile, low altitude short-range ADS
2K12 (SA-6)	Soviet low to medium-level ADS
S-300PT-1A, S-300PS (SA-10B)	Soviet /Russian long range SAM systems
Buk-M1-2 9K37M (SA-11)	Russian-made medium range AD missile systems
Tor-M2KM (SA-15)	Russian-made low to medium altitude short-range SAM
Pantsir-1S	Russian mobile, multi-channel short-range air defense missile-gun system
2K11 Krug	Soviet/Russian medium-range, medium-to-high altitude (SAM) system
S-125M1 (SA-3)	Soviet medium altitude medium range SAM system
ZU-23 and ZSU-23-4 'Shilka'	Soviet self-propelled anti-aircraft autocannon
Strela-2M	Soviet developed MANPADS
9K38 Igla	Soviet developed MANPADS
"9K333" VERBA (SA-25)	Russian-made MANPADS
Krasukha	Russian mobile, ground-based, electronic warfare system.
Polye-21	Russian mobile, ground-based, electronic warfare system
R-330P Piramida-I	Russian mobile, ground-based, electronic warfare system

The use of unmanned aerial assets by Azerbaijan during the war was a “tactical sensation,” to borrow Michael Kofman’s expression, and confirmed the superiority of the air force over the ground forces in the absence of adequate air defense systems.¹²⁵ Azerbaijan employed drones to carry out targeting, tracking, aiming, and hitting with precision strikes beyond the front line, deep in the rear. With drones and loitering munitions, Azerbaijan was able to destroy high-value assets such as tanks, artillery pieces, components of air defense systems, and conduct targeted killing of personnel and high-level officers, such as the so-called Minister of Defense of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹²⁶ Moreover, the destruction of supply lines in the rear played an important role in shaping

¹²⁴ Stijn Mitzer et al., “The Fight For Nagorno-Karabakh: Documenting Losses On The Sides Of Armenia And Azerbaijan,” *Oryx* (blog), September 27, 2020, <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2020/09/the-fight-for-nagorno-karabakh.html>.

¹²⁵ Kofman, “A Look at the Military Lessons of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.”

¹²⁶ Shaikh and Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

the outcomes of the war. However, it should not be understood that the fate of the conflict was decided merely by the drones. Analytics and observers highlight the importance of Special Forces working in small groups during the operations.¹²⁷ The importance of automated command systems manufactured by Israel and Turkey in conjunction with the successful operation of electronic reconnaissance is considerable as well.¹²⁸

Looking at the air defense equipment Armenia employed to ensure the areal control over the conflict zone, one could suggest, and various researchers share the opinion, that Armenia had a fairly well-integrated air defense system.¹²⁹ However, several factors emerge that made the failure of the system inevitable.

First, the failure of Armenian air defense can be attributed to the fact that most of the ADSs were dated, coming from the Soviet period. These air defense systems were manufactured at a time when UAVs did not exist and, hence, were not designed to counter such threats. It appears that the problem with the Soviet ADSs was not the missiles themselves but the sensors, which were designed to identify and detect fast aircraft while ignoring slow-moving, small-sized aerial vehicles.¹³⁰ According to Kofman, these outdated systems are not only ineffective against drones, but also impossible to upgrade for countering this new UAV threat.¹³¹

Nevertheless, besides the Soviet-era systems, Armenia also operated modern ADSs, such as the Russian-made Tor-M2KM and Pantsir-S1, capable of countering the UAV threat. From various points of view, these systems worked relatively effectively. According to these accounts, the Tor-M2KM, in particular, was responsible for downing of up to 60 air targets, including six Bayraktar TB2.¹³² Overall, the Russian-made air

¹²⁷Anna Maria Dyner and Arkadiusz Legieć, “The Military Dimension of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh,” PISM, November 26, 2020, https://pism.pl/publications/The_Military_Dimension_of_the_Conflict_over_NagornoKarabakh.

¹²⁸Dyner and Legieć.

