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**SECURITY STRATEGY OF SMALL STATES:
THE CASE OF AZERBAIJAN AFTER THE TOVUZ CLASHES OF 2020**

MA thesis

Supervisor: Ivan Ulises Kentros Klyszcz

Tartu 2021

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Security Strategy of Small States: The Case of Azerbaijan after the Tovuz clashes of 2020

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Abstract

The main objective of the thesis is to analyze how a small state copes with a shock to its security emanating from a conventional military threat. The author used a single case study and chose the case of Azerbaijan after the Tovuz clashes. The Tovuz incident was a shocking event for Azerbaijan since it created an imminent threat to the security of the state and its energy infrastructure. The study seeks to analyze shifts in Azerbaijan's security strategy as a result of perceived threats from the Tovuz clashes. The thesis aims to identify whether there has been a fundamental change in Azerbaijan's relations with regional powers and examine the overall implications of the Tovuz skirmishes on Azerbaijan's foreign policy decisions. To accomplish the research aims, the author contextualized Baku's reaction to the Tovuz clashes in the long-term trends of Azerbaijan's security policy. The author refers to the neorealist perspective on the security strategy choices of small states. The qualitative interview with Azerbaijani experts was selected as a major data collection method.

The study results identified a tactical shift to Turkey. There was a change in Azerbaijan's rhetoric towards Russia after the Tovuz incident. The perception of an imminent threat as a result of the clashes and tensions with Moscow prompted Baku to further consolidate its military, political, and economic partnership with Ankara. The results of the study also determined that one of the major implications of the Tovuz skirmishes was the reconsideration of Baku's stance on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although the military cooperation between Baku and Ankara has intensified after the clashes and there have been tensions in Baku-Moscow relations, the results of the study demonstrated that Azerbaijan's security strategy did not fundamentally change. Azerbaijani elites proceeded with the use of hedging strategy in relations with regional powers.

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List of Abbreviations

APF- Azerbaijani Popular Front

BTC- Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan

BTE- Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum

BTK- Baku-Tbilisi-Kars

CIS- Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO- Collective Security Treaty Organization

IPAP- Individual Partnership Action Plan

OSCE- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

SGC- The Southern Gas Corridor

TANAP- Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline

Introduction

From July 12 to July 16 of 2020, there has been an armed confrontation between the military forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia. This was the largest clash between the two countries since the April war of 2016 and both parties blamed each other for the violation of the ceasefire. One of the most significant features of this clash was the fact that it was conducted not on the line of contact between Azerbaijan and the unrecognized “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”, but directly on the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Tovuz district of Azerbaijan is located far away from Nagorno-Karabakh, on the strategic corridor linking Azerbaijan with Georgia. This corridor has utmost importance to Azerbaijan due to the fact that all the vital routes and energy projects of Azerbaijan such as The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Supsa oil pipelines, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railways, and Baku-Tbilisi highway pass through the territory of the Tovuz region.

For the purpose of examining the selected case study, the thesis will employ the concept of small states and the security strategies used by them to cope with existing threats in the international system. The author will refer to the neorealist perspective on the security strategy choices of small states and the factors that influence their security policy decisions. In order to cope with threats and uncertainties emanating from the anarchic structure of the international system, small states employ various strategies: balancing, bandwagoning, neutrality, and strategic hedging. Balancing strategy refers to confronting and defying the source of threat by internal build-up or forming alliances. Bandwagoning manifests alignment with a source of threat. Neutrality strategy signals great powers that a small state will not take part in a great power competition and its territory will not be used as a staging ground for war. Hedging strategy implies a multi-vector strategy with the use of mixed policies such as limited bandwagoning, indirect balancing, economic pragmatism, binding engagement, and dominance denial. Small states pursuing this strategy use contrary policies of engaging with a threatening power, and concurrently balancing it in an indirect way. Neorealism contemplates various factors that influence the decision of a small state to choose a certain security strategy, such as the distribution of power in the international system, interstate enmities, perceived threats, aggregate power of the state, and geostrategic location. The author argues that

geostrategic location plays a key role in the determination of a security strategy of a small state.

Azerbaijan's security strategy before the Tovuz clashes has been primarily stable and was based on the principle of balanced foreign policy without choosing any great power blocks. Azerbaijan has continued its strategic partnership with Russia on economic, political, and social issues. Moreover, it has comprehensive energy and economic partnership with Western countries and Turkey. Azerbaijan engaged with various regional and global powers on matters of mutual interests. Thus, Baku does not depend on any of these external forces and has conducted relatively independent foreign policy throughout these times. However, Azerbaijan's security strategy was not always this stable. During the presidency of Ayaz Mutalibov (August 1991- March 1992), Azerbaijan's followed a bandwagoning strategy by striving to align with Russia. During the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey (June 1992- September 1993), Azerbaijan has taken a clear anti-Russian, pro- Turkish, and pro-Western stance on foreign policy. President Elchibey decided to balance against Russia and Iran by aligning with Turkey and the West. Both strategies of balancing and bandwagoning failed due to geopolitical and domestic reasons respectively. Being a pragmatic leader, Heydar Aliyev took into consideration geopolitical realities and decided to pursue a balanced foreign policy. He learned from the mistakes of his predecessors and refrained from choosing either a clear pro- or anti-Russian approach. After being elected as the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev has maintained the foreign policy orientation determined by his father and proceeded to balance numerous foreign power influences in the region while promoting Azerbaijan's strategic interests.

The Tovuz incident was perceived in Azerbaijan as an attack on the vital geostrategic corridor. During the clashes, international reactions to his conflict have been primarily neutral, asking both sides to immediately stop hostilities. Turkey explicitly conveyed its support to Azerbaijan through the statements of the president, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite Moscow's neutral reaction to the conflict, Russia conducted joint military exercises with Armenia a day after the end of hostilities. Moreover, seven military transport aircrafts delivered more than 400 tons of military cargo from Russia to Armenia during and aftermath of the Tovuz incident.

Azerbaijani authorities and the society were extremely unhappy with Russia's intensive military support to Armenia right in the middle of the clashes.

The main objective of the thesis is to analyze how a small state copes with a shock to its security emanating from a conventional military threat. The research question is: how does a small state respond to the imminent military threats to its security? For the purpose of the study, the author used a single case study and chose the case of Azerbaijan after the Tovuz clashes. This study is original since it scrutinizes a case that is illustrative of how small states cope with conventional military threats to their security. The Tovuz incident was a shocking event for Azerbaijan since it created an imminent threat to the security of the state and its energy infrastructure. The thesis seeks to examine whether perceived threats from these clashes changed the security strategy of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the thesis aims to evaluate the overall implications of the Tovuz incident and the ways it influenced Azerbaijan's diplomacy towards external actors. The research tasks are to determine short-term shifts in relations with major regional powers as a result of Tovuz skirmishes and the potential transformation of Azerbaijan's security strategy towards external powers.

The thesis consists of five chapters. It starts with a theoretical framework chapter that examines major concepts and theories related to the study. Namely, the concept of a small state and the strategies employed by small states are examined in this chapter. Moreover, the author used a neorealist perspective on the factors that determine the choice of the security strategies and behavior of small states. The second chapter shortly explains the research design, the methods utilized in the research, and provides details regarding the data collection process. The next chapter provides a thorough analysis of Azerbaijan's security strategy before the skirmishes and examines a variety of strategies employed by Azerbaijani authorities in different periods of history. The fourth chapter provides an overview of the Tovuz skirmishes, Azerbaijan's perception of these skirmishes, and the geopolitical context within which it happened. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the long-term trends in Azerbaijani security policy. The last chapter analyzes the collected data and provides insights on the implications of the Tovuz clashes. It examines the major changes that happened in Azerbaijan's relations with regional powers in response to the clashes. Moreover, the overall security strategy is examined in comparison to the policies employed before the clashes. Lastly, conclusions of the thesis are provided.

1. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical chapter seeks to provide an overview of strategies small states employ in order to address their security challenges. The first section of the chapter provides literature on the definition of a “small state” concept. The traditional and relational definitions of a small state will be discussed. Furthermore, an overview of the challenges and security options of small states from a neorealist perspective will also be provided in this section. The second section of the theoretical chapter seeks to discuss in detail traditional alliance strategies utilized by the small states to cope with the challenges of the international system. More specifically, the discussion of balancing and bandwagoning strategies will be provided and the factors that influence the decision of small states to choose either of the strategies will be examined. The third section examines the strategy of neutrality. The conceptualization of neutrality and different forms of neutrality will be examined in this section. The factors that influence small states’ decision to employ this strategy will also be discussed. The last section of the theoretical chapter addresses the hedging strategy. An overview of the main elements of strategic hedging will be provided. In the last section, the distinction of hedging strategy from traditional alliance strategies and neutrality will also be discussed. The strategies examined in this chapter will establish the basic framework for the analysis of Azerbaijan’s security strategy before and aftermath of the Tovuz skirmishes. It should also be specified that the security strategy is a choice a small state makes between balancing, bandwagoning, neutrality, and strategic hedging.

1.1. Small States from a Neorealist Perspective

The security strategy of small states in a complex international environment has been a significant issue since the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is an increasing interest in the security strategy small states employ to address perceived threats within a changing geopolitical environment. This section provides an overview of the definition of a “small state” concept, challenges that small states face, and strategies they employ in order to cope with those challenges. The traditional and relational definitions of a small state will also be discussed in this section. The author chooses neorealism as a theoretical framework for this research study. The author argues that the geostrategic position of a small state is a crucial factor in determining its security strategy choice.

First of all, it is important to define a concept of a small state in order to determine its insecurities and to clarify its security policy options. There are no generally accepted criteria on this concept, although attempts have been made to classify states by area, population, and some other characteristics. The concepts of power and influence determined by the availability or absence of the resources and capacity are significant in the analysis of the definition of small states. Traditionally, the concept of a small state was defined as one that is not a great power and thus is not capable of changing the status quo in the international system (Wiberg, 1987, p. 340). The main attributes of this concept included material factors such as the size of the population, territory, military capacity, which determine challenges and policy options of small states (Steinsson & Thorhallsson, 2017, p.3).

According to the traditional definition, a small state does not possess the necessary capacity to ensure its security and protect its interests (Gunasekara, 2015, p. 213). The traditional definition refers basically to the absolute nature of the power and perceives it as a crucial attribute of small states. It involves quantitative characteristics which can be measured by analyzing economic, military, geographic, and other features of a state. These quantitative characteristics allow to differentiate the size of the state and classify it either as a small state or a great power (Efremova, 2019, p. 102). However, the absence of a universally accepted concrete threshold for these quantitative characteristics that would allow to clearly distinguish absolute power of a state is a major problem of traditional definition (Efremova, 2019, p. 102-103). One of the common factors to determine the size of the state is its population. For example, according to the definition of the Commonwealth, countries with a population size of 1.5 million people or less qualify as small states (Kurecic & Kokotovic, 2017, p. 7). According to Steinsson & Thorhallsson (2017, p. 3), “states with up to 30 million inhabitants are sometimes considered small, although most academic definitions regard those with less than 10 or 15 million inhabitants as small”.

Other scholars perceive the concept of power as a relative attribute and claim that the traditional definition is not accurate in explaining the behavior of small states in the international arena. Scholars of relational definition assert that small states differ from the bigger ones not just by their size or absolute power, but by their goals and functions in the international system, by their needs and challenges which are largely determined

by their material resources and capabilities, by their geopolitical position and relative power in comparison with regional and global actors.

Rothstein proposed a relational definition of the concept of a small state. “The traditional definition is simply unable to explain the influence Small Powers have come to exert in world politics” (Rothstein, 1968, p. 21). According to Rothstein (1968, p. 29), small states do not trust in their capacity to ensure their own security and survival through internal military build-up since they lack necessary material resources. Therefore, they are essentially dependent on the assistance of other states or international organizations (Rothstein, 1968, p.29). Rothstein’s definition distinguishes small states not just by material factors, but also by qualitative features. Discussing an example of Romania before World War I, Rothstein (1968, p. 215) states that Romania decided to ally with a more powerful side even though this amplified the imbalance of power which is harmful to its long interests.

According to Keohane (1969, p. 296), a small state is characterized by the inability to make an impact on the international system, except in cases when they aggregate their capacities in such a large group that the impact of each state is minimal. In these states, elites do not believe that they can make a substantial influence on the system, “acting alone or in a small group” (Keohane, 1969, p. 296). A state’s relative power and ability to exert influence are largely determined by the availability of resources. Although small states lack those resources and take a small part in international relations, Keohane (1969, p. 296) believes that they can still have an impact if they gather up in very large groups, mainly under the dominance of the larger power.

Geostrategic location is the most salient aspect that determines a small state’s security strategy. In addition to this, interstate enmities and perceived threats are also very important factors in explaining a security strategy that small states choose to follow. Besides, the small size of a state does not preclude it from exerting its power in the international arena and promoting its national interests. According to Steinsson and Thorhallsson (2017, p. 3), “a state with a larger population size may be surrounded by one or more great powers, making it relatively small and giving it limited action space in its region”. Moreover, states with small populations and territories may have other features like abundant natural resources and geo-strategic position which allows it to

impose its influence in the region and avoid general restrictions that are encountered by small states (Steinsson & Thorhallsson, 2017, p. 3-4).

Conventionally, small states have a very small influence in the protection of international order (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 3). The statement that powerful states do whatever they can do with their capacity, whereas small states should accept this reality was accepted by small states that followed pragmatic foreign policy taking into account the interests of great powers situated in close proximity (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 3). This was the only way to survive for small states since the times Thucydides expressed this statement long before the contemporary international structure was constructed (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 3).

The same rule persisted even after the international system started to institutionalize. The major agreements and treaties were concluded among great powers which determined the realities on the ground and the rules of the functioning of this system. Small states had to just accept those rules and obey them since they were too weak to influence decisions of great powers (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 3). The position of small states substantially deteriorated after the introduction of new technological innovations at the beginning of the 20th century because this expanded the gap in military and economic capacity between small states and the great powers (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 3). The technological advances and the subsequently increased gap between great powers and small states made the geostrategic location an even more important factor for small states. Most of them started relying on their powerful neighbors for security or by building coalitions to somehow fix the imbalance in the system (Vandenbosch, 1962, p. 301). In a confrontation with a larger neighbor, small states can do nothing on their own, therefore the role of strategic location became an even more important factor, especially in the geopolitical competition between great powers. The formation of the United Nations made the international system highly institutionalized. It played a considerable role in the process of decolonization and the establishment of a lot of new small states (Wivel, Bailes, & Archer, 2014, p. 4). Furthermore, small states could finally raise their problems and promote their interests in the international arena through the institutions of the UN.

As it was mentioned before, a geostrategic position is a substantial factor that determines the needs and challenges of a small state. According to Choi (1995, p. 19), “for small states, strategic location is more important than any other factors”. There are lots of historical examples when a small state was exposed to aggression because of its location and strategic importance. Insu Choi (1995) provides an example of the Second World War when Germany attacked Belgium and the Netherlands. Germany attacked these countries, not because of their weakness or any other factors, but because these small states “happened to be located on the strategic highway to France” (Choi, 1995, p. 19). On the other hand, an important strategic position could be a valuable advantage for a small state depending on a small state’s strategy and great power’s interests. Small states can use opportunities that emerge from the great power rivalry to their benefit and thereby significantly impact the international system itself. Consequently, small states with important geostrategic positions are generally substantial actors in the global arena due to their roles as balancers, neutral states, or buffer states.

National security strategy refers to the deliberate plan designed to allocate necessary resources and tools in a coherent way to pursue long-term national goals (Gaskarth 2015; Silove, 2017). There are various components of security strategy such as foreign, defense, and intelligence policies. This study will specifically look into foreign policy and defense policy as these are resources for the state to carry out its strategy.

Small states encounter various challenges that play a crucial role in the choice of their security strategy. Nowadays, small states encounter not only conventional challenges like military aggression and inter-state conflicts but also non-conventional challenges to their security like global terrorism, energy security, food shortage, cyber threat, transnational crime, and so on (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, p. 9). These challenges are considerably more severe for small states than for great powers due to a large gap in capabilities. Usually, small states do not have the capacity and material resources to deal with these numerous threats to their security. Therefore, they are reliant on external powers and international organizations to provide necessary assistance to deal with these challenges and ensure survival. International organizations also create a mechanism of influence for small states and allow them to promote national interests on equal terms with great powers (Sherwood, 2016).

As Vaicekauskaitė argues, in order to cope with challenges and ensure their security, small states employ various security strategies: balance against great powers or potential threats, bandwagon with great powers, stay neutral, or pursue the hedging policy. Neorealist stance will be referred to during the discussion of the security strategies. According to traditional alliance theory, there are two strategies that small states utilize in order to cope with perceived threats: either aligning with great powers (bandwagoning) or creating alliances against threatening actors (balancing) (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, p. 10). These strategies have certain drawbacks such as the tendency of great powers to limit the actions of small states, impose their policies, interfere in the domestic affairs of small states. In order to avoid these drawbacks, some small states pursue strategic hedging. This strategy avoids choosing any sides in competition between great powers since it fears that this will bring higher insecurity (Sherwood, 2016). These states tend to maintain relations with both great powers that operate in the region without choosing any sides. Moreover, they use a mix of contrary strategies which, on the one hand, aim to promote cooperation with a threatening power, on the other hand, it tends to indirectly balance against that state. Another strategy that small states employ is a policy of neutrality. Neutral small states don't choose any sides in great power conflicts. They are mainly focused on the protection of their territorial integrity in case of its violation, rather than on alliance politics. Moreover, small states chose this strategy in order to signal great powers that they are not a source of threat and no other great power will use its territory as a staging ground for war.

1.2. Balancing and Bandwagoning

Traditional alliance theory provides two strategies states employ to deal with external challenges: balancing strategy and bandwagoning strategy. Balancing strategy manifests in the endeavor of countries to balance against the most powerful or threatening state in the system by forming a coalition and aggregating capacities to equalize chances. Bandwagoning strategy, on the other hand, implies the alignment with a more powerful state or the source of threat. It mainly occurs when small states do not have any coalition options to balance or when balancing is not possible due to geostrategic reasons. In order to maintain their security, small states choose to either balance against the source of threat or to align with it.

According to the neorealist school, under the anarchic structure of the international system, the major goal of states is to survive (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 52). Systemic factors determine the behavior of states. Proponents of the neorealist school believe that achieving the balance of power between competing coalitions in the international system would bring stability and order to the system. Neorealism sees the balance of power as an automatic and structural reaction to disparities in the distribution of power among the states (Parent & Rosato, 2015, p. 52-53).

Balancing strategy refers to measures employed by the state to enhance its power relative to the hegemonic or the most dangerous state through the internal build-up or through the formation of a coalition. By employing a balancing strategy, states strive to alter the distribution of power in the international system from the one that favors and suits the interests of the hegemonic state or coalition (Chong, 2003, p. 5). There are two ways of balancing: internal and external balancing. Internal one refers to cases when a state enhances its own military, political, and economic capability as a way to oppose a certain threatening or hegemonic power, whereas external balancing refers to cases when a state aligns with another state or a block of states that aggregate their resources and capability against the most threatening state or a coalition of states (Chong, 2003, p. 5). Thus, the balancing strategy intends to alter the existing status quo to the new circumstances that serve the interests of a balancing coalition. Moreover, the balancing strategy creates tensions between the hegemonic coalition and the balancing one due to the fact that the latter gradually “challenges the position of the other” which in turn reacts to those challenges (Chong, 2003, p. 5).

According to Kenneth Waltz (1979), the security strategy of states is determined by the distribution of power in the international system. The structural factors determine the behavior of states in the international arena and reduce their freedom to act as they want. Kenneth Waltz (1979) perceived bandwagoning as irrational and did not believe that any state would choose this strategy since this is not consistent with behavior dictated by structural factors. According to Waltz (1979, p.126), if states wanted to maximize their power, there would not be balances in the system and the supremacy of one state would be maintained. However, this is not the case in the international system since “balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behavior induced by the system” (Waltz, 1979, p.126).

Kenneth Waltz believed that states tend to choose a balancing security strategy in response to the growing power. However, Stephen Walt included a new aspect to the balancing theory: he suggested that states balance against the threat, not power. Moreover, he claimed that small states are not concerned with the balance of power within the international system, they are rather concerned with those states that pose the threat to their security and survival (Walt, 1987; Choi, 1995, p. 36). Walt's theory is rather different since the concept of threat is more comprehensive than the concept of power and encompasses more variables such as "aggregate power, proximity to a target, offensive capability, and perceived intentions" (Choi, 1995, p. 36). The geographical position is one of the vital variables for small states. Unlike Waltz, Stephen Walt accepted the possibility of bandwagoning as a rational security strategy for small states. Backing the neorealist idea that the distribution of power in the international system is central to defining the behavior and security strategy of small states, Walt (1987, p.25) claimed: "The weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon. Balancing may seem unwise because one's allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough". Thus, he includes new variables by arguing that small states bandwagon when there are no alternative allies that would be able to support it when the threatening country is located in close proximity and is much more powerful. Stephen Walt's theory created a new platform for the debate regarding the behavior of small states in the international arena by adding the possibility of aligning with a threatening state.

Jack Levy (1989, p. 60) contributed to the discussion by arguing that small states are more likely to bandwagon than to balance and the balancing options are primarily used by great powers in order to counterweight the rise of future hegemon. Thus, according to Levy (1989), balancing is a game of great powers, while small states which are located close to more powerful states and great powers chose security strategies that ensure their security and survival. In most cases, the strategy that ensures their survival contains bandwagoning with powerful states rather than aggregating power against them (Levy, 1989, p. 60).

Bandwagoning is a security strategy in which small states align with more powerful and even threatening states in order to safeguard their security. Small states do not contribute a lot to the aggregate power of a balancing coalition due to their very small capabilities and their contribution does not change a lot in the distribution of power in the

international system (Gunasekara, 2015, p. 218). Therefore, the choice of bandwagoning eliminates the risks associated with a balancing option, while providing security to the small state. We can summarize circumstances in which small states tend to choose bandwagoning strategy over balancing one. As it was mentioned before, the weaker states are more likely to bandwagon. Moreover, small states are most likely to bandwagon when there are no alternative allies and there is a direct threat to their security. Gunasekara (2015, p. 217) brings an example of Sri Lanka which chose to bandwagon with Britain due to the fact that it could not find any actor in the international arena on which it could rely on its security and foreign issues during the proclamation of its independence in 1948. Furthermore, it is believed that in the bandwagoning strategy both a small state and great power gain profits and have shared interests. Small states have interests such as their protection from external threats, peace, and stability in the region and enhancement of its status in the international arena. Whereas great powers are motivated by aggregation of their capability, preclusion of small states from building a coalition with opposing block and maintaining them under their sphere of influence (Choi, 1995, p. 38). However, there are also drawbacks of bandwagoning policy for small states such as significant loss of state's autonomy, restrictions in domestic and foreign policies, excessive dependence on the great power, and potential participation in great power conflicts (Choi, 1995, p. 38; Chong, 2003, p. 6).

We can observe that the concept of bandwagoning brings a meaning of aligning with a more powerful state and all scholars that were mentioned agreed on this definition. However, what is a more controversial issue is the reason why states choose to bandwagon. Randall Schweller (1994, p.74) significantly contributed to this discussion by conceptualizing bandwagoning as a security policy utilized not to ensure security and survival as was suggested by previous scholars, but rather to gain a profit from the alliance. He asserts that concepts of balancing and bandwagoning are not contrary to each other and conceptualized them: "balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain" (Schweller, 1994, p.74) Thus, Schweller believed that the major purpose of alignment is not a security and therefore states choose bandwagoning strategy not because their survival is threatened by other states, but because they want to get a profit from the alliance.

According to Mearsheimer, a small state chooses to balance due to various factors. First of all, small states tend to align with the weaker coalition since the failure to inhibit the rise of a prospective hegemonic power or coalition would put their security and survival under threat (Gunasekara, 2015, p, 217). Moreover, another factor that induces small states to balance is the perception that they would be able to exert more impact within the framework of a weaker coalition (Gunasekara, 2015, p, 217). According to this thinking, the balancing allows small states to better promote their national interests and be more independent politically. Membership in a more powerful coalition puts some restrictions on the political freedom of small states and exerts a considerable influence on the internal and foreign policies of small states.

1.3. Neutrality

Various small states have employed the security strategy of neutrality throughout history. The strategy of neutrality implies that a state will not participate in wars between various powers and will not openly or indirectly support any side of the conflict. The concept of neutrality has developed throughout history “from a purely legal concept to a broader political concept” (Morris & White, 2011, p. 105). The strategy of neutrality was perceived as an attempt of small states to ensure their security and survival by not engaging in a great power coalition, and simultaneously maintaining their sovereignty, pursuing its national interests that might be at risk in alternative strategies of balancing and bandwagoning (Joenniemi, 1988, p.53).

The concept of neutrality dates back to the Peloponnesian wars described in the Melian Dialogue by Thucydides (Simpson, 2018, p. 122). During the war, a small state of Melos employed a strategy of neutrality in order to be left out of a violent armed conflict between Athenian and Sparta’s coalitions. Despite this, Athena could not accept this neutrality due to the very significant strategic position of Melos which could threaten the security of Athena if it decided to align with Sparta (Simpson, 2018, p. 122). Here, one side wanted to avoid a war, the other one could not accept even a very small possibility of an alliance between Melos and Sparta. Therefore, Athena ignored the neutrality of Melos and invaded it. These events demonstrate that the strategy of neutrality existed during ancient times, the geographic position of states is very important in the

choice of the strategy, and neutrality is to some extent dependent on the approval of the nearby great powers (Simpson, 2018, p. 122).

The concept of neutrality has gained its legal recognition as a right of a state to stay neutral during the war times and peace after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The recognition of a neutrality status by the international community was accomplished as a result of continuous attempts of Switzerland to achieve this status due to its exposure to the threats from great powers (Irfanoglu, 2018, p. 279-280). The legal aspects of neutrality, the rights and obligations of states with neutral status in times of war were institutionalized during The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 270). The Conventions asserted that a neutral state must stay impartial towards the warring states, should not participate in the war directly or back military activities of any side of the conflict in any way, should not let belligerents infringe upon its neutrality and actions made towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not viewed as hostile, and should not allow the belligerents to use the territory of a neutral state (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 270). Furthermore, according to the Conventions, the belligerents should acknowledge the impartiality of a neutral state by not using the territory of a neutral state for military purposes (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 270). If a neutral state fails to accomplish its responsibilities, it would be regarded as an abuse of its status and a breach of international law.

The geographic position is a very significant factor that affects the decision of adopting and maintaining a neutrality strategy (Simpson, 2018, p. 123). States with an important geostrategic position are exposed to numerous threats coming from aggressive states that tend to maximize their capability by exploiting other states. States that are located far away from great powers and want to maintain the status quo may opt to adopt neutrality without having risks of violation of their status by outsiders (Tsebenko & Shymchuk, 2017, p.55). Thus, states with insignificant strategic locations for great powers are more likely to safeguard their status than states located in the middle of great power competition. The neutrality status of a buffer state is especially vulnerable to violations during times of war between great powers and/or if there is an equilibrium in the balance of power (Tsebenko & Shymchuk, 2017, p. 55). Each side of the conflict might exploit the favorable strategic location of a buffer state in order to gain an

advantage at the expense of a rival. Throughout history, various states such as Finland or Belgium adopted the status of neutrality due to their geographical location.

Due to the fact that there is no assurance that great powers will respect the neutrality of a small state during the war, a neutral state should ensure the credibility of its status. In order to do so, small states use a wide range of tools categorized as positive and negative elements of neutrality (Tsebenko & Shymchuk, 2017, p. 54). The capacity of a small state to assure great powers or warring states that the former's neutral status will benefit the latter is regarded as a positive element of neutrality. A small state should demonstrate that the costs of disregarding and infringing upon its neutrality status are very high because of possible political profits of maintaining the status quo (Tsebenko & Shymchuk, 2017, p. 54). Another way to prevent the violation of neutrality status is by developing a military capability and strengthening a defensive infrastructure. Karsh called this a negative element of neutrality. It is a deterrence strategy aimed at demonstrating a readiness to defend its sovereignty and maximizing the costs of infringement upon neutrality (Tsebenko & Shymchuk, 2017, p. 54).

There are various types of neutrality. The first type is *de jure* neutrality which consists of two forms: permanent neutrality and "neutralization" (Simpson, 2018, p. 124). One of the major characteristics of permanent neutrality is its voluntary nature and its applicability not only during the war times but also during the peace. This form of neutrality is based on international legal arrangements and is also codified in the domestic law of a given state (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 267). This type of neutrality has no time boundary and is not attached only to a certain armed conflict. A state with such a status is not allowed to be a member of a military organization or to have a foreign military base (Gavrilova & Tryma, 2015). Maintaining neutrality in peaceful times is important since provocative activities of a state during the peace might create ambiguity as for the real status of a state and might later drag it into a war as a side of the conflict (Radoman, 2019, p. 8). The most prominent example of this type of neutrality is Switzerland. Its status of neutrality was accepted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 267). Another form of *de jure* neutrality is a neutralization of a state imposed as a result of the international agreement. These states did not choose to be neutral voluntarily, but rather their status was determined and imposed by the international community or external powers (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 268). Neutralized states have a legal

obligation to maintain and adhere to their neutrality. Two prominent examples are cases of Austria and Finland. As a result of WW2, Austria was convinced to accept neutrality as a requirement for its independence.

The second type of neutrality is ad hoc neutrality. According to this type, states adopt neutrality temporarily or during a certain war between other states (Simpson, 2018, p. 124). States with ad hoc neutrality stay away from war theater both directly and indirectly. Moreover, they should ensure the absence of a foreign army on its territory during the war (Gavrilova & Tryma, 2015). Ad hoc neutral states do not provide any legal guarantees that they would stay neutral during other wars that will happen in the future (Simpson, 2018, p. 124).

De facto neutral states are the states that practice neutrality in their foreign policy without referring to the international agreement or internal legal regulation (Simpson, 2018, p. 124). There is no legal aspect that requires these states to obey their neutrality status, which specifies their rights and duties. It is a matter of foreign policy and decisions of a state expressed in practice. Despite the absence of legal regulation, the international community generally recognizes the status of de facto neutral states (Simpson, 2018, p. 124).

Finally, the last type of neutrality is non-alignment or positive neutrality which developed during the Cold War. Since those times, the concept of neutrality has been largely used in the denotation of non-alignment. During the Cold War, various states decided to refrain from aligning with either the United States or the Soviet Union by adopting a neutral position in their foreign policy (Stojanovic, 1981, p. 444). Thus, it mainly refers to the neutrality towards the political conflict between great powers during times of peace. This type of neutrality refers to the security strategy of states which refrained from joining any military coalition with competing great powers during times of peace (Stojanovic, 1981, p. 444). Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the political status of a non-aligned state does not exclude the possibility of its involvement in armed conflicts that concern its national interest or security and does not engage a great power (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 268). Most states with positive neutrality are members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

1.4. Strategic Hedging

Strategic hedging is a security strategy that enables small states to tackle their security concerns emerging from the uncertainty and risks of the anarchic international system by conducting two contrary policies. It includes engagement with a threatening force in different ways such as by promoting cooperation in various fields, enhancing diplomatic relations, joining multilateral organizations led by that power (Kuik, 2020). Simultaneously, hedging strategy contains indirect balancing policies against that concrete power by developing military capacity, joining non-military multilateral alliances and so on (Kuik, 2020). This strategy allows small states to escape a direct confrontation with the threatening force despite their balancing behavior. Small states also use strategic hedging as a way to pursue an equidistant foreign policy towards several global or regional powers (Kuik, 2020). Additionally, hedging gives a certain degree of independence in the foreign policy framework of a small state (Wu, 2016). Hedging strategy allows states to enhance their relative capability in the international arena while avoiding direct confrontation with great power (Geeraerts & Salman, 2016, p. 62).

According to Koga, the major impetus for states to pursue strategic hedging is “to reduce the risks and uncertainties associated with a particular course of action—balancing or bandwagoning” (Koga, 2018, p. 638). Open balancing strategy aggravates tension and provokes a threatening power, whereas hedging strategy enables a small state to enhance its capacity and evade confrontation with that power by upholding a cooperative stance. Despite the above-mentioned advantages of hedging, it should also be mentioned that this strategy carries “a risk of sending mixed signals” (Koga, 2018, p. 638). Due to its ambiguous nature, a hedging behavior of a small state might be misinterpreted by a great power, thus leading to tensions between states and increased pressures imposed on a small state in order to determine its political stance (Koga, 2018, p. 639).

Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2008, p. 163) defined hedging as “a behavior in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects under the situation of high-uncertainties and high-stakes”. This definition is quite similar to the ones provided above since it refers to cases when states employ a wide range of policies that retain ambiguity and escapes the challenges and risks that exist when states employ only balancing or bandwagoning strategies. The choice of a security strategy vis-a-vis external powers primarily depends on whether the state faces an “imminent security threat” (Kuik, 2008, p. 64). When a

small state perceives a certain external power as a direct threat, it is likely to employ a balancing policy against that power. However, Kuik (2008, p. 64) emphasizes that in most cases “elites do not perceive any imminent and unambiguous threat”. Consequently, most states employ a hedging strategy in the circumstance of an absence of an imminent threat to their security.

In his article, Kuik (2008) introduced five elements of hedging strategy: economic pragmatism, binding engagement, dominance-denial, limited bandwagoning, and indirect balancing. The economic pragmatism component of hedging strategy constitutes a behavior in which a state strives to gain economic benefits from the close engagement with great power, despite any political tensions and challenges in their bilateral relations (Kuik, 2008, p. 167). Binding engagement implies a behavior in which a state regularly socializes with great power through various channels, and “institutionalizes its relations with a power by enmeshing it in regularized diplomatic activities” (Kuik, 2008, p. 167). The major goal of this policy is to establish mechanisms through which a state can affect a great power’s foreign policy options and eliminate its offensive inclinations. Limited bandwagoning refers to a political partnership between a small state and a great power, within which a small state coordinates its policy with a great power on certain issues and there are also elements of intentional deference in certain issues. Concurrently, a small state continues its partnership with other powers and does not lose its autonomy in foreign policy. The dominance denial component of hedging strategy implies a close engagement with other powers in regional issues and refuting the establishment of hegemonic dominance in the region (Kuik, 2008, p. 170). Indirect balancing refers to “a policy wherein a state makes military efforts to cope with diffuse uncertainties by forging defense cooperation and by upgrading its own military” (Kuik, 2008, p. 170).

According to Kuik (2020), the hedging behavior of a small state does not target a certain threat or power, but rather it intends to counterweigh a lot of perceived threats, risks, and insecurities that arise from the self-help nature of the international system. He defined three characteristics of hedging strategy: refraining from choosing sides and highlighting non-alignment position; maintaining an ambiguous policy of “deference and defiance” in order to escape various threats and risks; and tendency to follow distinct positions in order “to keep options open” (Kuik, 2020).

In his article, Le Hong Hiep (2013) conceptualized hedging as a strategy consisting of mixed policy tools that simultaneously enhances collaboration with partner states and counterweighs prospective dangers and risks coming from them in order to tackle ambiguity regarding the intentions and future behavior of partners. All states have almost the same tools ranging “along a continuum extending from pure bandwagoning to pure balancing” (Hiep, 2013, p. 337). Nevertheless, each state selects different tools and attaches different importance to each tool depending on how the state perceives its partner. By having a wide range of tools, states gain flexibility in their foreign policy and “easily move back and forth along the bandwagoning-balancing continuum, depending on developments in bilateral relations and changes in the international environment” (Hiep, 2013, p. 337). Le Hong Hiep discussed Vietnam’s hedging strategy and specific tools used in its relations with China. According to him, Vietnam has used four tools: an economic pragmatism-expanding partnership in the economic sphere; direct engagement-enhancing bilateral instruments with the aim of developing mutual trust between states; hard balancing- developing and modernizing army and military infrastructure to create deterrence mechanism from potential aggression, and soft balancing- involvement in various international and regional organizations, and developing relations with other global or regional powers in order to resist possible pressures exerted by China (Hiep, 2013, p. 344).

Hedging is different from balancing in a sense that the latter is an explicit behavior of defying a threatening state by building its own capability or joining a military alliance, whereas the former contains some challenging and defying policies, but in a careful, limited, and ambiguous way so that it does not provoke a threatening state to undertake countermeasures (Kuik, 2020). Thus, by utilizing certain limited compliant and cooperative policies, hedging tends to evade pressures and conflict with a threatening state which are the risks associated with cases of balancing behavior. In relation to the bandwagoning strategy, hedging differs by the limited nature of its acquiescence and avoidance of making an obvious siding with any global or regional power (Kuik, 2020).

The distinction of hedging strategy from neutrality is less clear than from cases of balancing and bandwagoning. There is a similarity between concepts in the sense that in both cases a small state chooses not to align and take sides in great power competition. However, states with a hedging strategy are relatively independent actors and are usually

very active in the international arena by engaging with various partners (Guzansky, 2015). Hedging does not follow a firm non-alignment policy due to the fact that states employing strategic hedging usually join multilateral alliances, thus developing and enhancing cooperation and partnership with various powers. “Hedging-based alignments are based on selective converging pragmatism, as opposed to a rigid mutual defense commitment” (Kuik, 2020). Such an alignment is usually flexible, dynamic, “adaptable to changing relations and evolving environment” and is based on the needs of the parties and the interest convergence (Kuik, 2020). Consequently, when interests of parties converge in certain areas and at certain times, then the alignment enlarges; when interests do not match at those areas, then alignment breaks up.