¹²⁹Edward J. Erickson, “The 44-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh Turkish Drone Success or Operational Art?,” Army University Press, August 2021, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2021-OLE/Erickson/>.

¹³⁰Gressel, “Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh.”

¹³¹Kofman, “A Look at the Military Lessons of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.”

¹³²Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 67–68.

defense systems were able to destroy 180 air targets, including seven Bayraktar TB2 in total. On the other hand, some accounts suggest that up to 40 Azerbaijani air targets were destroyed, which includes only two Bayraktar TB2 as well as 13 An-2 biplanes that were transformed into UAVs and used as bait to reveal the location of Armenian ADSs.¹³³ Despite the striking divergence between these reports, if we compare even the highest number of losses of Azerbaijan to the losses of the Armenian side, the effectiveness of even modern Russian ADSs becomes questionable. In particular, out of the six Tor-M2KMs stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh, four (five in total according to different source)¹³⁴ were destroyed during the first 15 days of the confrontation.¹³⁵ Moreover, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan declared the destruction of seven S-300 launchers, a radar, and two control units.¹³⁶ At the same time, the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army lost more than half of its air defense systems (60 percent according to the Center for Strategy and Technology Analysis) at the beginning of the conflict.¹³⁷ It should be taken into consideration that not all of these air defense assets were destroyed by the Bayraktar TB2 but also by loitering munitions and a few by artillery. Overall, the Bayraktar TB2 was responsible for destroying 559 ground targets confirmed with either photo or video graphic evidence; hence, the actual numbers may be higher.¹³⁸ These numbers include:

¹³³Stijn Mitzer et al., “The Fight for Nagorno-Karabakh: Documenting Losses on the Sides of Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *Oryx* (blog), September 27, 2020, <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2020/09/the-fight-for-nagorno-karabakh.html>.

¹³⁴Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 67.

¹³⁵Mushvig Mehdiyev, “Armenia’s Military Equipment Loss in Recent Karabakh War Stands at \$4 Billion, Exceeding State Budget,” *Caspian News*, December 6, 2020, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/armenias-military-equipment-loss-in-recent-karabakh-war-stands-at-4-billion-exceeding-state-budget-2020-12-6-0/>.

¹³⁶Shaikh and Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

¹³⁷Barry et al., *Buria Na Kavkaze*, 48.

¹³⁸Stijn Mitzer et al., “The Conqueror of Karabakh: The Bayraktar TB2,” *Oryx* (blog), September 27, 2021, <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/09/the-conqueror-of-karabakh-bayraktar-tb2.html>.

- Self-propelled anti-aircraft gun 23mm ZSU-23-4 (1);
- 24 Surface-to-air missile systems:
 - 2K11 Krug (1),
 - 9K35 Strela-10 “SA-13” (3),
 - 9K33 Osa “SA-8” (17),
 - S-300PS “SA-10” (2),
 - Tor-M2KM “SA-15” (1);
- Radars systems (6);
- Jammer R-330P Piramida-I (1).

According to various sources, Armenia operated a Russian-made short-to-medium range ADS, Pantsir-S1. Although the system officially was not on armaments list of Armenia, information on the destruction of one Pantsir-S1 by Israeli-made Harop loitering munition was disseminated with attached photographic evidence.¹³⁹ Significant attention is given to the performance of the Pantsir-S1 systems as it garners great interest on the international market. For example, Serbia bought six units of this system in 2020 while the UAE bought 50 units.¹⁴⁰ However, not much information was revealed about the effectiveness of Pantsir-S1 in Nagorno-Karabakh other than that of its destruction by the loitering munition and also an observation by Franz-Stefan Gady and Alexander Stronell suggesting its inability to engage low-flying targets such as the Bayraktar TB2.¹⁴¹

One may conclude that the reason for the success of drones in Nagorno-Karabakh was not only the datedness of the Armenian ADSs but also the characteristics of the

¹³⁹“Azerbaijani Army Destroyed Pantsir-S1 of Armenia Using Israeli Harop Drone,” *Global Defense Corp* (blog), October 26, 2020, <https://www.globaldefensecorp.com/2020/10/26/azerbaijani-army-destroyed-pantsir-s1-of-armenia-using-israeli-harop-drone/>.

¹⁴⁰Ali Bakeer, “The Fight for Syria’s Skies: Turkey Challenges Russia with New Drone Doctrine,” Middle East Institute, March 26, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/fight-syrias-skies-turkey-challenges-russia-new-drone-doctrine>.

¹⁴¹Franz-Stefan Gady and Alexander Stronell, “What the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revealed About Future Warfighting,” *World Politics Review*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29229/what-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-revealed-about-future-warfighting>.

drones, such as flight altitude, speed, and size. For example, the Turkish-made UAV, the Bayraktar TB2, operates at altitudes that are beyond the engagement range of short-range air defense systems, while a medium-range surface-to-air missile system (SAM) is unable to detect and engage it as the latter is designed to target fast jets.¹⁴² The advantage of drones becomes particularly apparent when used for both target identification and killing (the Bayraktar TB2 carries MAM-L—smart micro munitions which makes it deadly force) or when used with swarming tactics.¹⁴³

Moreover, it appears that ineffectiveness of the Russian-made ADSs as well as the success of Azerbaijani drones were facilitated by the lack of adequate support from Electronic Warfare (EW) systems. As it turns out, electronic warfare devices such as long-range jammers, which can break the guiding link of an unmanned aerial vehicle, are effective and efficient means to be used against drones.¹⁴⁴ The Armenian side possessed the Russian-made EW means, such as the Polye-21 and Krasukha; however, according to some reports, they enjoyed limited success in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the Armenian general, the Armenian side was able to disrupt the operation of the Azerbaijani drones for only four days.¹⁴⁵ Azerbaijan was able to neutralize the Armenian EW in the very first days quite effectively with Israeli-made loitering munitions that could operate even under adverse conditions (albeit with limitations), as they did not require a guiding link.¹⁴⁶

To the extent that drones in the Second Karabakh War worked effectively, it is all the more important to understand the effectiveness of drones against Russian-made ADSs in other conflict areas. This will provide even more insights into the capabilities of these systems in relation to each other and exclude the randomness of the Karabakh case.

¹⁴²Jack Watling and Sidharth Kaushal, “The Democratisation of Precision Strike in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” RUSI, October 22, 2020, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/democratisation-precision-strike-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

¹⁴³Watling and Kaushal.

¹⁴⁴Gady and Stronell, “What the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revealed About Future Warfighting.”

¹⁴⁵“Armenia: General ObvinilPremiera Pashinyana v Grubikh Oshibkakh v Voine v Karabakhe,” BBC News Russian Service, November 19, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-55005875>.

¹⁴⁶Gressel, “Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh.”

Before the Second Karabakh War, Turkey widely used its own UAVs, such as Bayraktar TB2s, in Syria and Libya. In both cases, the Turkish drones were quite effective against the enemy's manpower, as well as equipment and targets of high importance, despite operating within the area of modern Russian-made air defense systems. Moreover, these ADSs not only failed to neutralize Turkish drones but suffered attacks from them and were effectively destroyed.

Particularly noteworthy is the drone campaign during the Operation Spring Shield, launched by Turkey in response to an airstrike in the Syrian province of Idlib that killed 33 Turkish military personnel.¹⁴⁷ The Turkish drone campaign reflects well the effectiveness of the drone and its kill potential against various types of targets including the modern ADS. During the campaign, the Turkish drones managed to destroy “3,000 soldiers, 151 tanks, eight helicopters, three drones, three fighter jets (including two Russian-made Sukhoi Su-24s), around 100 armored military vehicles and trucks, eight aerial defense systems, 86 cannons and howitzers, ammunition trucks and dumps, and one headquarters,” and more.¹⁴⁸ Importantly, among the victims of the drones, according to President Erdogan, were eight Russian-made ADS Pantsir-S1, which the Russian Defense Ministry called an exaggeration. However, the Turkish Ministry of Defense did not delay publishing videos depicting how drones were destroying Russian Pantsir-S1s, the purpose of which was to neutralize air threats from short/medium range and low altitudes.¹⁴⁹