Various scholars provided different conceptual frameworks of the main components of hedging strategy. In the current research study, the author employed the conceptual framework developed by Cheng-Chwee Kuik. The components of the hedging strategy introduced by Kuik are applicable to the case of Azerbaijan.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the traditional and relational approaches to the concept of a small state. Furthermore, the challenges and strategies utilized by a small state to guarantee its security have also been reviewed. The author employed a neorealist stance in the discussion of different security strategies used by small states. A balancing strategy is used to confront the source of threat by forming or joining the already existing counterbalancing coalition. Structural factors determine the choice of this policy. Bandwagoning strategy, on the other hand, is employed by a small state to align with the source of threat. Several factors influence the decision of a small state to employ this strategy: proximity to the source of threat, perceived intentions, aggregate power of a small state, and offensive power of the source of threat. Neutrality strategy is employed by a small state to signal it would not take part in the rivalry between great powers and its territory would not be used against any power. The choice of this strategy is also largely dictated by geopolitical factors. Strategic hedging means a pursuit of an equidistant foreign policy by engaging with various powers, joining non-military organizations, and employing defying or limited balancing against the source of threat when it is needed. The choice of a hedging strategy by a small state is rationalized by the

desire to eliminate risks that are existent in other strategies. Small states employing this strategy strive to conduct autonomous foreign policy and make pragmatic decisions in accordance with the changing geopolitical environment.

2. Methodology

This chapter will clarify the research design and explain the case selection. Moreover, data collection methods, the sampling process, and the choice of interviewees will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.1. Research design and the case selection

The research is based on a single case study of Azerbaijan's security strategy in a timeframe between the end of the Tovuz clashes and immediately before the Second Karabakh war. A single case study allows exploring the single phenomenon over a specific period of time through a very detailed data collection from numerous sources (Landman, 2008, p. 92). Moreover, it enables the researcher to thoroughly examine the given issue taking into account different circumstances. A single case study is the best option for this research study since it allows for in-depth study of a case and permits to capture of nuances and complexities better than other designs.

The current case of Tovuz clashes was selected due to the fact that it is based on recent events and its results were supposed to impact Azerbaijan's security strategy taking into account the perceived threat to a very important strategic area of Azerbaijan where all the vital transportation routes pass through. The research study explores the security strategy employed by a small state in response to the imminent threat perceptions. The study of the current case requires a thorough analysis of Azerbaijan's diplomacy before the Tovuz clashes and an examination of various strategies used by Azerbaijani elites throughout history. This analysis is required in order to identify the long-term trends in Azerbaijan's security policy, which would later allow the author to contextualize Baku's reactions to the clashes. Then, a detailed analysis of the Tovuz clashes and their implications is needed to determine the potential change in Azerbaijan's strategy in comparison to previous years. Hence, the analysis of Tovuz clashes provides a very interesting case for examining the behavior of small states during the period of increased threat perceptions to their security.

2.2. Research methods and data collection

The focus of this research study is to examine the implications of the Tovuz fighting and its impact on Azerbaijan's security strategy. In order to evaluate the potential

transformation of Baku's diplomacy towards external powers, the author established communication with political experts, former diplomats, and researchers working in think tanks. The author attempted to establish contact with members of the foreign policy elite such as a spokesperson of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy Advisor of the President of Azerbaijan. However, due to various reasons, they did not manage to provide their valuable views on this topic. Since the author did not manage to get access directly to diplomats and foreign policy advisors, it was decided to interact with political experts working in think tanks, former diplomats, and members of academic circles. The expert interview is relevant to this study because expert knowledge "has the power to produce practical effects" and is presumed to be influential in the societies they live in (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 54). Some of the interviewed experts are very close to foreign policy elites and their opinion is highly valued among political elites. For example, one of the interviewed experts is Dr. Farid Shafiyev, who is currently a chairman of the Baku-based think tank. Moreover, Dr. Farid Shafiyev has been an ambassador of Azerbaijan to Canada from 2009 to 2014, and to the Czech Republic from 2014 to 2019.

The author employed the purposive sampling technique since the chosen sample was based on the judgment of the author. He purposefully selected the political experts that are either close to foreign policy elites of Azerbaijan or work in research institutes. The author chose qualitative interview as a major data collection method that would allow examining the views of experts on Azerbaijan's diplomacy after the Tovuz clashes. Expert interviews have been conducted with six participants. Due to Covid-19 related restrictions, it was decided to conduct interviews in virtual circumstances, rather than face-to-face interaction.

For the implementation of interviewing process, the author has developed open-ended questions. It was aimed to gather comprehensive views of experts on the given issue and engage the experts in broad discussions (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002, p. 674). Open-ended questions enable the interviewees "to organize their answers within their own frameworks and this increases the validity of the responses" (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002, p. 674). Although interview questions had been primarily designed beforehand, the interviewer asked additional follow-up questions throughout the interview in order to gain more complete insight on experts' opinions on the issue. A semi-structured interview

enabled the interviewer to discover new subjects related to the issue and evaluate the research question through another angle (Puyvelde, 2018, p. 382).

The author will examine the implications of the Tovuz clashes and the shifts in Azerbaijan's security strategy through the analysis of in-depth interviews with experts. Empirical data would be gathered not only from an interview process but also from various primary sources such as news media, official statistical data, bilateral agreements between Azerbaijan and regional powers, speeches of high-ranking officials that were conveyed during and after the Tovuz incident. Furthermore, the author will employ secondary sources in the examination of Azerbaijan's foreign policy behavior before the July skirmishes. Relevant scholarly articles and think tank publications will be analyzed for that purpose. Thus, the data collected through qualitative interviews would be further bolstered by the examination of numerous official documents, statistical data, and journalistic reports. The author used the triangulation approach by collecting data from multiple sources. The combination of different data sources enables the researcher to develop a more thorough and comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014, p.545; Puyvelde, 2018, p. 378). This approach has also been regarded "as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources" (Carter et al., 2014, p.545).

Since the main question of this research study is how Azerbaijan's security strategy changed after the Tovuz clashes, the author would attempt to find out in which way has Azerbaijan's security policy shifted, either towards bandwagoning, balancing, neutrality, or hedging. Any change in Azerbaijan's security policy will be reflected in the analysis of interview results, speeches of high-ranking officials, and tangible changes in defense procurement and military exchanges. The author will determine the security strategy by looking at changes in diplomatic activities of Azerbaijan, the intensity of diplomatic engagements, and military cooperation with regional powers. The views of interviewed experts will be crucial in the analysis of the implication of Tovuz clashes and subsequent changes in the security policy of Baku. The interviewees' insight will help to determine whether there has been a fundamental transformation of Azerbaijan's diplomacy towards external actors, in what ways Tovuz clashes influenced Azerbaijan's foreign policy, and what is the basis of Azerbaijan's security strategy.

3. Azerbaijan's security strategy since its independence

This chapter analyzes Azerbaijan's security strategy in different periods of contemporary history. In the first section, security policies during the period of Mutallibov (August 1991-March 1992) and Elchibey (June 1992-September 1993) presidencies will be examined. The second section provides an analysis of Azerbaijan's diplomacy with external powers during the presidency of Heydar Aliyev (October 1993-October 2003). The last section explores patterns of Azerbaijan's security strategy during the period of Ilham Aliyev's presidency (2003-present).

3.1. Azerbaijan's security strategy during the Mutallibov and Elchibey presidencies: two opposite strategies

3.1.1. Introduction

Azerbaijan experienced a period of high political and economic instability upon independence from Soviet rule. At that time, Azerbaijan was in a deep economic and political crisis that was further intensified by the war in Nagorno-Karabakh (1988-1994). The absence of clear strategy, frequent change of leadership, and the war with Armenia added to the already unstable economy inherited from the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan was in a deep economic recession. The government could not control the inflation rate, "which increased from an annual rate of 616 percent in 1992 to 1130 percent in 1993" (Cornell, 2011, p. 74). Azerbaijan's Armed Forces were established in October 1991. It was "followed by the formation of two tactical motor brigades of the Armed Forces from the military establishment of the former Soviet Army located in the town of Shikh" (Mod.gov.az). During those times, armed forces primarily consisted of local voluntary battalions led by self-proclaimed warlords.

During the early independence period, Azerbaijan's security strategy frequently changed due to repeated shifts in power. Mutallibov and Elchibey choose traditional strategies of bandwagoning and balancing respectively. Both strategies were inefficient. Mutallibov's policy was inefficient due to domestic factors, whereas Elchibey's strategy failed due to geopolitical reasons. Mutallibov wrongly assumed that the pro-Russian stance would help to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and safeguard Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Moreover, he did not take into account anti-Russian tendencies within

society after Soviet military forces violently suppressed the pro-independence movement in January 1990. Elchibey wrongly assumed that a pro-Turkish and pro-Western stance would help in confrontation against Russia and Armenia. His foreign policy was purely ideological and did not take into account geopolitical realities.

3.1.2. Ayaz Mutallibov's presidency: Bandwagoning strategy (August 1991-March 1992)

Ayaz Mutallibov became the first president of Azerbaijan after the announcement of independence in October 1991. Having strong links with Russia and being a former Soviet politician, Mutallibov chose a clear pro-Russian foreign policy and counted on Moscow for assistance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Gvalia et al., 2013, p. 127). He did not actually accept the fall of the Soviet Union and perceived Russia as a sole arbiter in the South Caucasus (Cornell, 2011, p. 59). Moreover, he believed that Moscow would sooner or later recreate a new alliance of former Soviet states. Although Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan, "relations with Turkey and the West carried mainly a formal nature" (Cornell, 2011, p. 309). Despite considerable domestic disapproval and obvious wrath towards Russia due to aggression against civilians in Baku during the events of January 20, 1990, Ayaz Mutallibov wanted Azerbaijan to become a member of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (MacDougall, 2009, p. 223). This created huge domestic discontent due to the fact that people demanded complete independence and did not want to join any pro-Russian coalition. Membership in the CIS was perceived by the general public and opposition groups as losing sovereignty to Moscow again. In December 1991, Mutallibov signed the Alma-Ata Agreement to join the CIS. The pro-Russian vector of his policy was so robust that Mutallibov ignored the necessity of building an army despite the fact that during those times the country was in the condition of war with Armenia (MacDougall, 2009, p. 224). He was highly reliant on Russia in that sense and believed that Russia would resolve the conflict to Azerbaijan's benefit if the latter join the CIS. Mutallibov's diplomacy is a primary evidence for the bandwagoning strategy in Azerbaijan's foreign policy during the early independence.

After Mutallibov's decision to become a member of the CIS, an agreement was supposed to be ratified by the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan. In exchange for that, Yeltsin

gave his word to disband “the 366th motorized infantry brigade of the Russian Interior Ministry that later played a crucial role in the occupation of Khojaly” (Abilov & Isayev, 2015, p.119). Nevertheless, the suggestion was not ratified by the Supreme Soviet and shortly after this decision, horrible atrocities happened in Khojaly. Despite Mutallibov’s pro-Russian foreign policy, Armenian forces which were supported by the Russian 366th motorized infantry brigade occupied Khojaly and massacred innocent civilian population that was trying to flee from the city (MacDougall, 2009, p.224). These events demonstrated that Russia clearly supported Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict despite all the efforts of Mutallibov to gain Russian support. Mutallibov failed to defend its nation’s interests, to establish a professional army, and prevent atrocities against its population, and rather tried to align Azerbaijan with Russia and rely on its help. He decided to bandwagon with a source of threat and relied on its security guarantees, without taking into account internal political processes. As a result of large-scale protests after the Khojaly massacre, Ayaz Mutallibov was forced to resign under popular pressure in March 1992.

3.1.3. Abulfaz Elchibey’s presidency: Balancing strategy (June 1992-September 1993)

In June 1992, Abulfaz Elchibey, a member of a Popular Front Party, was elected as the president of Azerbaijan. Nationalists under the rule of Elchibey promoted the ideology of Pan-Turkism. During Elchibey’s presidency, foreign policy choices were primarily driven by ideological factors, rather than material ones. Nationalists were striving to develop a very strong relationship with Turkey and move away from Russian influence. Thus, Elchibey sought a pro-Western foreign policy and relied on Turkey’s help in establishing Western support. Azerbaijani authorities blamed Russia for its military support to Armenian forces in Khojaly and this caused the pro-Russian elite to lose its power grounds in Azerbaijan (Shiriyev, 2019, p. 6). Despite the fact that the majority of the members of the nationalist party supported the pro-Turkish position, some members of the government condemned overreliance on Turkey (Shiriyev, 2019, p. 6). Azerbaijan’s relations with Turkey considerably improved during this period. “Elchibey’s foreign policy priorities were based on a belief that Turkey, not Russia, was the best model of development for Azerbaijan” (Gvalia et al., 2013, p.127). Elchibey openly

expressed that the Turkic identity of Azerbaijan is more important than the Muslim identity and it was taken as a basis for the foreign policy orientation.

At the beginning of his presidency, Elchibey tried to form friendly relations with Russia in order to achieve its neutrality in the conflict, and the pro-Russian leaders of the Azerbaijani army played an important part in this decision. However, after realizing that Russia would not take a neutral position in the conflict, Elchibey removed all pro-Russian staff from governmental offices in order to reduce the Kremlin's influence (Shiriyev, 2019, p. 6). Russia was dissatisfied with its diminished influence in Azerbaijani domestic structures and with the increased influence of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Since Russia perceived these countries in its sphere of its influence, Moscow wanted to be the main mediator between two rivals in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Abilov & Isayev, 2015, p.122). Moreover, Moscow made a proposal to send its military forces to the line of contact between two warring post-Soviet countries (Abilov & Isayev, 2015, p.122). However, Azerbaijani authorities were against this proposal since it was perceived as an attempt to separate Nagorno-Karabakh from other regions of Azerbaijan. Elchibey insisted on the full removal of Russian troops from its territory. Thus, Azerbaijan became the first post-Soviet country that fully removed all Russian military bases from its territory (Ozturk, 2013, p.8).

Despite considerable Russian pressures, Azerbaijani authorities were unwilling to approve membership in the CIS. Elchibey was overall suspicious regarding Russian intentions since he was aware of the Russian support to Armenia (MacDougall, 2009, p.231-232). His suspicions further intensified after Armenia decided to join the CIS Collective Security Treaty in May 1992 (MacDougall, 2009, p.231). During that period, Azerbaijani authorities perceived Russia as the major threat to the existence of an independent Azerbaijan due to the fact that CIS was regarded as an attempt to collect all the former countries of the USSR under a new organization and revive an old union.

During Elchibey's tenure, Baku wanted to align with Turkey and to expand its relationship with the United States in order to balance Russian influence in the region. However, at that time, Turkey's interests in the South Caucasus were limited to the promotion of economic cooperation with newly established states (Shaffer, 2012, p.76).

Turkey did not want to directly engage in this region's conflicts and was not interested in forming a military alliance with Baku at that time (Shaffer, 2012, p.76). Despite Turkey's support of Azerbaijan expressed in the international arena, this was not what Azerbaijani authorities were expecting from its closest allies. Elchibey expected more active measures from Ankara to protect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (Shaffer, 2012, p. 76). However, he did not recognize the geopolitical situation in the Caucasus, numerous restrictions on Ankara's foreign policy coming from membership in NATO, Turkey's own foreign policy problems regarding Cyprus, and Armenian accusations of genocide (Ozturk, 2013, p. 10). Furthermore, in order to protect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Turkey had to confront Armenia's closest ally, the Russian Federation. At that time, Turkey was not powerful enough to openly challenge Russia and to deter Russia from its involvement in the conflict (Ozturk, 2013, p.10). Thus, Elchibey wrongly assumed that common identity would lead to a military coalition between Turkey and Azerbaijan which would ensure the latter's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Shaffer, 2012, p.76).

Elchibey's belief that the development of democratic tendencies and the choice of a pro-Western stance would persuade the US to back Baku in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and other regional security issues also failed. Despite Elchibey's efforts to improve relations with the West, Azerbaijan was the only post-Soviet country that did not get governmental aid from the United States under Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act which was legislated under the pressure of the Armenian Diaspora in the US (Cornell, 2011, p.71; Shaffer, 2012, p.76). Due to the intense propaganda of pro-Armenia media outlets in the US and the influence of the Armenian Diaspora, Azerbaijan was regarded as an aggressor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict despite being exposed to occupation and ethnic cleansing of its population (Cornell, 2011, p.71). Hence, the Armenian Lobby contributed to the lack of support to Azerbaijan by the US.

During the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey, relations between Azerbaijan and Iran significantly deteriorated. President Elchibey carries responsibility for transforming the relationship with Iran into a hostile one. Even though Iran officially claimed its neutral position in the Nagorno-Karabakh war and several times attempted to be a mediator in negotiations, Azerbaijani authorities did not trust Iran and perceived its intentions as malign (MacDougall, 2009, p. 233-234). Furthermore, Elchibey several times criticized Iran for the marginalization and cultural repression of ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Iran

(Cornell, 2011, p. 70). The most significant issue that damaged relations with Iran was Elchibey's claims to the northern regions of Iran. He promoted the idea of liberation of "South Azerbaijan" and its unification with the Republic of Azerbaijan (Shaffer, 2012, p.76). Elchibey and his PFA party have sought a very close connection with around 20 million ethnic Azerbaijanis that comprise an absolute majority of the population in the northern regions of Iran (MacDougall, 2009, p.233). Thus, the idea of unification of northern and southern Azerbaijan was one of the cores of Elchibey's foreign policy. Elchibey's statements prompted Tehran to support Armenia in the conflict since Baku was perceived as a real threat to Iran's territorial integrity.

The pro-Turkish foreign policy of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) and parliament's constant refusal to approve membership in the CIS had negative consequences for Azerbaijan because Russia was induced to further intensify its military support for Yerevan (Cornell, 2011, p.311). At the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia did not have a clearly defined foreign policy, and its position residing on the Armenian side was mainly grounded on religious identity (Abushov, 2009, p.196). However, Russia's position on the Armenian side in the conflict further strengthened and Moscow utilized the conflict as leverage against Azerbaijan after Baku disapproved of the involvement in the CIS and decided to get rid of the Russian military presence in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's relations with Russia further deteriorated after APF invited Western oil companies to Baku in order to hold negotiations regarding the development and exploitation of oil fields in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian basin. Azerbaijani authorities did not request Russian companies to join the consortium since Elchibey did not want to make even the slightest concession to Russia in this matter either. In September 1992, an agreement was reached with the British Petroleum and Statoil companies on the joint development of a proven Chirag oil field and assessment of an unverified area called Shahdeniz (Bagirov, 1996, p.7). During that year, Azerbaijan signed several more arrangements with Pennzoil and Ramco regarding the promising Guneshli field (Bagirov, 1996, p.7). In June 1993, Azerbaijan was expected to sign an ultimate contract with several western oil companies regarding the extraction of Azerbaijani oil resources (Abilov, 2010, p.127). Russia did not recognize the validity of these contracts by arguing that Azerbaijan does not have a legal right to exclusively

exploit the natural resources of the Caspian basin due to its unresolved legal status. In addition, “redefining the Caspian’s status as an isolated intercontinental Salt Lake, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called for joint ownership and development of Caspian Sea resources” (MacDougall, 1997, p.93).