Turkish drones enjoyed success against the Russian ADS Pantsir-S1 in Libya as well. Turkey, in support of Libya's legitimate government, deployed the Bayraktar TB2, which inflicted significant damage on Khalifa Hifter's forces and destroyed the Russian ADSs that were meant to provide air cover for the warlord. Eventually, the Turkish

¹⁴⁷Bakeer, “The Fight for Syria's Skies.”

¹⁴⁸Bakeer.

¹⁴⁹Bakeer.

campaign significantly undermined the positions of Hifter and forced him to abandon the idea of seizing Tripoli.¹⁵⁰

A number of observers suggest that one should not exaggerate the capabilities of Turkish drones while underestimating Russian ADSs as long as the systems Russia exports to other countries (i.e., to Syria, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan) are different from the systems that Russia itself has in its armaments.¹⁵¹ According to this view, none of the export variants of the Russian ADSs are capable of “plot-fusion”—“accumulating and combining raw radar echoes from different radars into one aggregated situation report” that is critical to spot targets such as drones.¹⁵² In a nutshell, this view suggests that the Pantsir-S1 guarding a Russian base is effective against Turkish drones, while the Syrian Pantsir-S1 fails. This argument seems an attempt to salvage the reputation of the Russian Pantsir, though it is weak and controversial in itself. Firstly, it is impossible to verify this view in practice; the Turkish Bayraktar never attacked a Russian base on Russian soil to observe how effective the respective ADSs are. Moreover, it is illogical for a client country, such as the UAE, to pay \$750 million for 50 Pantsir-S1s supposedly designed to protect against drones, if it is incapable to meet its purpose being an export variant. It should also be noted that the UAE have deployed several Pantsir-S1 in Libya in support of Hifter, at least one of which was destroyed by a Turkish drone.¹⁵³ Thus, it is possible to conclude that there is no significant difference between the domestic and export variations of Russian-made ADSs because both appear less effective against UAVs and specifically against the Turkish-made drones. This view is supported by the fact that Russian officials indirectly acknowledge the weakness of their own systems when objecting to the purchase of Turkish drones by their adversary. Following the destruction of Russian howitzers by the Bayraktar TB2 in a separatist-controlled area of Ukraine, the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov expressed disappointment saying that

¹⁵⁰James Marson and Brett Forrest, “Armed Low-Cost Drones, Made by Turkey, Reshape Battlefields and Geopolitics,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/armed-low-cost-drones-made-by-turkey-reshape-battlefields-and-geopolitics-11622727370>.

¹⁵¹Gressel, “Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh.”

¹⁵²Gressel.

¹⁵³Bakeer, “The Fight for Syria’s Skies.”

the supply of Turkish drones to Ukraine would “destabilize the situation at the engagement line.”¹⁵⁴

It is rather difficult to compare the effectiveness of ADS and UAV system,” as it is determined not only by the technical characteristics of each but also by many external factors including tactics, level of automation and integration. However, we may conclude that Azerbaijani-owned Turkish and Israeli-made drones took advantage over Armenian-owned Russian-made air defense systems. The Second Karabakh War revealed the effectiveness as well as the importance of drones in modern conflicts. The war severely damaged the reputation of Russian-made air defense systems, which had already been tested during the conflicts in Syria and Libya. In fairness, however, it should be noted that drones are a problem not only for Russian air defense systems but for other advanced powers as well. This is well evidenced by the Iranian drone strike on Saudi oil infrastructure in September 2019. As Stephen Bryen observes, none of the U.S., French, and Swiss air defense systems, such as the Patriot, Crotale, and Oerlikon, respectively, was able to defend against or even detect the Iranian drones.¹⁵⁵

The analysis has far-reaching implications beyond the region of the South Caucasus, particularly vis-à-vis the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War. It suggests that the effectiveness of drones against the Russian ADS as well as other military equipment including artillery, tanks, and armored vehicles and also military personnel should play a significant role in tilting the fate of the war towards Ukrainian victory. In sum, the Second Karabakh War has undermined the Russian ADS, which is part of A2/AD of the Black Sea and elsewhere, to be effective means for exercising Russian power.