Despite its military failures in Karabakh, the APF did not agree to make concessions to Russian demands in numerous issues such as oil extraction in the Caspian Sea, membership in the CIS, and Russian military presence in Azerbaijan. The consequences of Elchibey’s hostile attitude towards Russia and Iran were very costly. Russia managed to undermine the power of the APF by effectively using its leverage in the face of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the unresolved status of the Caspian Sea, and pro-Russian forces inside Azerbaijan. The loss of new territories in Nagorno-Karabakh and coup d’état organized by colonel Suret Huseynov forced Abulfaz Elchibey to leave his office in June 1993.

3.1.4. Conclusion

Ayaz Mutallibov chose a strategy of aligning with Russia despite domestic disapproval. Being a former Soviet politician, he wanted to integrate Azerbaijan into the Russian-led CIS. Mutallibov hoped that a pro-Russian stance would gain Moscow’s support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Domestic unwillingness to join the CIS led to the participation of the Russian infantry brigade along with Armenian forces in the occupation of Khojaly which resulted in a horrible tragedy against the Azerbaijani civilian population.

Elchibey did not understand geopolitical realities on the ground and regional distribution of power. He chose a clear and direct balancing strategy against the Russian Federation while not taking into account the inability and unwillingness of Turkey to directly confront Moscow. Moreover, despite Elchibey’s attempts to gain Western support, the US perceived Baku as an aggressor in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict due to the influence of the large Armenian Diaspora in the US. Elchibey’s anti-Iranian stance and statements regarding the unification of Azerbaijan significantly damaged the relations with southern neighbor. His unwillingness to make concessions to Russia prompted Moscow to further support Armenia and led to the loss of more territories in the Nagorno-Karabakh. The balancing strategy against Russia was doomed to failure taking into

account the geographical proximity of Russia, the lack of allies at that moment, the ongoing war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and internal political and economic crisis.

3.2. Azerbaijan's security strategy during Heydar Aliyev's presidency: the period of balanced foreign policy (October 1993-October 2003)

3.2.1. Introduction

Substantial losses of Azerbaijan's territory generated anti-governmental uprisings and forced Elchibey to resign in June 1993. In October of the same year, Heydar Aliyev was elected as the new President of Azerbaijan. Being a pragmatic leader, Heydar Aliyev took into account the realities and difficulties of regional politics and chose to follow a multi-vector foreign policy. He did not want to repeat the mistakes of his predecessors by choosing either a clear pro- or anti-Russian approach. As Elchibey's presidency empirically demonstrated, Azerbaijan did not have a capacity to balance against Russia either by enhancing its internal military capability or by aligning with other powers. Internal instability and the lack of available allies would make a further balancing strategy suicidal for Azerbaijan. Bandwagoning policy was also not an option because the new administration took lessons from Mutallibov's experience and recognized that Azerbaijan's domestic audience was absolutely against returning back to Russian influence. Thus, Azerbaijan could lose its sovereignty if President Aliyev chose to align with any external power (Ismailzade, 2004, p.6). Seeking an alliance with the West would further anger Russia, aligning with Russia would make Azerbaijan its puppet state and would bring Azerbaijan back to depend on Russia (Ismailzade, 2004, p.6). Therefore, Heydar Aliyev decided to refrain from pursuing a one-sided approach of either balancing or bandwagoning due to Azerbaijan's very challenging geopolitical and domestic environment after the proclamation of independence.

Being a leader of a small state with abundant energy resources and a favorable geostrategic location, Heydar Aliyev managed to pursue an alternative approach of strategic hedging in his diplomacy with external powers. The major principles of Azerbaijan's foreign policy orientation during previous presidents were the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. As for other small states, Azerbaijan's goal was to ensure national security and survival of the state by all means. During the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, there were additional

aspects that influenced Azerbaijan's diplomacy. Recognizing challenges imposed on Azerbaijan due to geostrategic factors, Heydar Aliyev also comprehended and utilized opportunities gained due to the geography. Heydar Aliyev perceived energy resources and favorable geostrategic location as an opportunity to engage with various external actors and to pursue an active and independent foreign policy in the international arena. The new factors enabled Azerbaijan to develop an effective hedging strategy towards the major global and regional powers.

3.2.2. Appeasement of the giant neighbor

After being elected the head of Parliament in June 1993 during the coup d'état against Elchibey, Heydar Aliyev firstly decided to appease Russia and change its attitude towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. President Aliyev knew that it would not be possible to stop hostilities in Karabakh without gaining Russian trust and making certain concessions. The further confrontation with northern neighbors might cause the occupation of more Azerbaijani territories. Thus, in order to end the invasion of Azerbaijani territories by Armenian forces, and to improve relations with Russia, Heydar Aliyev carried out several measures. First of all, he made a visit to Moscow in July 1993 during which he discussed the prospect of participation in the CIS. In September 1993, the related agreements were signed and Azerbaijan finally joined the CIS (Aslanli 2010, 140). The ratification of membership in the CIS, frequent visits of Heydar Aliyev to Moscow, and new agreements between parties are elements of binding engagement and limited bandwagoning with Russia. Despite making concession with the CIS membership, Heydar Aliyev did not agree with two other Russian demands: the joint development and exploitation of Caspian resources and the presence of Russian military forces on the Azerbaijani territory (Abushov 2009, 196). At the same time, Heydar Aliyev decided to suspend activities of the western businesses operating in Azerbaijan with the intention to indicate the relinquishment of a pro-Western stance of foreign policy established during the Elchibey rule (Safi & Aslanli 2017, 5). All the above-mentioned measures were also made because Heydar Aliyev wanted to eliminate potential threats and pressures from Russia before the conclusion of an energy deal with western companies. Thus, as a part of the strategy of limited bandwagoning, Azerbaijan made certain concessions in order to deal with risks and challenges and improve relations with Russia.

After slightly improving Russian-Azerbaijani relations, President Aliyev revived cooperation with western corporations regarding the development and exploration of Azerbaijan's oil fields. Initially, Russia was against any energy arrangements of Azerbaijan with western oil companies since it would increase the Western influence in the South Caucasus. Russia again used an issue of the unresolved status of the Caspian Sea as a leverage and trump card against Azerbaijan (MacDougall, 1997, 94). Heydar Aliyev distributed ten percent out of shares of the State Oil Company to the Russian Lukoil company in order to acknowledge Russian interests and appease Russian pressures and threats (Bagirov 1996, 9). Thus, in September 1994, the government of Azerbaijan and a group of the biggest international oil corporations signed the "Contract of Century" to develop and explore Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil fields. It was a very significant contract not only because of huge profits that could be gained from oil reserves but also due to the fact that it established a basis for the future cooperation between Azerbaijan and Western countries (Bagirov 1996, 9). This accomplishment can be considered as a part of the strategy of denial of Russian dominance in the hedging policy of Azerbaijan. Skillful and sophisticated political maneuvering demonstrated by Azerbaijani authorities allowed this cooperation while mitigating risks and threats coming from Russia. Azerbaijan's abundant energy resources and enhanced engagement with Western partners became vital policy tools in accomplishing Azerbaijan's objectives of strengthening national security and developing autonomous foreign policy. Azerbaijan purposefully invited the largest oil companies from the largest countries with the objective to increase their interests and support to Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Ipek 2009, 233). Thus, energy resources not only brought large investments in Azerbaijan and stimulated economic development but also allowed for increased security and independence of the country.

As a part of dominance denial element of hedging strategy, Azerbaijan aimed to engage and enhance partnership in economic, political, and social spheres with various powers like Turkey, the EU, Iran, and the US. Modifications in Azerbaijan's foreign policy framework were perceived with concerns among the Turkish political circles since there was a risk of deterioration of relations between the two countries (Nasibova, 2019). Thus, at the beginning of President Aliyev's presidency, relations with Turkey were a bit cold and Aliyev's policies aimed at improving relations with Russia were perceived

suspiciously among Turkish authorities (Ismailzade 2005, 4). In September 1993, the Turkish Foreign Minister paid a visit to Baku. During that meeting, President Aliyev emphasized that Turkey will be the main direction in the future export of oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli fields and that the Azerbaijani army will be trained by Turkish military experts as was agreed during Elchibey's presidency (Yesevi & Tiftikcigil 2015, 28). In September 1994, Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel signed "The Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation" during his visit to Ankara (Ibrahimov, 2011).

Energy cooperation played a very significant role in transforming Azerbaijani-Turkish relations to a completely new level of strategic partnership. The Contract of Century was a vital agreement in that sense. Turkish TPAO oil company gained 1.75 percent of shares in that contract, which was later increased to 6.75 upon the Turkish request (Bagirov 1996, 11). This deal has paved the way for a number of subsequent huge projects and agreements in energy cooperation between two countries. Even though President Aliyev pursued pragmatic policies, he attached very significant meaning to Turkey in his foreign policy (Ismailzade 2005, 4).

The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was one of the vital issues in Azerbaijani-Turkish cooperation. Since Azerbaijan is a landlocked country, there was a need for a route to transport oil to European markets that would bypass Russia from the deal. At the moment the only possible way to export Azerbaijani oil to Europe was through Novorossiysk and that route was not efficient and it was giving Russia leverage over Azerbaijan since at any moment Moscow could disrupt the process (Kim & Eom 2008, 99-100). Thus in November 1999, an agreement regarding the construction of the BTC pipeline was signed by presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia (Suleymanov, Bulut & Rahmanov, 2017, p. 34). The construction works were finalized by 2005.

Another huge project between two brotherly countries was an agreement regarding the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipeline that was signed in March 2001. The purpose of this project was to transport Azerbaijani natural gas from the Shah Deniz field to Western markets. This project was another step towards Azerbaijani strategic partnership with Turkey and the EU. Turkey played the role of transit country in energy cooperation and connection between Azerbaijan and the West. BTC and BTE pipelines were of utmost geopolitical importance for Turkey, Azerbaijan,

the US, and the EU. The Russian monopoly over the export routes from Central Asia and the Caucasus to European markets was eliminated with the construction of these pipelines (Nixey 2010, 129). Azerbaijan also managed to keep Armenia isolated in the region by taking them out of energy projects.

3.2.3. Increased tensions with Russian Federation and Iran

Despite President Aliyev's attempts to pursue friendly relations with Russian authorities, there were tense issues that aggravated the relationship between the two countries. The Russo-Chechen war that started in 1994 after Russian forces invaded Chechnya was one of the central issues in Russo-Azerbaijani relations during this period. Azerbaijan was accused of aiding Chechen insurgents during the war by permitting them to use its territory as a transit route to supply military ammunition to rebel forces (Aslanli 2010, 141). Even though Azerbaijani authorities officially refused accusations, Russia did not change its position by closing the borders with Azerbaijan and levying an economic embargo for three years (Aslanli 2010, 141). This was a very substantial punishment for Azerbaijan since around seventy percent of the country's trade was with northern neighbors. The embargo was annulled only in 1996 after the Russo-Chechen war ended with the Khasavyurt Accords.

The question of the status of the Caspian Sea was another controversial topic in Russo-Azerbaijani relations during this period. Russian authorities wanted to decrease territorial waters to a ten-mile zone so that huge reserves of oil would not be included there. Furthermore, they insisted that the principle of a condominium should be applied in the case of the Caspian which requires the joint use of Caspian resources (Haghayeghi 2003, 33). Russia used this argument by referring to the treaties concluded between Iran and the Soviet Union in 1921 and 1940 (Haghayeghi 2003, 33). On the other hand, Azerbaijan was striving to realize the division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors along the median line.

Another very significant issue that complicated the Russo-Azerbaijani relationship was military assistance by the Russian side to Armenia in 1997. Russia granted for free one billion dollars' worth of military ammunition and weapons to the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia (Abilov & Isayev 2015, 126). After this event, Azerbaijan demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with Western countries and NATO

regarding security developments in the region. Heydar Aliyev very carefully employed the strategy of indirect balancing against Russia. Thus, Azerbaijan reacted to Russian actions by trying to get support from the West. This created concerns in Moscow since during those times there were speculations regarding Azerbaijan's membership in NATO and the establishment of its military bases in Azerbaijan (Abilov & Isayev 2015, 126).

The establishment of the alliance between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova (GUAM) was perceived as a balancing instrument against increased Russian influence in the post-Soviet space (Abushov 2009, 197). As a part of indirect balancing, Azerbaijan continued its security partnership with NATO. The foundation of Azerbaijan's relations with NATO goes back to May 1994 when the Partnership for Peace Framework was signed between the parties. This framework enabled cooperation of Azerbaijan with NATO would cooperate in matters of security and defense industry and allowed Azerbaijan to take part in peace operations led by NATO forces (NATO website). Turkey was a very crucial actor in the establishment of Azerbaijani relations with Euro-Atlantic structures. Turkish military experts were actively engaged in the training process of the Azerbaijani army for its adaptation to NATO standards as a part of the Partnership for Peace Framework (Oztarsu 2011, 8). In 1997, Azerbaijan started participating in the Planning and Review Process. Despite Russian pressures, Azerbaijan has participated in the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo under NATO-led forces from 1999 till 2008 (Antonopoulos et al. 2017,374).

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran remained very complicated despite Heydar Aliyev's attempts to normalize it after Elchibey's presidency. Authorities of Iran were displeased and suspicious of Azerbaijan due to its increasing energy partnerships with Western countries and the growing influence of the US in the South Caucasus. Moreover, Azerbaijan's engagement with Euro-Atlantic military structures, participation in NATO-led peacekeeping operations were additional annoying issues for Iran (Geybulla 2018, 106). An accumulated mutual distrust between Azerbaijan and Iran was an impeding factor in the normalization of bilateral relations and development of mutually beneficial projects (Ismailzade, 2016).

The worst period in Azerbaijani-Iranian relations started during the confrontation in the disputed Alov oil field. Due to the unresolved status of the Caspian Sea, both

countries claimed that the Alov field belongs to their respective sector of the Caspian basin. During the exploration conducted by BP's research vessels, Iranian warships forced them to stop the exploration works. Right after this incident, Iran's two jet fighters several times crossed Azerbaijan's airspace sending a very severe warning (Ismailzade, 2016). During these tensions, Turkey supported Azerbaijan by making several foreign policy decisions. The Turkish general visited Baku and Turkey sent a message to Iran by performing a demonstration of its military jets in Baku. Turkish involvement did not allow this incident to further escalate into a military conflict between Baku and Tehran (Ismailzade, 2016).

3.2.4. Negotiation process over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Armenia was ended by the 1994 ceasefire brokered by the Russian Federation. As a result of the war, Azerbaijan lost twenty percent of its internationally recognized territories. Moreover, Azerbaijan got more than 700 thousand refugees or internally displaced people. The results of this war have shaped Azerbaijan's subsequent security policy since its fundamental principle was based on the restoration of territorial integrity.

The OSCE Minsk Group has been involved in the conflict resolution process since 1992. In 1996, the OSCE Minsk Group proposed a "package solution" to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The proposal aimed to deal with the major issues and accommodate the interests of both parties. According to the package solution, Azerbaijan's territorial integrity should be maintained while ensuring "the broadest possible self-rule for Nagorno Karabakh" (Hopmann, 2014, p. 169). Furthermore, this solution demanded the removal of Armenian forces from the seven adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh districts of Azerbaijan, the return of internally displaced people to their homes, and the unconstrained connection between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Hopmann, 2014, p. 169). The package solution was proposed to Azerbaijan and Armenia during the OSCE Lisbon Summit. Azerbaijani authorities supported the proposed package. At the same time, Azerbaijani authorities added that the proposed self-rule for Nagorno-Karabakh should not permit the possession of its private army and currency (Hopmann, 2014, p. 22). Armenian authorities opposed the proposed framework insisting that it was detrimental to negotiations (Hopmann, 2014, p. 22).

In 1997, the Minsk Group proposed a “step-by-step” solution to the conflict. In the first stage, Armenian military forces were required to withdraw from six out of seven districts surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of Azerbaijani IDPs to six districts, and the opening of communication links (Hopmann, 2014, p. 23). The next stage encompasses the negotiations on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of Lachin district to Azerbaijan, and “the return of Azerbaijani IDPs to Nagorno-Karabakh” (Hopmann, 2014, p. 23). Both parties to the conflict initially endorsed a “step-by-step” solution. However, the “Nagorno-Karabakh leadership” strongly opposed this solution and claimed that “the final Status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be achieved before the withdrawal of occupying forces from the region” (Abilov, 2018, p. 149). Thus, due to pressures from Nagorno-Karabakh, this solution was also rejected by Armenia.

3.2.5. New president- new attitude

Heydar Aliyev was eager to stimulate cooperation and trust with Russia by visiting Moscow seven times during his presidency period till 2003. However, President Yeltsin did not follow the reciprocity principle by making an official or working visit to Azerbaijan (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019, 7). Bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Russia experienced positive modifications underlined by several mutual visits by heads of states after Vladimir Putin became the President of the Russian Federation in 2000. These modifications were supposedly caused by good personal relations between presidents who had a common background of working in KGB (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019, 5). With the purpose of bringing Azerbaijan back to Russia’s sphere of influence, Putin started more actively engaging with its southern neighbor unlike his predecessor, and made an official visit to Baku in January 2001 (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019, 5). It was the first visit of the Russian president to Azerbaijan since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During that meeting, Azerbaijani and Russian authorities managed to achieve a compromise regarding the use of natural resources of the Caspian Sea. According to the agreement by the parties, coastal states have an exclusive right to explore natural resources and conduct economic activities in their respective zones.

During President Aliyev’s visit to Russia in January 2002, two republics concluded an agreement regarding the lease of the Gabala radar station. The station was originally constructed by the Soviet Union in 1985 with the purpose of detecting missile

launches (Ismailova, 2002). In accordance with the 2002 agreement, the radar station was recognized as Azerbaijan's facility, and Russia was permitted to lease it for 10 years. One of the primary reasons for Russian authorities to maintain this radar station was to preserve a military presence in Azerbaijan since it was the only country of the South Caucasus where Russia did not have a military presence (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019,9). Therefore, the Gabala radar station had geopolitical importance for Russian authorities.

3.2.6. Conclusion

Heydar Aliyev pursued a hedging strategy in his relations with external powers. This strategy allowed Azerbaijan to reduce threats and risks to national security by closely engaging with Russia and simultaneously to avoid foregoing close and mutually beneficial cooperation with other important actors in the region such as the US, the EU, and Turkey. During the timeframe of Heydar Aliyev's presidency from October 1993 to October 2003, Baku utilized a wide range of tools in its hedging policy such as economic pragmatism, indirect balancing, limited bandwagoning, binding engagement, and dominance denial.