¹⁵⁴“Ukraine Uses Turkish Drone against Russia-Backed Separatists for First Time,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 27, 2021, sec. Ukraine, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-turkish-drone-separatists/31532268.html>.

¹⁵⁵Kofman, “A Look at the Military Lessons of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.”

V. CONCLUSION

The consequences of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan have changed the security context of the region considerably. Most of the analyses around the war contend with the assumption that Russia gained significant benefits from the war's outcomes—extended military presence in the region and broadened control over Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In contrast to common sense that Russia benefited significantly from the war, the thesis seeks to demonstrate that Moscow lost considerably, particularly, in terms of exerting influence in the region. In support of this claim, the thesis briefly explores the conflict's roots, leading to the outbreak of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, and provides the analysis of the available literature on the consequences of the war unfolding the newly established realities. Moreover, it explores the literature on the question of power and influence in order to establish the theoretical framework for assessing the consequences of the war and whether Russia's power increased or decreased as a result. Robert Dahl's approach defining power in terms of its ability to achieve desired aims is applied. Implications of the war on Russia's power are analyzed with the focus on the most important power dimensions such as scope, domain, and weight.

The thesis is based on two hypotheses. The “null hypothesis” that this thesis sought to disprove is the proposition that Russia emerged with more power from the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The second proposition, that Russia lost power resulting from the war, serves as the alternative hypothesis. These hypotheses are evaluated through careful analysis of Russian power indicators as follows:

- Scope and reliability of Russia's power over Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- Russia's ability to maintain the power domain, hence prevent other countries from engaging in the security matters of the region;
- Effectiveness of the military means to exercise Russian power.

The research design is based on the evaluation of alternative propositions regarding the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in terms of the Russian power over the conflicting countries and in the region. The methodology of the research comprises a) a historical analysis of the origins of the conflict leading to renewed escalations; b) an analysis of the 2020 conflict and Russia's influence over the parties involved before and after the conflict; c) a study of the Russian political and military posture and the regional implications of the war. The research addresses the strategic interests of the relevant countries, the rationale behind the emergence of Turkey as the regional power, as well as the nature of the Russian peacekeeping and use of military means to advance its strategic interests.

To summarize the war in general terms, Russia has let Azerbaijan to win back all seven previously occupied territories and the part of Nagorno-Karabakh, supposedly to punish Armenia for electing pro-western Pashinyan. Moreover, Russia has allowed Turkey to intervene in the course of the Second Karabakh War that secured its military presence in the region as a peace observer. Even more, changing security context in the region has prompted Iran to take steps in support of its regional interests, contributing to the dense atmosphere within the Caucasus. Russia deployed a peacekeeping mission in the conflict area that turns out to be ineffective for manipulations with the conflict and risks a failure to meet the mission objectives endangering Russia's reputation as a "peacekeeper." Finally, the establishment of the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh ensured Turkey's involvement in the ceasefire monitoring process through the deployment of militaries on Azerbaijani soil.

Through extensive research, the study finds that Russia's power has significantly decreased in terms of all three power dimensions, however to a various degree vis-à-vis Armenia and Azerbaijan and the entire region, as a result of the Second Karabakh War.