3.3. Azerbaijan's security strategy during Ilham Aliyev's presidency (2003-Present)

3.3.1. Introduction

After being elected as the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev continued his father's foreign policy framework and tended to balance the influences of various external actors while promoting national interests. Despite several proposals from the OSCE Minsk Group, there was no progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Ilham Aliyev continued the implementation of a hedging strategy by using the same mixed policies. Partnerships established with numerous actors were based solely on Azerbaijan's national interests. Gigantic projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, TANAP, TAP have been implemented during this period and were parts of the dominance-denial strategy. These crucial projects were detrimental to Russian interests and were implemented under very high pressures and threats coming from Russia. But since these projects were based on Azerbaijan's national interests, Baku did not make any concessions to Russia in these matters. Thus, the above-mentioned projects significantly improved Azerbaijan's geostrategic position making it a

transportation and energy hub between the East and West, considerably increased Baku's political autonomy in foreign affairs, and enhanced overall prestige and standing on the international stage. Azerbaijan's increased strategic partnership with various regional powers such as the EU, the US, Turkey, Iran, and China are all part of the dominance denial strategy and aim to decrease dependence on Russia to a minimum. The key regional and international transportation projects such as TRACECA, North-South Transport Corridor, and the New Silk Road pass through the territory of Azerbaijan. Cooperation with NATO and participation in NATO-led peacekeeping operations increased during the presidency of Ilham Aliyev and constituted the indirect balancing strategy against Russia. However, the elements of limited bandwagoning are also present in Baku's security strategy since Azerbaijani authorities still remained very attentive and did not directly challenge Russia by trying to integrate into either NATO or the EU. Azerbaijan increased its cooperation with Russia and participated jointly in big projects like the North-South railway. Elements of economic pragmatism can also be easily observable since Russia is the second-largest trading partner of Azerbaijan and Baku tries to maximize its profits from economic cooperation.

3.3.2. 2003-2008: A period of increased engagement with the West

During the first term of Ilham Aliyev's presidency, Azerbaijan established a partnership with the EU on the basis of various regional projects. Transportation projects and energy projects were vital in the development of bilateral relations between parties (Valiyev 2017, 33). Energy relations with the EU were established after the BTC pipeline became operational in June 2006. Furthermore, in November 2006, Azerbaijan and the EU signed a memorandum on the strategic partnership in the energy field. The main goal of this memorandum was to safeguard the EU's energy security and diversify the supply of energy resources through the export of energy resources from the Caspian basin to European markets (Jamalov & Alizada 2015, 7). Thus, this document established grounds for Azerbaijan's role both as an exporter of and transit for the supply of energy to the EU countries.

Azerbaijan's relationship with the EU deepened more after becoming part of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004. After the adoption of the Action Plan by the European Union and Azerbaijan in 2006, the parties started cooperation in various spheres

such as the democratization of Azerbaijani society, sustainable economic development, as well as energy cooperation (Matzigkeit, 2016). The financial assistance of the European Union was not a major issue for Azerbaijani authorities. The Azerbaijani side was more interested in EU mediation on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Matzigkeit, 2016).

In 2004, Azerbaijan expanded its partnership with NATO by joining the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). The IPAP demonstrated Azerbaijan's willingness to cooperate with Euro-Atlantic structures on various issues such as security sector reforms, enhancing military to NATO standards, and so on. The increased investment of the US companies in Azerbaijan's energy projects and Baku's active involvement in the war against terrorism further intensified the bilateral relations (MacDougal 2009, 263). Additionally, despite external pressures coming from Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan continued its contribution to the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan by sending its peacekeeping forces and by being a reliable transit country (Garibov 2015, 31).

At the beginning of Ilham Aliyev's presidency, tensions in relations with Turkey that were present since Erdogan's party came to power still continued. One of the contradictory issues was the recognition of the Republic of Northern Cyprus. Azerbaijan's major concern regarding this issue was that Azerbaijan's recognition of a Northern Cyprus would set a precedent in the future for the case of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan was unwilling to vote for the formation of Northern Cyprus's representation at the Council of Europe (Ismailzade 2005, 8). Azerbaijani diplomats missed the voting on this issue during the 2004 session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg. After the bill was rejected, Turkish politicians blamed Azerbaijan for not supporting Turkey on this issue (Ismailzade 2005, 9). However, the trilateral cooperation of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia continued in 2005 with the agreement signed between respective countries on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway which would connect three countries (Celikpala & Veliyev 2015, 16). This is a very important part of the transport corridor linking Europe and Asia, the construction of which has been finalized in 2017. Due to the fact that Armenia was not included in the project and it was viewed as an effort of Azerbaijan to isolate Armenia from regional projects, the US Congress prevented the financial support for this project under the pressure of the Armenian Diaspora.

Consequently, the financial burden of the project was taken by the parties of the agreement (Celikpala & Veliyev 2015, 17).

From the beginning of his tenure, Ilham Aliyev acknowledged the crucial importance of developing friendly relations with his northern neighbor (MacDougall 2009, 255). In February 2004, there was an official visit of President Aliyev to Moscow. Azerbaijan's interests in developing economic relations and increasing trade turnover with neighboring countries coincided with Russian plans. After the reciprocal visit of Vladimir Putin to Baku in 2006, trade and economic issues gained crucial importance in bilateral cooperation between states (Cornell 2011, 352). Azerbaijan actively participated in the project of the International North-South Transport Corridor that would reduce transport costs and increase trade volumes in bilateral relations of countries involved. Transport corridors take fundamental importance in Azerbaijan's foreign policy because it considerably improves the geostrategic position of Azerbaijan, stimulates trade relations and the development of the economy (Cornell 2011, 352).

Iran was a source of threat to Azerbaijan's security during this period. Following the events of the Alov oil field, Azerbaijan closed a large proportion of Shiite religious schools operating on its territory, which were funded by Iran (Cohen 2012, 70). Baku has taken preventive measures to tackle the problem of radical groups supported and funded by Iranian authorities. These radical Shiites that mainly operate in southern parts of Azerbaijan cause a threat to the internal security of the state. Iran was blamed several times for the interference in Azerbaijan's internal issues. In 2007, several citizens of Iran were imprisoned for espionage activities in Azerbaijan and for an attempt to incite rebellion (Cutler 2012, 348). Moreover, a year later, Azerbaijan prevented a terrorist attack on the Embassy of Israel in Baku organized by Hezbollah agents with the support of Iranian intelligence (Cohen 2012, 70).

In November 2007, during the OSCE conference in Madrid, the Minsk Group proposed a new framework for the negotiations of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The framework included "the phased withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territories contiguous to Nagorno-Karabakh", the demilitarization of these seven districts, arrangement of international peacekeepers, necessary measures to ensure the safe return of IDPs to their homes, and "a referendum among the Nagorno-Karabakh population to

determine the region's future status" (Abilov, 2018, p. 154). Although both parties supported some of the principles, the main point of the impasse was the question of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Abilov, 2018, p. 154).

3.3.3. 2008-2014: New geopolitical realities

During the second term of Ilham Aliyev's presidency, several important events such as the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, an attempt of a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, and certain shifts in the US interests in regard to South Caucasus induced Azerbaijani authorities to reconsider certain patterns in state's foreign policy. Russian aggression against pro-Western Georgia and its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states was a shocking event for Azerbaijani political circles and the overall population (Cutler 2020, 40). As a result of the war, Russia demonstrated itself as the only and undisputable power in the region. By failing to appropriately react to the Russian aggression against the pro-Western country, the United States demonstrated its lack of ability to counter Russia and protect its allies in the South Caucasus (Cornell, 2011, p. 353; Cutler 2020, 40). Furthermore, Azerbaijan's perception of the Western countries as credible partners to deter Russian offensive actions was shattered (Goble, 2008).

During the period of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement, Azerbaijani-Turkish relations experienced the highest deterioration in recent history (Nichol 2013, 19). The rapprochement process has started after the President of Turkey Abdullah Gul visited Yerevan in September 2008 after the invitation from the Armenian counterpart to attend a football match between Turkey and Armenia within World Cup qualifications. This event has been subsequently framed as "football diplomacy". In October 2009, Turkey and Armenia signed two very important documents: the "Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations" and the "Protocol on the development of bilateral relations" (Nichol 2013, 19). Azerbaijan perceived the reconciliation process between Armenia and Turkey as a betrayal from a fraternal state since it was agreed that Turkey would not cooperate and normalize relations with Armenia unless the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is solved (Torbakov 2010, 35).

Ilham Aliyev severely responded to the reconciliation process by intimidating the sale of natural gas to Turkey by market prices. Under the agreement of 2002, Azerbaijan's

gas was sold to Turkey at the price of \$120 per thousand cubic meters, which is three times less than market prices (Mikhelidze 2010, 4). Moreover, Azerbaijani authorities demonstrated that if Baku's interests would be ignored, Azerbaijan could start negotiations with Russia regarding the participation in Russian led energy projects instead of the Nabucco project (Blank 2013, 46). In October 2009, Azerbaijan signed a contract with Russia on the export of its natural gas to Russian markets, but from the gas fields of the State Oil Company. This energy partnership was perceived as a signal that Russia is an alternative transit country for the export of Azerbaijani natural resources to European markets (Mikhelidze 2010, 7). Thus, Azerbaijani authorities demonstrated that if the agreement with Armenia would not include a condition regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey would incur significant losses. These measures were effective since Turkey included a precondition to the deal that Armenia's military should end the occupation of Azerbaijani territories. Armenia did not accept this precondition and protocols signed in 2009 were not ratified. Deterioration of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations has ended and both parties continued their cooperation in all spheres of life, especially in upcoming huge energy projects.

During this period, the diplomatic relations of Azerbaijan with the US deteriorated due to the latter's participation in and persistence on the rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia instead of participating more actively in the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijani authorities perceived this as a biased approach that favored Armenia (Nichol 2013, 20). The cancellation of the US-Azerbaijani military training by Ilham Aliyev in 2010 was perceived as a reaction to these events (Nichol 2013, 20).

After the Russia-Georgian war and the deterioration of Azerbaijan's relations with the US and Turkey, Azerbaijan started to engage more with the Russian Federation in various areas of interest. During the visit of President Medvedev to Baku in 2008, presidents signed a declaration on strategic partnership (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019, 12). In 2009, President Medvedev again visited Baku and an agreement was reached according to which Azerbaijan provided the North Caucasus region of Russia with natural gas (Nichol 2013, 18). However, it should be mentioned that Azerbaijan continued to engage with Russia only in matters of its own national interests. Both sides benefit from this partnership: Russia guarantees the supply of natural gas to the North Caucasus;

Azerbaijan, in its turn, trades its gas at market price (Valiyev 2011, 142). Mutually beneficial economic partnership with Russia demonstrates “an element of economic pragmatism in Azerbaijan’s hedging strategy towards Russia” (Valiyev & Mamishova 2019, 13). In 2010, the collaboration between Azerbaijan and Russia grew to a new level after the signing of bilateral agreements on the demarcation of state borders and the rise of the natural gas volume exported to southern regions of Russia. Furthermore, by 2011 Russia turned to be the largest supplier of military equipment to Azerbaijan (Garibov 2015, 31). The rising cooperation with Russia in various spheres reflects the limited bandwagoning element of Azerbaijan’s diplomacy.

After two years of tensions in Ankara-Baku relations, the two countries significantly intensified their military cooperation. In 2010, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support Agreement. According to this agreement, in case of aggression against one of the parties, the other one will support it by taking all necessary measures (Abbasov, 2011). The agreement also encompasses joint military exercises. The deepening of military relations with Ankara was perceived as a response to the Russo-Georgian war. This agreement reflects s a limited balancing element of Azerbaijan’s hedging strategy.

In 2011, Azerbaijan became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It was a continuation of the longstanding multi-vector foreign policy and an obvious signal to the major global powers that Azerbaijan will not become a member of any military coalition (Strakes 2015, 4). Moreover, Azerbaijan was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2012-2013 and this substantially increases the international prestige of Baku (Jafarova, 2020).

The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline made Azerbaijan a part of the European gas network. In 2012, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed an agreement in Izmir regarding the implementation of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) (Bilgin 2012, 311). The construction of TANAP was another huge project in the strategic partnership of Azerbaijan with Turkey and the EU. As a result of the TANAP project and planned Trans-Caspian pipeline, Azerbaijan would become both a supplier of gas and a transit country through which large volumes of Caspian gas would reach European markets

(Blank 2013, 16). However, this project produced tensions between Azerbaijan and Russia due to the fact that TANAP was challenging Moscow's South Stream project.

In June 2013, a decision was made to build the Trans Adriatic gas pipeline, which is part of the Southern Gas Corridor project by which Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz 2 field will flow to European consumers. This was the turning point in the energy dialogue between the EU and Azerbaijan (Kusters, 2017, p. 38). By connecting the Turkish-Greece border with Italy, it would finally enable the complete energy route starting from Shahdeniz 2 field. This project had substantial strategic importance to all parties since it allowed Azerbaijan to diversify its export routes, for Turkey and Europe to decrease dependence on Russia by expanding supply routes of natural gas.

Azerbaijan continued its engagement with the EU by joining Eastern Partnership in 2009. One of the central motives for Azerbaijan's participation in the EaP was an attempt to make progress in the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, the EU was more interested in energy cooperation and the democratization process in Azerbaijan, and did not demonstrate active interest in the resolution of the conflict. Thus, Azerbaijan and the EU pursued different goals in the partnership. European integration was not the major goal in Azerbaijan in its engagement with western partners (Gurbanov, 2018). Baku continued its hedging policy by engaging with various partners and without confronting Russian interests. Economic and energy cooperation were major mutual points of interest between the EU and Azerbaijan. In 2013, Azerbaijan refused from signing the Association Agreement, instead suggesting a separate strategic partnership agreement based on mutual interests.

Along with the decision on the TANAP project, there was another issue in which Azerbaijan stood contrary to Russian interests. In 2012, Azerbaijan demonstrated its unwillingness to make concessions to Russia in negotiations over the extension of the lease of the Gabala radar station. This station was important for Russia for the maintenance of its presence in Azerbaijan. Originally, the annual lease of this station was 7 million dollars (Fuller 2013, 6). However, during the negotiations, Azerbaijan asserted that it wants compensation for the negative impact the station has on Azerbaijan's tourism industry and environment (Valiyev 2013). Azerbaijan decided to increase the cost of the station so much that Russia would reject the claim and refuse from extending the deal.

Thus, Azerbaijan firstly increased the price to 15 million dollars, then to 150 million, and finally to 300 million dollars, and Russia rejected the deal (Fuller 2013, 6).

During these times, Moscow was promoting the idea of an alternative integration project: Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Despite considerable pressures, Azerbaijani authorities did not perceive this project as beneficial for Baku but simultaneously did not want to spoil relations with Moscow (Kempe 2013, 4). The EEU was seen as an instrument for promoting Russian geopolitical interests and the continuation of Russian dominance in the Post-Soviet space (Bayramov 2013, 15).

3.3.4. 2014-2020: Ukrainian crisis and the period of Western disengagement

After Crimea's annexation, Azerbaijan has been very cautious in its engagement with Western countries in order to avoid confrontation with Russia which still has leverage over Baku. Moscow reacted very aggressively to Ukraine's attempts to integrate with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. Russia sent a clear message to all CIS countries that it would not tolerate the EU's eastward enlargement and would employ all the means necessary to maintain its geopolitical interests and keep the Post-Soviet space as a Russian sphere of influence. In regards to Azerbaijan, Russia continued using the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as its major source of leverage on Baku in order to guarantee that similar events would not happen there (Guliyev, 2014).

Azerbaijan faced new challenges after the occupation of Crimea also because official Baku needed to be very careful in its position and statements regarding the conflict in order to avoid irritating its northern neighbor. Azerbaijan totally supported Ukraine's territorial integrity by voting in favor of the resolution in the UN General Assembly. Azerbaijan along with Georgia and Moldova were the only CIS members that supported the resolution (Abbasov 2014, 13). This is because the Russian leverage over Baku is not as high as in cases of most CIS countries. At the same time, Baku refrained from officially condemning the annexation of Crimea in its statements (Guliyev, 2014).

After the Ukrainian crisis, there was a period of US disengagement in the region which still continues during the presidency of Donald Trump. Faced with new realities, Azerbaijan was especially cautious in its relations with Russia and tried to buy Russian support through continuous cooperation in the arms trade. Over the period from 2013 to

2017, Azerbaijan has purchased military equipment from Russia worth \$3.35 billion, accounting for 65 percent of Azerbaijan's total military purchases (Aliyev, 2018; Valiyev 2017, 135).

In 2013, Chinese authorities declared their plans regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that aims to expand connectivity and partnership between countries of Europe and Asia by restoring the ancient Silk Road. Azerbaijan, which for years initiated and implemented transportation and energy projects to connect Europe and Asia, very positively viewed the Chinese-led project. Up until this moment, China was only passively involved in the South Caucasus due to geographical restrictions. In 2015, during the visit of Ilham Aliyev to Beijing, Azerbaijan joined the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Encouragement of the Establishment of the Silk Way Economic Belt (Azertag 2019). During the visit, President Aliyev repeatedly mentioned the importance of cooperation with China in the transportation sector and the role Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which is the shortest route for trade between Europe and China, in supporting the BRI project (Azertag 2019). Azerbaijan's increased role as a transportation hub was expected to increase Chinese investments. China was highly interested in cooperation because of Azerbaijan's strategic location and since Baku has the necessary capacity to contribute to the BRI in terms of financial power and developed transport routes (Babayev & Ismailzade 2020, 5).

During that time, the cooperation with Beijing was important for Baku not only for economic but also for political reasons since Azerbaijan was directly looking for new global power to fill the power vacuum established after the gradual EU and US disengagement in the region (Valiyev 2016). However, Azerbaijani elites gradually comprehended that Beijing "does not have political interests in the region, due to its geographical distance" (Valiyev 2016).

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line was finally completed in October 2017 despite massive Russian pressures, economic challenges of the project, and instability in the region. The BTK project was developed without the financial backing of international donors due to leaving Armenia out of the project for political reasons. Azerbaijan demonstrated its determination and took the major share of responsibility to accomplish this project. The BTK project is evidence that a small state can initiate and play a crucial

role in huge regional and global projects without the help of the international community (Abdullayev, 2017).

From a geopolitical view, the key importance of the BTK is that it will end very long-term Russian supremacy over land transportation between Europe and Asia (Howard 2012, 353). Moreover, Russian control over railway links across the Caucasus will also come to end. “For nearly a century, Kremlin planners developed the Caucasus railway network along a North-South axis, aimed at integrating Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan into a Russian/Soviet economic sphere of influence” (Howard 2012, 353). Thus, the BTK project demonstrates that Azerbaijan plans to enhance its economic relations with countries along the East-West line without integrating into Russian-led projects. This project fits into elements of economic pragmatism and dominance denial of Azerbaijan’s hedging policy. Azerbaijan continues to diversify its partners in various spheres and challenges the Russian dominance over railway networks.

Relations with Iran considerably normalized during the last years since the sides found a common agreement regarding the disputed oil fields in the Caspian basin and decided to develop fields and extract resources together in these areas. In 2018, the Convention on the Caspian Sea’s Legal Status was signed between respective coastal states (Gurbanov, 2018). This agreement served mainly Iranian and Russian interests because it did not allow the presence of armed forces of non-coastal states in the Caspian Sea (Rahimov, 2019). Nevertheless, the most contentious issues regarding the demarcation of national zones and the development of pipelines were still unresolved.

3.4. Conclusion

The chapter examined Azerbaijan’s security policies since the proclamation of independence. During the presidency of Ayaz Mutallibov, Azerbaijan pursued a bandwagoning strategy by complying with Russian demands and striving to integrate into Russian-led projects. President Elchibey followed a balancing strategy against Russia by seeking a pro-Turkish and pro-Western foreign policy. During his presidency, Azerbaijan wanted to move away from Russian influence and thus did not make any concessions in regards to Russian demands. Both strategies under the Mutallibov and Elchibey presidencies failed due to domestic and geopolitical factors respectively. Heydar Aliyev took into consideration domestic and geopolitical factors and chose to follow a hedging

strategy in relation to external powers. Hedging strategy allowed Azerbaijan to decrease threats to state security by maintaining a close partnership with Russia and simultaneously pursuing a relatively independent foreign policy with other regional powers as well. Abundant natural resources and a favorable geostrategic position contributed to the effectiveness of this strategy in Azerbaijan's case. Ilham Aliyev continued hedging strategy that enabled Azerbaijan to maintain mutually beneficial energy, economic, security partnerships with numerous regional actors while not confronting the northern neighbor. Azerbaijan's influence in the international arena considerably increased over the past decade with the finalization of the huge energy and transportation projects.

4. The Tovuz Clashes: Prelude, Development and Reactions.

On July 12, 2020, there was a confrontation between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces along the border between the Tovuz region of Azerbaijan and the Tavush region of Armenia. During this incident, the sides of the conflict actively used heavy artillery attacks, tanks, and drones causing casualties and property destruction. During the July events, the Azerbaijani public made it clear that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be solved soon. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets demanding mobilization and the beginning of military operations in Karabakh (BBC, July 15). Azerbaijani elites recognized that the status quo is not acceptable for the domestic audience.

There have been numerous discussions on the sources of this confrontation and who was interested in the escalation of the conflict on the border between the two countries. Since the research is about the influence of the Tovuz incident on Azerbaijan's security strategy, only Baku's perception of the clashes would be discussed. The escalation of hostilities between two states would be discussed in the context of a series of events in the region that were perceived as provocative by Azerbaijan. After Nikol Pashinyan came to power in Armenia as a result of the Velvet Revolution, the peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia reached a deadlock position. There was no progress in the peace process and Armenia's new Prime Minister's actions demonstrated deviance from the format of negotiations.

4.1. Azerbaijan's perception of Armenia's moves prior to the clashes

In August 2019, during his visit to Khankendi, Nikol Pashinyan made a statement that was very provocative for Baku by declaring that Nagorno Karabakh is Armenia. It was very harsh rhetoric due to the fact that it was completely inconsistent with the overall negotiation format and specifically with regards to Armenia's official position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Despite Armenia's insistence on the principle of self-determination in the resolution of the conflict and the independence of an unrecognized republic, Pashinyan contradicted the official position that Armenia for years has been putting on the negotiation table. This statement was a declaration that Nagorno-Karabakh was actually a part of Armenia, not a separate republic that strives to get recognition (Cutler, 2020). Nikol Pashinyan was the first Armenian politician that made such a contradictory claim since the first Karabakh war (Cutler, 2020). Despite the international

recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan, Armenian authorities for years have been arguing regarding the right to self-determination and have been trying to prove that Nagorno-Karabakh is an independent republic and is not controlled by the Republic of Armenia itself. However, in the prominent case of *Chiragov vs Armenia*, the European Court of Human Rights made a decision in 2015 that the Republic of Armenia exerts effective control over Nagorno-Karabakh. This court decision meant that it is not an internal administration of an unrecognized entity that controls the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, but the republic of Armenia itself (Cutler, 2020). Actually, the decision of the European Court of Human Rights is in line with Pashinyan's statement and contradicts Armenia's official position on the conflict. Pashinyan's statement was very negatively perceived in Baku since it completely wasted all negotiation efforts that have been taken throughout 27 years of dialogues. It was a clear indication that Pashinyan abandoned the OSCE's Madrid Principles. Hikmat Hajiyev, the assistant to the president of Azerbaijan, said: "the final nail in the coffin of the negotiation process was when he said that Nagorno-Karabakh was Armenian" (Gall, 2020). The rejection of the Madrid Principles was further confirmed when the Armenian Premier Minister proposed to President Aliyev new conditions for the continuation of peace negotiations. He was attempting to modify the format of negotiations by inviting the members of Nagorno Karabakh's local administration to the negotiation table. Azerbaijan considered this step as detrimental to the negotiation process since Baku does not accept the separatist regime as a party to the conflict.

Another act that was provocatively perceived in Baku was the inauguration of a new 'president' of the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. In late March of 2020, there were parliamentary and presidential elections held in the occupied regions of Azerbaijan. Later, Armenia's Prime Minister took part in the inauguration ceremony which was held in Shusha city which is a cultural center of Azerbaijan and has a very deep emotional significance for Azerbaijanis (Huseynov & Muradov, 2020). Moreover, Pashinyan was suggesting to move the parliament of the unrecognized republic to Shusha. Another provocatively perceived action was the announcement of the construction of a road from Armenia to Jabrayil city which is one of seven regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh (Kucera, 2019). Under the basic principles of negotiations, these seven adjacent

regions were supposed to be given back to Azerbaijan. It was another clear indication that Armenia is not willing to make concessions and is abandoning the Madrid Principles.

Another provocatively perceived episode happened when Armenia's Minister of Defense David Tonoyan adopted a new military doctrine. During his visit to the US in 2019, Tonoyan proclaimed that Armenia would change the old format: instead of holding the defensive position of returning back Azerbaijan's seven districts in exchange for peace, Armenia would pursue a new doctrine of 'new war in exchange for new territories' (Abrahamyan, 2020). This statement was perceived as a clear threat to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in addition to the already occupied territories. Armenia's new military doctrine demonstrated increasingly rising militaristic sentiment among new government circles in Armenia. It also demonstrated that new military provocations might happen with the intention of the Armenian side to expand the conflict zone by including new territories from the Republic of Azerbaijan (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). "Because of all these reasons, Azerbaijan was on high alert for the potential confrontation" (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). The new doctrine precisely targeted the Azerbaijani state border, it was actually targeting not only Tovuz but also beyond that (T. Gafarli, personal communication, December 25, 2020).

4.2. Overview of the Tovuz skirmishes

On July 12, 2020, the fighting between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces broke out. The military forces of the two countries confronted each other along the international borderline between the Tovuz province of Azerbaijan and the Tavush province of Armenia. The two countries accused each other of initiating the conflict along the border. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense spread the news about an attempted attack by Armenian groups to seize positions in the direction of the Tovuz region (Mod.gov.az, July 12). The Ministry announced that Armenia used an artillery attack and Azerbaijani military forces have taken necessary measures to repulse the intervention attempt. Furthermore, it was announced that as a result of this attack two Azerbaijani soldiers were killed and five soldiers were injured (Mod.gov.az, July 12). Later that day, Azerbaijan reported the death of one of the wounded soldiers. The Ministry of Defense of Armenia, in turn, accused the Azerbaijani side of an attempt by Azerbaijani military forces to cross the state border in

a UAZ car (Twitter.com/ArmeniaMODTeam, July 12). After warnings by the Armenian side, Azerbaijani servicemen left the car and moved back to their positions (Twitter.com/ArmeniaMODTeam, July 12). Furthermore, the Armenian Ministry claimed that Azerbaijani forces tried to seize a position in the direction of the Tavush region by using artillery attacks.

Azerbaijani side accused Armenian authorities of deceiving their population by not revealing the real number of casualties. On July 13, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense shared a video and stated that Armenia's "firing positions, a radar station of the reconnaissance unit, the storage for military vehicles, tank, armored personnel carrier, more than 20 servicemen, the headquarters of the battalion and military infrastructure were destroyed" (Mod.gov.az, July 13). Moreover, it was noted that Armenia continues hiding the real losses from its public. Armenia's Ministry of Defense refuted these reports. On July 14, Armenia's military officials confirmed the death of four military personnel (Elliott, 2020). Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense reported the death of seven soldiers including the Major General (Sevencan, 2020).

Both parties to the conflict accused each other of targeting civilian settlements. According to Armenian sources, on July 13, Azerbaijani forces fired projectiles from 82 mm and 120 mm caliber mortars on civilian settlements in Chinari village of Tavush province (Stepanyan, 2020). One of the projectiles damaged the roof of one house in that village, however, there were no casualties (Stepanyan, 2020). The representative of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense denied these claims by noting that Azerbaijani forces do not target the civilian population (Report Information Agency, July 13). Furthermore, the Azerbaijani side stated that on the same day "Armenian armed forces fired on Aghdam and Dondar Gushchu villages of Tovuz region with 120 mm mortars and D-30 howitzers" (Azertac, July 13). Several houses in Dondar Gushchu village were severely damaged, but there were no casualties (Azertac, July 13). Azertac news agency shared images of the damaged houses and destroyed properties. On July 14, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense shared news claiming that Armenian forces fired at Aghdam and Alibeyli villages of the Tovuz region from "large-caliber guns and artillery" (Trend News Agency, July 14). As a result of the attacks, several houses of residents of Dondar Gushchu village were damaged (Trend News Agency, July 14). Moreover, it was reported that a 76 years old resident of Aghdam village was killed by artillery fire (Trend News Agency, July 14).

The Armenian side shared news about an attack by Azerbaijan's combat drones on civilian settlements in the Berd village of the Tavush region (Kucera, July 14).

The spokesperson of Armenian Ministry of Defense Shushan Stepanyan (2020) in her official Facebook page stated that the Armenian Minister of Defense, David Tonoyan, gave instructions to the military command: "in case of provocations of the enemy on the borders of the Republic of Armenia, react as necessary, up to the capture of new advantageous positions". On July 14, the Armenian media spread the news that Azerbaijani military post on the Garagaya height was seized by Armenian forces (Nalbandyan & Bulghadaryan, July 14). The photos from this height have been shared in the Armenian media sources. Press secretary of Armenian Ministry of Defense, Artrun Hovhannisyan, replying to the questions about the Garagaya height stated that Armenia "has gained more favorable positions" and "let's wait for the official information" (Nalbandyan & Bulghadaryan, July 14). Actually, the local population of the Tovuz region also spread the news about an attempt to seize the military post in Garagaya. This is a very important strategic height. By capturing Garagaya height, Armenian would have control "over a strategically important highway, linking Azerbaijan's second-largest city Ganja with neighboring Georgia" (Rzayev, 2020). However, the spokesman of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense refuted these claims by stating that this is disinformation aimed at distracting public opinion (Azertac, July 13). Later, Armenian officials did not confirm the information about the seizure of the Garagaya post.

The military officials of both countries continued reporting about the elimination of combat and intelligence drones of the opposite side, whereas the officials of the opposite side refuted those claims. Moreover, till the end of hostilities, both countries accused each other of not revealing the true number of casualties and lost military vehicles. The clashes ended on July 16, 2020. Azerbaijani side informed about the 12 military casualties and one civilian casualty. Armenian side reported four military casualties. As a result of clashes, none of the parties gained or lost any piece of land. Despite this, both Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities claimed the victory to their respective domestic audiences.

4.3. Azerbaijan's perception of the skirmishes and the international reaction

During the clashes, Azerbaijani experts argued that one of the major motives to attack Azerbaijan along the international borders was the desire of Armenian authorities to involve the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the conflict (Veliyev, 2020). Indeed, shortly after confrontations started, the Armenian side urged the CSTO to get involved by referring to Article 4 which obliges all member states to protect Armenia in case of aggression against it (Jafarova, 2020). However, the CSTO did not react urgently to the hostilities along the border despite Armenia's allegations that Azerbaijan attacks its territory. The CSTO simply issued a statement calling both countries to immediately stop hostilities. Azerbaijani experts and authorities argued that if Azerbaijan wanted to conduct a military attack it would do so on the occupied territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts because these areas are internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan (Veliyev, 2020). Only aggression against the internationally recognized territories of Armenia fall under the jurisdiction of the CSTO. The mandate of the military alliance is not upheld during the hostilities along the line of contact in Nagorno Karabakh.

The main feature of Tovuz clashes was the fact that it was outside the Nagorno-Karabakh region. "That basically manifested that Armenia has broader ambitions. It was the indication that Armenia would continue its expansionist policy" (F. Shafiyev, personal communication, December 9, 2020). It is important to make a distinction between the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the line of contact which separates two armies in the conflict zone. Baku has always aimed to evade confrontation along the international borders due to the fact that Azerbaijan does not have any claims in regards to the internationally recognized territories of Armenia (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Furthermore, Azerbaijan demilitarized northern parts of the border with Armenia by reassigning the protection of these territories from the national army to the State Border Service (Azertac, 2020). Demilitarization of this zone was a clear signal that Baku is unwilling to initiate hostilities along the state borders (T. Gafarli, personal communication, December 25, 2020).

Tovuz was sensitive because it was close to major regional oil and gas projects that Azerbaijan developed for decades. The Tovuz confrontation was perceived by Azerbaijan as an attack on its energy infrastructure (Jafarova, 2020). Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway are

critical infrastructures for Azerbaijan's economy and pass through the Tovuz district. Military hostilities and insecurity in the Tovuz district directly affect the operability of major energy and transportation routes. It is a matter of national security for Baku to guarantee the physical security of these infrastructures (A. Valiyev, personal communication, December 8, 2020). "It is one of the last places Baku would want to see fighting because it lies directly on strategic transportation lines that are essential to Azerbaijan's independence, economic vitality, and strategic significance" (Bryza, 2020). Any disruption or damage to these vital infrastructures would damage the whole economy of the country.

The geostrategic importance of the Tovuz district dragged the attention of an international community to this fighting since the US, the EU, and Turkey's interests are involved here. Energy infrastructure that connects the Caspian basin with the EU countries passes through the Tovuz district. The Southern Gas Corridor delivers Azerbaijani natural gas from Shah Deniz 2 fields to European markets transiting through the territory of Georgia and Turkey. The Southern Gas Corridor includes the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline. It is an alternative route for the energy security of the EU and Turkey. In the first half of 2020, Azerbaijan supplied 2.7 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas to Turkey through the Southern Gas Corridor and this comprised 23 percent of the Turkish energy market (Babayev, 2020). Actually, the corridor has a capacity to annually deliver 6 bcm of gas to Turkey and 10 bcm to Europe. With the launch of the Trans-Adriatic pipeline which was expected to be in late 2020, Baku will start delivering gas to the EU countries. An attack on Tovuz is an attack on Azerbaijan's entire energy infrastructure and regional projects (A. Valiyev, personal communication, December 8, 2020). Therefore, an increased threat to the security of this region required a very assertive reaction from the Azerbaijani side (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020).

The reaction of the international community to the border clashes has been mostly neutral. The majority of the countries called the sides of the conflict to immediately end hostilities. They asked Azerbaijan and Armenia to resolve the issue in a peaceful manner and avoid provoking each other. Iran and Georgia called parties to the conflict to stop hostilities and voiced their concerns regarding the aggravation of the situation in the

region. The EU, Russia, and the US asked both countries to stick to the peaceful resolution of the conflict (Jafarova, 2020). Although most countries stayed neutral, there have been some countries and organizations that chose sides by openly expressing their support to one of the sides. Turkey was one of the first countries that reacted to the hostilities by issuing statements on all levels of government. The President of Turkey, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other high-ranking government officials explicitly supported Azerbaijan and condemned the Armenian aggression. Pakistan was another country that openly expressed its support to Azerbaijan and criticized the attacks on the Tovuz district. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan issued a statement where it was emphasized that any solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (Mansurov & Sheikh, 2020, p. 76). The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) supported Azerbaijan and expressed its condolences for soldiers who have been the victims of the aggression (Mansurov & Sheikh, 2020, p. 76). Ukraine expressed its support to Baku and emphasized the importance of resolving the conflict within the principles of territorial integrity. Moldova also issued a statement calling for a peaceful resolution of the conflict based on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (Mansurov & Sheikh, 2020, p. 76). Cyprus explicitly supported Yerevan and condemned Azerbaijan's aggression (Mansurov & Sheikh, 2020, p. 76).

4.4. Tovuz skirmishes in the context of the geopolitical competition between Russia and Turkey

The aggravation of hostilities on the Azerbaijani-Armenian international borders carries the risks of developing into the new area of intensively rising geopolitical competition between Russia and Turkey. There is a clash of interests between Moscow and Ankara in the July skirmishes since they support the opposing parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Tovuz incident conveys challenges to increasingly competitive relations between Ankara and Moscow, which are already engaged in proxy wars in Syria and Libya. Armenia is the closest Russian ally in the South Caucasus and both countries share the membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which guarantees the mechanism for collective defense in the event of a military attack against a member state. Turkey, on the other hand, plays a role of a security guarantor for Azerbaijan since two close neighbors have an Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support,

which establishes a commitment for both countries to defend each other in the case of external aggression. Consequently, the escalation of military actions along the international borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia might have enabled the activation of the collective defense mechanisms of both security pacts.

Despite periodic coldness in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations like the one caused by the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement attempts in 2008, Ankara and Baku have always been supportive of each other and this mutual support was based on cultural links and shared geopolitical interests. The recent rise of Turkey as a regional power that can be competitive on a global level creates new opportunities for Baku to use in its foreign policy. Consequently, the growing assertiveness of Turkey creates a possibility for increased involvement of Ankara in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In order to consolidate its regional power status, Turkey is willing to play a more active role in the negotiation process that is currently mediated by the OSCE Minsk group. The energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey plays one of the major roles in Turkey's growing support of Azerbaijan. The rising Turkish influence in the Caucasus challenges Russian dominance in the region. Russia perceives the South Caucasus as its own sphere of influence and it does not tolerate the intervention of other regional powers in its near neighborhood, especially NATO members. Moscow maintains its status as the major power in the South Caucasus and wields an extensive influence over Yerevan, and breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The influence over Baku and Tbilisi is still existent, but it substantially decreased for the last decade. With the diminishing role of the Western countries in the South Caucasus, Russia to some extent tolerates the increasing influence of Turkey, but within the red lines set by Moscow.

Turkey has firmly reacted to Tovuz fighting by condemning Armenia's aggression and publicly demonstrated its political and military support to Azerbaijan. The Turkish president said: "Turkey will never hesitate to stand against any attack on the rights and lands of Azerbaijan, with which it has deep-rooted friendly ties and brotherly relations" (Bryza, 2020). Turkey's Foreign and Defense Ministers also publicly supported Baku and demonstrated that if any external actor intervenes in the conflict, Turkey will not leave Azerbaijan alone and would take all necessary measures to ensure Azerbaijan's security. The Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement signed by Azerbaijan and Turkey in 2010 provides the legal basis for Ankara's interference in case of aggression

against Azerbaijan. President Erdogan specifically mentioned that attacking Azerbaijan and extending the conflict zone is a move that goes “beyond Armenia’s caliber” (Tol & Bechev, 2020). Some analysts interpreted Erdogan’s speech as referring to Moscow’s role in instigating Armenia to provoke hostilities (Jones, 2020).