The decisive Armenian defeat in the war, the demise of the myth of Russia being a security guarantor, the demonstration by Armenia of the firm will of pursuing the more democratic and pro-western path, have shaken the fundamentals of the influence of Russia over Armenia. This, in terms of power analysis, suggests that Russia's power has decreased in reliability to achieve desired effects over Yerevan in accordance with

Moscow's interests. Moreover, it may entail a decrease in the scope and domain of the Russian power in the long term perspective. It is possible to assume that Yerevan will seek to escape from the Russian influence if the hostile environment around it alleviates and/or possibilities for new security arrangements open. Some signs of such prospects are already unfolding as Ankara and Yerevan made steps to normalize relations through specially appointed envoys. Moreover, Iran has demonstrated its intention to support Armenia if its internationally recognized borders are endangered. And finally, signs from the Russia-Ukraine war suggest that Moscow is weakening and is unlikely to be capable of conducting coercive policy comparable to its previous posture.

The outcomes of the war, enhanced leverages to balance the Russian pressure, and increased distrust of Baku towards Moscow suggest that Russia suffered significant loss of power from the war and will exert the least influence over Azerbaijan if any. Azerbaijan is likely to pursue more independent foreign and domestic policy backed by Turkey. This, in terms of power analysis, suggests that Russia's power has decreased in scope and reliability. Moreover, it is highly relevant to assume that the domain of power has reduced, shifting Baku towards Turkey's power domain.

As some researchers observe, the Second Karabakh War established a new reality in the region where Moscow is no longer the only major power. It is definite that Russia will have to consider and accommodate the Turkish increasing ambitions in the region. Moreover, the aftermath of the war observed Iran demonstrating its readiness to defend Tehran's interest vis-à-vis the region. Hence, developments during and after the Second Karabakh War suggest that the domain of Russian power in the region has shrunk significantly. It is caused by the emergence of rival powers within the region, primarily of Turkey, as well as Baku's shift towards Ankara's power domain.

The idea that Russia has gained from the deployment of peacekeepers in the conflict zone is revealed to be unfounded. The new peacekeeping mission is incapable to deliver on Russia's interests of manipulating the conflict, guarding the CIS outer border, and acquiring new military infrastructure. Instead, the mission poses a risk to Russia's reputation as a peacekeeper. Moreover, the establishment of the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh ensured Turkey's involvement in the ceasefire monitoring process.

This could be said to have legitimized Turkey's presence in the South Caucasus as a rival regional power for Russia. The deployment of the peacekeepers not only failed to deliver on expanding the Russian means of exercising the power but contributed to reducing Russia's power domain.

The Second Karabakh war revealed the effectiveness of drones against air defense systems as well as other military equipment and personnel. The war severely damaged the prestige of Russian-made ADS as Azerbaijani-owned Turkish and Israeli-made drones took advantage of Armenian-owned Russian-made systems. The finding has far-reaching implications, particularly, vis-à-vis the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War. It suggests that the effectiveness of drones against the Russian ADS as well as other military equipment and personnel should play a significant role in deciding the outcomes of the war tilting it towards Ukrainian victory. Overall, the war has undermined the Russian ADS, which is part of A2/AD in the region and elsewhere, to be effective means for exercising Russian power.

In Sum, the outcomes of the war prove to be a significant blow to Russia's regional policy and interests. In line with the suggested hypotheses on implications of the war on Russia's power, the analysis demonstrates that Moscow's power over Yerevan has decreased in weight with the potential of further reduction in the scope and domain in the long run. Moreover, Azerbaijan's victory in the war has reduced Russia's power in scope, reliability, and domain considering the emergence of Turkey as a regional power and the perceived shift of Baku under Ankara's power domain. The war has contributed to the establishment of the new, Turkish-centric power pole in the region with the proportional reduction of Russia's power domain, scope, and weight. In addition, the war undermined the reliability of Russian ADS as means of exercising power and failed to provide a tangible mechanism of influence through the deployment of peacekeepers in the conflict area.

Overall, given the new status quo and provided analysis on the outcomes of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Russia should be expected to take assertive steps to balance its losses. If Russia aims to maintain the status of global power, first it will need to reestablish the regional dominance in the South Caucasus which will not be easy to

achieve. It is certain that competition among the two power centers, Moscow and Ankara, will increase in the region that is unlikely to contribute to the regional security and stability. These understandings shall allow the regional countries to review their foreign, security, and defense policies and adapt accordingly.

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