Pro-governmental media sources in Turkey started blaming Moscow for this aggression against Azerbaijan by referring to the rising confrontation between Turkey and Russia in the Middle East. Actually, the Tovuz skirmishes were interpreted as an indicator of an extension of a geopolitical competition area between Moscow and Ankara to the Caucasus. According to Avinoam Idan (2020), “the violence in the region of Tovuz is, it seems, in actuality reflects a clash between Russia and Turkey, wherein Russia used Armenia as leverage in its confrontation with Turkey”. Ankara and Moscow have already confronted each other in Syria and Libya by supporting opposing sides in the civil wars. According to Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Turkey perceives the Tovuz incident as a message from Moscow and recognizes that it is very dangerous to directly confront Russia in the South Caucasus (Yackley, 2020).

As geopolitical competition between Russia and Turkey in the Middle East intensified, Turkey has been increasingly worried that its foreign policy interests might be undermined due to the traditional Russian mechanisms of influence. Moscow has long been using the disruption of energy supplies as a source of leverage in its foreign policy (Mammadov & Marshall, 2020). It used it against Georgia in the 2008 war, against Ukraine in 2014. Turkey has long been largely dependent on Russian gas to ensure its energy security. For the last three decades, Turkey has been striving to diversify its energy supplies by promoting the trilateral partnership with Azerbaijan and Georgia. Ankara has long been cooperating with Azerbaijan and Georgia on the construction of alternative energy routes from the Caspian basin to Turkey. The Southern Gas Corridor creates an opportunity to deliver energy resources of the Caspian Sea to the EU through the territory of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. This corridor bypasses Russia and thus is a rival project to the Russian-led South Stream project. The completion of the Southern Gas Corridor serves the strategic interests of Ankara since it would enable Turkey to develop its role as a crucial energy and transportation hub between Europe and Asia (Mammadov & Marshall, 2020). Moreover, this corridor diversifies energy supplies to Turkey. All the major energy infrastructure that connects Azerbaijan with Turkey passes through the

Tovuz region and any damage to the physical security of these infrastructures would considerably destabilize Turkey's energy security and Azerbaijan's economy (Mammadov & Marshall, 2020).

The Moscow-Ankara competition established very good conditions for Azerbaijan to gain the status of Turkey's primary gas supplier and thus achieve even more considerable support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Avdaliani, 2020). Indeed, Azerbaijan played a crucial role in the implementation of Ankara's diversification policy. The natural gas supplies from Russia to Turkey decreased by 62% from the first half of 2019 to the same period of 2020 (Avdaliani, 2020). Azerbaijan's supplies of natural gas to Turkey considerably increased with the finalization of the TANAP project at the end of 2019. Azerbaijan's share of Turkey's energy market reached 23.4% in the first half of 2020, whereas Russia's share during the same period was only 18% (Avdaliani, 2020; Rzayeva, 2020). Thus, Azerbaijan became Turkey's major gas supplier in May 2020 by surpassing Russia (Avdaliani, 2020). "Azerbaijani gas is thus set to play a central role in Turkey's evolving approach toward Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (Avdaliani, 2020). The growing role of Baku as a major supplier of gas to Turkey challenges the Russian dominant position in the energy market of Turkey. With the enhancing diversification of energy routes to Turkey, Russia begins to lose its dominance as a major supplier of gas which is an essential foreign policy tool in the Kremlin's relations with Ankara (Guler, 2020). The loss of such an important source of leverage reduces Moscow's chances to influence Ankara's decisions in geopolitical competition in the Middle East. Consequently, the escalation of hostilities on the border could reflect the growing tension between Moscow and Ankara related to the gradual refusal of the Russian gas supplies. The ability of Moscow to impact the political decisions of its only ally in the South Caucasus provides Moscow with an additional source of leverage on Ankara (Idan, 2020). Therefore, Tovuz skirmishes were interpreted as a reflection of geopolitical competition between Moscow and Ankara.

4.5. Conclusion

Before the Tovuz skirmishes, there have been several events that underlined the growing tension between the sides of the conflict. Armenia's new military doctrine, presidential and parliamentary elections in Karabakh, and Armenia's plans to build a road

to Jabrayil city were provocatively perceived in Azerbaijan. Moreover, statements and new conditions set by Nikol Pashinyan reflected the rejection of the Madrid Principles by Armenia. In the immediate background to the clashes, the negotiation process reached a deadlock position.

One of the most important features of the July skirmishes was the fact that it happened outside the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijan perceived the Tovuz skirmishes as an attack on its energy infrastructure since the vital energy projects pass through this region. Turkey openly expressed its support to Azerbaijan and condemned Armenia's attacks. Most countries remained neutral and asked both sides of the conflict to stop hostilities. Although Russia remained neutral in its reaction to the skirmishes, it organized joint military drills with Armenia right after the end of the clashes. The Tovuz incident has been a shocking event for Azerbaijan and it certainly had consequences on Azerbaijan's diplomacy towards external actors. The implications of the Tovuz clashes on Azerbaijan's relations with Russia and Turkey, on the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and on the overall security strategy of Azerbaijan will be discussed in the next chapter.

5. Analysis of short-term consequences of the Tovuz clashes for Azerbaijan's security policy

This chapter will provide an analysis of implications of the Tovuz skirmishes for Azerbaijan's security policy. The first section will examine short-term changes in diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation in the immediate aftermath of the Tovuz clashes. In the second section, changing patterns of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey will be discussed. More specifically, the inclination of Azerbaijani authorities towards short-term realignment with Turkey will be analyzed in terms of deepened military cooperation, mutual political support, and cooperation in non-military spheres as well. The third section of this chapter will explore the implications of the July skirmishes on the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The last section will analyze how the short-term changes in Azerbaijan's diplomacy are reflected in its overall security strategy towards external powers.

5.1. Azerbaijani-Russian relations after the Tovuz skirmishes

The emergence of new challenges in relations between Baku and Moscow could be observed while the geopolitical environment and the balance of power in the region changes. Russia's military support to Armenia in the midst of the aggravation of the situation on the border and subsequent Russian-Armenian joint military drills right after the end of the Tovuz clashes created very negative reactions among the Azerbaijani elites and society. Although there have been various challenges in Azerbaijani-Russian relations throughout recent history, Azerbaijan has long maintained a balanced approach in its relations with the regional powers. An external shocking event such as the increased threat to Azerbaijan's national security might be the factor to persuade Azerbaijani authorities to make a drastic pivot in its foreign policy orientation by allying with Turkey to balance Russian influence in the South Caucasus. The rise of Turkey as a new regional power capable of challenging Russian dominance in the South Caucasus might encourage official Baku to reconsider its relations with Russia.

Right after the Tovuz incident, Azerbaijani-Russian relations experienced increased tensions since Azerbaijani officials accused Russia of intentionally fueling the conflict by supplying Yerevan with military armaments. During and aftermath of the Tovuz clashes, there have been seven flights of military transportation planes from Russia

to Armenia. Since Georgia did not allow the use of its airspace, the military cargo planes have been intensively delivering weapons to Armenia using the airspace of Caspian countries: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. One of the flights occurred during the fierce fighting in Tovuz, the rest of the flights happened immediately after the end of the incident on 18, 20, 27, 29 July, and 4,6 August (Azernews, August 31). The comprehensive military support to Armenia created discontent among the Azerbaijani society and elites. On August 12, President Aliyev discussed this issue with Vladimir Putin over the telephone conversation and expressed Baku's position in respect to this problem. Azerbaijani president emphasized that the volume of military cargo delivered to Armenia during and aftermath of the border clashes exceeded 400 tons. He asked Putin for clarification of this issue since it raises "concern and serious questions among the Azerbaijani public" (President.az, August 13). Azerbaijani authorities did not reveal the details of Putin's response to the expressed concern. The member of Azerbaijan's Parliament, Rasim Musabayov, emphasized that the reaction from Baku indicated that Azerbaijan would make inferences from the recent events and would intensify its military cooperation with Ankara, while gradually reducing military purchases from Moscow (BBC, August 30).

On August 25, the Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu arrived in Baku to participate in the opening ceremony of the Sea Cup. During the visit, the Russian minister commented on the growing concern of the Azerbaijani side. Even though Sergey Shoigu claimed that these flights were used with the purpose of delivering the construction materials for the Russian military base in Gyumri, this response did not convince Azerbaijani society and specifically the Azerbaijani president's foreign policy advisor, Hikmat Hajiyev. He said: "military cargoes are delivered from Russia to Armenia, and this seriously worries the Azerbaijani state and the public. We are not satisfied with the explanations of the Russian side" (Azernews, August 31). Mr. Hajiyev emphasized that the Azerbaijani society is waiting for the sincere and open response from the Russian side on these questions: "On what basis and with what purpose Moscow continues to intensively supply Yerevan in the background of Armenia's aggression in Tovuz" (Azernews, August 31). Hikmat Hajiyev's response demonstrates that the Azerbaijani relevant structures have very accurate and trustworthy information on the composition of these supplies. The essence of Hikmat Hajiyev's statement consists in the fact he publicly

refuted Shoygu's response and revealed the assertive stance of Azerbaijan on this matter. Besides, it is obvious that Ilham Aliyev and Vladimir Putin discussed these issues in private conversation and the Azerbaijani president has already received an answer to his question. Russian Minister of Defense tried to ease the situation during the visit to the Azerbaijani capital, however, the Azerbaijani authorities remained principled in this sensitive matter. By aggravating this issue through the media and statements by the officials, Baku puts pressure on and sends a message to Moscow about its discontent.

Even though Baku occasionally expressed its concern to Moscow for its continuous military support for Yerevan, it has typically done so through the media. After the Tovuz incident, Azerbaijan's high-level officials expressed their complaints to Russian counterparts regarding the Russian military provision to Yerevan in the middle of the conflict. There has been a considerable change of rhetoric as president Aliyev openly informed Vladimir Putin about his and Azerbaijani society's concerns about the growing Russian support of Armenia. "It is not a coincidence that after the Tovuz clashes Azerbaijani government started to be louder about the military supplies from Russia to Armenia. President Aliyev himself talked about it in international media," said Vasif Huseynov, a senior research fellow at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) in Baku. It was something unusual happening in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia because Azerbaijani authorities were very careful with statements regarding Russia, but After the Tovuz clashes, they openly started criticizing Russia's military supplies to Armenia (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). "That was the major change that happened in Azerbaijan's diplomacy. The government started to be more loudly in its criticism of Russia's military commitment to Armenia, its support, and military supplies" (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). Consequently, after the July skirmishes, Azerbaijani high-ranking officials started publicly questioning Russian military support to Armenia. The fact that this changed rhetoric happened during the unprecedented military rapprochement between Ankara and Baku created questions concerning the foreign policy orientation of Azerbaijan.

There were also other events that signaled the tensions in relations between Moscow and Baku. Azerbaijan decided not to participate in the "Caucasus-2020" military training organized by Moscow. Azerbaijani authorities decided to send two observers and did not provide any details regarding the explanation of this choice. During these events,

there were some speculations in Azerbaijan's society that the decision was made due to coldness in relations with Moscow, but it could be also because of the unwillingness of Azerbaijani forces to participate in military drills together with the Armenian military especially taking into account the recent aggravation of the situation on the border of two states (Avdaliani, 2020).

Although Baku changed its rhetoric towards Russia and there have been some tensions between the two states, their relations did not completely deteriorate. Baku and Moscow continue to remain important strategic partners that have mutual interests in various spheres of cooperation. On August 26, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov, made an official visit to Moscow where he met with the Russian counterpart. Changing rhetoric of Azerbaijani authorities towards Russia could be just a short-term tactical maneuver (Avdaliani, 2020). The changing rhetoric also reflects Baku's intention to more actively engage Turkey in the region and expectations for a bigger role of Ankara in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Avdaliani, 2020).

5.2. Azerbaijani-Turkish relations after the Tovuz clashes

The aggression against Tovuz represented an enormous threat to Azerbaijan's security from two perspectives. First of all, under the background of Yerevan's increased militaristic and offensive stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Moscow's military support to Armenia in the middle of skirmishes, Baku has perceived the possibility of further aggression and the loss of new territories. Secondly, the instability in the Tovuz corridor, which represents crucial strategic importance for Azerbaijan's energy and transportation strategy with Georgia, Turkey, and the EU, would disrupt the operability of the energy pipelines and hurt Azerbaijan's economy. The increased threat to Azerbaijan's national security and crucial economic infrastructure during the Tovuz skirmishes and Russian military supplies to Armenia pushed Azerbaijan further towards the consolidation of the Ankara-Baku military-political partnership (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). Ankara's absolute support to Baku during the Tovuz skirmishes has facilitated the deepening of the Azerbaijani-Turkish relations and encouraged the two countries to diversify bilateral relations in various areas. First of all, the military cooperation between the parties substantially increased right after the July

events. The deepening of military relations between Baku and Ankara can be evidenced by the drastic increase in Turkish military supplies to Azerbaijan, by the frequent and mutual visits of the high-ranking military officials, and by the most comprehensive joint military exercises in the recent history of bilateral military cooperation. Bilateral relations between Baku and Ankara deepened also outside the military sphere. Azerbaijan and Turkey announced the establishment of a common media and communication platform to jointly fight against the dissemination of false news targeting both countries in the international media. Moreover, Turkey's Minister of Trade announced the plans to deepen economic relations by signing the free trade deal with Azerbaijan. Consequently, the deepening of Ankara-Baku relations was one of the major changes in Azerbaijan's diplomacy right after the Tovuz events (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). Ankara-Baku relations have been evolving for three decades and nowadays, we can observe the highest point in the cooperation between two countries since the proclamation of Azerbaijan's independence in 1991.

Despite certain ups and downs in bilateral relations, Turkey has always been fairly consistent in its approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by supporting Azerbaijan and demanding Armenia to act in accordance with international law and four resolutions of the UN Security Council. Turkey has always been determined to advocate Azerbaijan's interests in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict but in a more balanced way. We can observe a significant change in Ankara's reaction to the conflict during the Tovuz skirmishes. "This time, Turkey has been instrumental, very active, and assertive" (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020). Turkey's high-ranking officials including president Erdogan demonstrated a very robust position in the border skirmishes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It was unusual for Ankara to express such strong rhetoric in the South Caucasus. Many experts related Ankara's firm rhetoric and proactive position in the conflict to Erdogan's highly assertive foreign policy and intention to assert Turkey as a rising geopolitical force in the South Caucasus.

During the July events, Turkey more proactively engaged in the conflict and has taken a much more assertive stance compared to its reactions in previous years. "We engaged Turkey into South Caucasus this time. Unlike in 2016, in 2020 we observed a very active involvement of Turkey and other players such as Pakistan, and Israel in a form of military supply and political support" (F. Ismailzade, personal communication,

December 10, 2020). Right after the beginning of the hostilities, Turkey's high-ranking governmental and military officials expressed their support to Azerbaijan by making very robust statements demanding Armenia to stop hostilities. "Turkey stood next to Azerbaijan. That was an important message to the world and to Russia that Turkey will not leave Azerbaijan alone" (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020).

5.2.1. Increased military cooperation with Turkey

A day after the end of the Tovuz incident, on the 17th of July Russia launched joint military drills in Armenia. Against the backdrop of growing tensions in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Turkey announced joint military exercises, which were scheduled from July 29 to August 10. These military exercises have been the most comprehensive and the largest in the contemporary history of military collaboration between Ankara and Baku (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). On July 31, F-16 jets of Turkish Air Forces arrived in Baku in order to participate in the TurAz Eagle 2020 joint aviation exercises (Mod.gov.az, July 31). These military exercises were broadly perceived by experts as a response to the Tovuz skirmishes and Russo-Armenian joint military drills (A. Valiyev, personal communication, December 8, 2020). According to Elkhan Shahinoglu, the director of Atlas Research Center, the joint military exercises were an important message to Yerevan and the external forces that were behind it (Mehdiyev, 2020). The importance of this message is that it clearly reflected Azerbaijan's perspective and reaction to the Tovuz skirmishes. Furthermore, Elkhan Shahinoglu emphasizes that amid the recent military supplies to Armenia and joint military drills of Russian and Armenian forces, it is necessary for Baku to intensify military cooperation with Ankara (Mehdiyev, 2020).

In the midst of the aggravation of fighting on the border, high-ranking Azerbaijani military officials went to Turkey to discuss the situation in the region and the development of military collaboration. After the meeting with the Azerbaijani Deputy Defense Minister, the head of the Turkish Defense Industry, Ismail Demir, stated: "Our defense industry is always at the disposal of Azerbaijan with all its experience, technology, and capabilities" (Ergocun, 2020). On August 13, a Turkish delegation led by Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar, arrived in Baku. During the meeting with Hulusi Akar, President

Aliyev emphasized the significance of expanding military cooperation with Ankara and underlined that in the near future Turkey will become the major arms supplier to Azerbaijan (Daily Sabah, 2020).

Azerbaijan's growing military cooperation with Turkey can also be reflected in the drastic increase of arms supplies to Baku after the Tovuz clashes. "Sales jumped from \$278,880 in the month of July to \$36 million in the month of August, and \$77.1 million in just September" (Toksabay, 2020). Overall, during the period of January-September of 2020, Azerbaijan has purchased various kinds of military equipment worth \$123 million (Toksabay, 2020). A substantial part (92 %) of the purchases accounts for the period after the July skirmishes. If we compare this data to the arms purchases from Turkey in the first nine months of 2019, we would observe a six-fold increase in the same period of 2020. Thus, Turkey's role as an arms exporter to Azerbaijan substantially increased in the aftermath of the Tovuz fighting. The military drills right after the July incident, the enhanced military cooperation with Baku reflect the increased proximity between Ankara and Baku and can serve as evidence of Turkey's willingness to engage more actively in the region.

Right after the start of joint military exercises of Azerbaijani and Turkish forces, there have been speculations in Azerbaijani and Turkish media that high-ranking military officials from two countries discuss the possibility of the formation of Turkish military bases in Azerbaijan as a counterbalance to the Russian base in Armenia (Jasem, 2020). These speculations also disseminated in the news media of some post-Soviet countries including Russia. In the article published by Russian *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, it is argued that the Turkish army is still in Baku and the high-ranking military officials discuss the question of establishing an official military base in Azerbaijan (Muhin, 2020). Despite growing speculations, the establishment of the Turkish military base in Azerbaijan is not real taking into account Azerbaijan's major foreign policy principles and the geopolitical context. Azerbaijan strives to pursue an independent multilateral foreign policy based on national interests. The establishment of foreign military base will considerably restrict the autonomy and freedom of Azerbaijani authorities in making foreign policy decisions and pursuit of national interests.

There are permanent military exercises between Azerbaijan and Turkey. According to military agreements between parties, throughout the year Azerbaijani military forces can be in Turkey and the Turkish military can be in Azerbaijan. Thus, it means that from a formal point of view, the Turkish military forces and equipment can be present in Azerbaijan since they have the right to conduct joint military exercises throughout the year (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). “Therefore, I do not think there is a need to create an infrastructure for a military base. There is already an arranged infrastructure for deploying Turkish troops to Azerbaijan, if necessary, and vice versa” (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). “There are already Turkish air forces located in Azerbaijan. The de-facto Turkish army has been in Baku since August, but officially building a Turkish military base is not real, especially in the short term. Maybe in the long term, something could change” (T. Gafarli, personal communication, December 25, 2020). Dr. Farid Shafiyev also does not exclude the possibility of a Turkish military base in the future. “Establishment of the military base might happen in the future depending on the overall security situation in the region. If a more military threat arises against Azerbaijan” (F. Shafiyev, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

5.2.2. Intensification of Azerbaijan’s partnership with Turkey in other spheres

Azerbaijan’s military cooperation with Turkey expanded substantially after the Tovuz incident which was evidenced by the increased purchases of military equipment from Turkey, by the extended presence of the Turkish F-16s and other military staff in Azerbaijan, and by the considerably increased visits of Turkish military officials to Azerbaijan and vice versa. However, enhanced cooperation between Ankara and Baku was not limited only to the military sphere, the deepening of bilateral relations can be observed in other domains as well. One of the major domains of interest was the establishment of the joint media and communication platform with the primary purpose of incorporating the media sources of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the joint struggle against false news and black propaganda (Hurriyet Daily News, 2020). “It is not a coincidence that Azerbaijani officials including foreign policy advisors made visits to Turkey and they sought to develop relations with Turkey in other spheres” (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). The news about the establishment of the common media platform was confirmed during the official visit of the assistant to the President of

Azerbaijan, Hikmat Hajiyev, to Ankara on September 7, 2020 (Hurriyet Daily News, 2020). The formation of such a platform is understandable in the face of an increased spread of fabricated news in the international media sources and social media during the Tovuz skirmishes. Thus, this media platform is essential for Azerbaijan's public diplomacy. It provides an opportunity to work with the Turkish media representatives in order to swiftly disseminate true and accurate information to the international audience and tackle the spread of disinformation and fake news targeting Turkey and Azerbaijan in international and social media.

During and after the Tovuz incident, we can observe the substantial increase of mutual visits between officials at all governmental levels of the two countries. On August 11, Azerbaijan's newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jeyhun Bayramov, made his first foreign visit to Ankara. During the meeting with his Turkish counterpart, Bayramov emphasized that one of the crucial foreign policy priorities of Azerbaijan is to deepen and intensify its cooperation with Ankara (Mammadov, 2020). Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavushoglu, underlined the growing role of Baku in the Turkish energy market and revealed the plans to increase the supplies of natural gas from Azerbaijan (Mammadov, 2020). On September 2, President Aliyev supported Turkey over the maritime dispute between Ankara and Athens in the Eastern Mediterranean region. During the meeting with the Greek ambassador to Azerbaijan, President Aliyev stated: "Without any hesitation whatsoever, we support Turkey and will support it in any circumstances. We see the same support from our Turkish brothers. They support Azerbaijan on all issues, and we support them on all issues, including the issue of intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean" (Azertac, 2020).

On September 11, the Azerbaijani delegation led by Sahiba Gafarova, the speaker of Azerbaijan's Parliament, visited Ankara and met with Turkey's Minister of Trade Ruhsar Pekcan (Bicer, 2020). After the meeting, the parties announced that the current trade turnover between Baku and Ankara does not reveal the real potential and there are plans to substantially expand trade volume by achieving a free trade deal (Bicer, 2020).

The drastic increase in military supplies, explicit political support to Azerbaijan in the middle of the aggravation of the situation in the border, the most comprehensive joint military drills, numerous mutual visits of Turkish and Azerbaijani political and

military officials during and aftermath of the conflict, intensified cooperation in other spheres reflect the major changes that happened in the bilateral relations of Ankara and Baku right after the Tovuz skirmishes.

5.3. Implications on the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The July border skirmishes between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the subsequent enhanced military cooperation between Ankara and Baku had certain implications on the balance of power in the South Caucasus and on the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The unconditional and explicit support of Ankara has obviously encouraged Azerbaijan to confront Yerevan and its external supporters in a more assertive way (Huseynov, 2020). The growing threat to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the demand of the domestic audience to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict aftermath of the July skirmishes along with the rise of Turkey as a regional power and its support to Azerbaijan compelled Baku to consider the military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

One of the most essential impacts of the Tovuz skirmishes was to make Baku reconsider its approach to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Baku has always threatened Yerevan that it would not hesitate to reconsider its policy and move towards the military solution if diplomatic attempts would not generate any outcomes. Of course, the regional context and the deadlock of the negotiation process also contributed to the reevaluation of Baku's policy tools towards the resolution of the conflict. Armenia's Prime Minister's provocative for Azerbaijan actions and statements concerning Nagorno-Karabakh led to the complete stalemate in the negotiation process. Rejection of the Madrid Principles to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by the new Armenian government and David Tonoyan's new security approach were the initial factors that could influence Baku's reconsideration of its attitude towards the diplomatic resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, Turkey's appearance as a rising regional power and its active support to Azerbaijan right after the July events were also additional factors that prompted and emboldened Baku to consider the use of military force.

In the background of the changing geopolitical situation in the Caucasus and the complete deadlock of the negotiation efforts, the July aggression against the crucial geostrategic district of Azerbaijan was a shocking external event that triggered the

determination among the local population and political elites of Azerbaijan to seriously consider the military solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and start the preparation for the war. “Tovuz event was a trigger for the next war. It demonstrated that Azerbaijan’s national security is undermined and threatened. That’s why it forced Baku to think of a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” (A. Valiyev, personal communication, December 8, 2020). “Armenia regretted that it attacked Tovuz because Azerbaijan has received a very good opportunity to liberate the occupied territories. So, aggression against Tovuz was responded in a very assertive way in Karabakh” (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020). Consequently, the Tovuz skirmishes resulting in the increased threats to Azerbaijan’s security in a sense of possibility of the new aggression and the loss of new territories forced Azerbaijan to switch to drastic measures and consider the use of military tools rather than relying solely on diplomatic tools in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

On July 14, thousands of Azerbaijanis took to the streets to show their support to the military. Due to the news of the death of the very famous Major General, Polad Hashimov, the angered audience demanded the state mobilization and the beginning of the military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh (BBC, July 15). The domestic sentiment could be an additional factor that prompted Azerbaijani authorities to consider the tough stance of the use of military force instead of a continuation of the deadlocked negotiations. However, it should also be mentioned that this was not the first time when the domestic audience made it clear to the authorities that they are not happy with the ineffectual peace negotiations longing for three decades. Interviewed experts also did not mention the domestic factor as the one that prompted Azerbaijan to reconsider its stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The military drills right after the July incident, the enhanced military cooperation with Baku reflect the increased proximity between Ankara and Baku and can serve as evidence of Turkey’s willingness to engage more actively in the region. Ankara took an assertive position in the conflict and established itself as an important security actor in the region whose interests should be taken into consideration. “And this in many ways has determined the fate of Tovuz clashes and the second Karabakh conflict. It deterred Russia from an open interference in the conflict, it deterred Russia from sending troops to support Armenia” (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020) Even

though officially military exercises were supposed to finish on August 10, Turkish F-16 jets remained in Azerbaijan even after the end of exercises. In his appeal to the domestic audience, President Aliyev emphasized that Turkish F-16s and the explicit support of Turkey were addressed towards external actors as a measure of deterrence. Ankara's actions deterred Armenia's allies from involvement in the conflict and this played a crucial role in Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh war. Turkey played the role of a counterbalancing force in Baku's efforts to return the occupied territories (T. Gafarli, personal communication, December 25, 2020).

Turkey's unconditional and clear support to Azerbaijan from military and governmental leaders was an act of deterrence strategy in order to prevent external powers from involvement in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. "We also see that it opened a new opportunity for Turkey to be more actively involved in the South Caucasus strategically. Turkey will be a more active player in the South Caucasus and Russia will have to deal with it and accept this new reality. In a way, we see the South Caucasus as a region that is divided between two regional powers: Russia and Turkey. We see less and less the presence of Western powers in this region" (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020). Ankara's further commitment to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War has considerably enhanced its image and status as a reliable ally and regional power that has a substantial weight in regional matters. Before the conflicts, Turkey has been involved in the South Caucasus mainly in terms of the trilateral format in energy and transportation projects with Georgia and Azerbaijan. The failure of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict in 26 years generated a power vacuum and rising regional powers such as Turkey gained an opportunity to fill this power vacuum and become a significant player in the negotiation process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Ankara has begun more proactively engaging in the South Caucasus and enhanced its stance as a significant security actor in the region.

5.4. Implication of changes on Azerbaijan's security strategy

The previous sections discussed the changes in Azerbaijan's relations with Turkey and Russian Federation right after the July clashes on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border. This section discusses the implications of these changes on Azerbaijan's security strategy. Despite the considerable enhancement of Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation and

the growing tensions between Baku and Moscow, the interviewed experts asserted that Azerbaijan's diplomacy in respect to the external actors did not fundamentally change. "Many people claim that Azerbaijan made a drastic choice in favor of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations at the cost of Azerbaijani-Russian relations. But there is no evidence to support this claim" (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). Azerbaijan has always been supportive of multi-vector foreign policy and has always maintained a balanced approach between different external powers. "If Azerbaijan makes reckless foreign policy choices and endangers geopolitical balance in the region, it might cause serious troubles for Azerbaijan" (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). "Azerbaijan has a very consistent foreign policy based on certain principles" (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). The fundamental principles of Azerbaijan's diplomacy have been the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, independent foreign policy in the international arena, and pursuit of national interests. Azerbaijani authorities make foreign policy decisions based on these core principles. "After the Tovuz events, Azerbaijan intensified relations with Turkey. But obviously didn't break up with Russia or the US. Azerbaijan's foreign policy was getting ready for something bigger. They successfully kept the balance between Russia and Turkey" (T. Gafarli, personal communication, December 25, 2020). Azerbaijan successfully maintained the balance between major regional actors by not breaking relations with Moscow after the Tovuz skirmishes. Despite the changing rhetoric, Azerbaijan continued its strategic partnership with Russia. The multilateral diplomacy based on partnership with multiple actors and retaining good relations with Moscow allowed Azerbaijan to use military force in Nagorno-Karabakh without directly challenging the northern neighbor.

Azerbaijan continues pursuing the strategic hedging strategy in its relations with regional powers. It is possible to track several elements of this strategy in the analysis of changes in Azerbaijan's relations with Russia and Turkey. Growing military cooperation between Ankara and Baku increased Turkish military supplies, and the joint military exercises reflect the indirect balancing strategy in Azerbaijan's hedging policy. Baku did not explicitly and fundamentally challenge Russian dominance. The measures employed by Azerbaijani elites reflect their discontent with Russia's military supplies to Armenia right in the middle of the conflict. Baku reacted to the Russian actions during the July

hostilities by facilitating military cooperation with Ankara. “Azerbaijan always knew that Russia is very close with Armenia and provides massive military supplies. However, the military delivery during the Tovuz clashes and in the immediate aftermath was the factor which compelled Azerbaijan to seek more robust military cooperation with Turkey” (F. Shafiyev, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Even though this could seem like a profound transformation of the security strategy, the author would interpret it as a careful tactical maneuver employed by Azerbaijani authorities on the basis of the core principles of their foreign policy. This kind of tactical maneuver has always been employed in Baku’s relations with external powers. There have been very similar tensions in relations with Russia in 1997 during the presidency of Heydar Aliyev. After the Russian authorities granted Armenia weapons worth a billion dollars, Baku has engaged with NATO in terms of the possibility of increased military cooperation. There have even been speculations concerning the potential membership in NATO and the creation of a military base in Baku. Thus, the changes in Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia and Turkey might be just a short-term tactical maneuver analogous to the one that happened in 1997.

Baku’s efforts to impact Moscow’s policies through the direct communication channels and media reflect the binding engagement element of Azerbaijan’s hedging strategy. Azerbaijan’s increased engagement with Turkey in various areas of bilateral relations, the mutual political support of two countries, and the choice of a military solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reflect the dominance denial element of Azerbaijan’s hedging policy. Russia has always sought to attain geopolitical benefits by exploiting the conflicts in the surrounding areas and often provoking them. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been an important foreign policy tool for Moscow to retain both Azerbaijan and Armenia under its influence. Despite the role of mediator in the conflict, Russia has been providing both sides of the conflict with military supplies. The resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not in the interests of Moscow, especially by military means. Thus, Azerbaijan’s decision to use military force to ultimately resolve the conflict to some extent challenged Russian interests. At the same time, it should be mentioned that Azerbaijan has formed an important principle for a small state: the ability to say no to great powers if their plans and actions conflict with Azerbaijan's national interests in the South Caucasus (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

“Azerbaijan cannot compete with large forces at the global level, but in this area of geography we are not only able to compete with them, but we are implementing our initiatives. If their policies are in conflict with ours, we can say no” (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Thus, Azerbaijani elites strive to conduct autonomous foreign policy in accordance with the national interests even if it collides with the interests of global and regional powers. There are numerous examples in the recent history of Azerbaijan when elites chose to pursue their own agenda at the detriment of the interests of global and regional powers. Azerbaijan stood contrary to Russian interests by shutting down Gabala Radar Station in 2012 (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Azerbaijani authorities demonstrated an assertive position during the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation attempts in 2008 since it collided with Azerbaijan’s interests.

Azerbaijan continues its cooperation with Russia which can be evidenced by the official visit of Azerbaijan’s new foreign policy minister to Russia where he discussed bilateral relations in various areas. Both countries continue their strategic partnership. “In fact, Russia has played a more neutral and more constructive role this year in comparison with last years. Russia understands that Azerbaijan is an important partner for Russia, an important regional partner. We have common interests in the Caspian Sea, common interest in the war against terrorism” (F. Ismailzade, personal communication, December 10, 2020). “There is no threat to Russia on the territory of Azerbaijan. We are predictable for Russia. We value each other as a strategic partner and we will cooperate on an equal basis” (F. Mammadov, personal communication, December 9, 2020). “Immediately after the end of the war, President Aliyev appreciated Russian support towards the establishment of the ceasefire” (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020). It is a matter of geopolitical necessity for Azerbaijan to maintain a balanced policy especially after the Second Karabakh war (V. Huseynov, personal communication, December 24, 2020).

Thus, the fundamental principles of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy did not change and there was not a drastic pivot of security strategy towards the explicit balancing against the source of threat. Azerbaijan continues its balanced approach in its relations with external powers by cooperating with them and refraining from the open confrontation. The intensification of military cooperation with Ankara reflects the discontent expressed

towards Moscow for the military support to Armenia during the Tovuz clashes. The changing patterns of relations with Ankara and Moscow reflect a short-term tactical maneuver that also enabled Azerbaijan to consider the use of military force in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijani authorities make independent foreign policy decisions based on national interests even if it collides with the interests of the great powers. Azerbaijan always leaves room for compromise and negotiations, but when the issue touches the cores of its foreign policy, then Baku takes a principled position like it did in respect to Tovuz clashes and subsequently in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

6. Conclusion

The objective of the study was to examine the behavior of a small state and the security policy employed during the imminent military threat to its security. A single case study was used as a research strategy. The author used the case of Azerbaijan after the Tovuz skirmishes for the purposes of this study. The study examined shifts in Azerbaijan's security strategy as a result of perceived threats from the Tovuz clashes. The thesis sought to identify whether there has been a fundamental change in Azerbaijan's relations with regional powers and the overall implications of the Tovuz skirmishes on Azerbaijan's foreign policy decisions. The theoretical framework provided grounds through which the author examined the behavior and security policies employed by a small state during the times of imminent threat perception to its security. The concept of a small state and the strategies employed to cope with their threats were used as a conceptual basis of this thesis. Neorealist perspective on the determination of the security policy choice was employed in the thesis as a theoretical framework.

The shifts in Azerbaijan's security policy were examined through analysis of qualitative interviews with political experts that are close to Azerbaijan's foreign policy elites or work in think tanks. Furthermore, the author collected and analyzed the data from various primary and secondary sources. News disseminated via Azerbaijan's media, bilateral agreements of Azerbaijan with external powers, official statistical data, and the speeches of high-ranking officials delivered during and after the clashes have been thoroughly examined. Besides, numerous academic articles have been analyzed to examine Azerbaijan's security strategy before the clashes.

During the period of early independence, Azerbaijan's security strategy drastically transformed several times because of frequent change of leaders. The first president of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutallibov, pursued a bandwagoning strategy by aligning with Russian Federation. He expected that pro-Russian foreign policy would ensure Azerbaijan's territorial integrity by gaining Russian support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, Mutallibov did not take into consideration the domestic unwillingness to participate in Russian-led integration projects. Therefore, the bandwagoning strategy proved to be inefficient in those circumstances. The second president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, followed a balancing strategy against the source of threat. He wrongly

assessed the geopolitical realities of that time and assumed that a pro-Turkish and pro-Western stance would help him to pursue independent foreign policy without making any concessions to Russia. The balancing strategy failed due to the incorrect calculation of the geopolitical realities of the region.

After coming to power in October 1993, Heydar Aliyev learned the lessons from his predecessor's mistakes and refrained from pursuing a clear pro- or anti-Russian approach. He accurately evaluated geopolitical context, domestic circumstances, and chose the strategy that would allow Azerbaijan to maintain autonomy in the foreign and domestic policies while not directly confronting the Russian Federation. Being the president of a small with rich natural resources and favorable geostrategic position, Heydar Aliyev pursued a hedging strategy in Azerbaijan's relations with regional powers. The fundamental principles of Baku's security strategy were the restoration of territorial integrity by resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the pursuit of an active and autonomous foreign policy based on Azerbaijan's national interests. Realizing the constraints and challenges imposed on Azerbaijan due to its geostrategic position, Heydar Aliyev also recognized and exploited the opportunities given to Azerbaijan due to its geography. The abundance of natural resources and favorable geostrategic position allowed Azerbaijan to pursue an efficient hedging strategy by engaging with Russia and simultaneously continuing an autonomous foreign policy based on national interests. Azerbaijan established close partnerships in economic, energy, political, and social spheres with other regional actors such as the US, the EU, and Turkey.

Ilham Aliyev maintained a hedging strategy in relations with regional powers. Azerbaijan implemented huge energy and transportations projects in a trilateral format of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. Despite being detrimental to Russian interests, Azerbaijan managed to finalize Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, TANAP, TAP projects and enhance its partnership with Turkey and Western countries. As a result of these projects, Azerbaijan enhanced its international standing and political autonomy in foreign relations. Military cooperation with Turkey has been intensified during the presidency of Ilham Aliyev. Simultaneously, a strategic partnership with Russia was also maintained.

The Tovuz incident created an imminent threat to Azerbaijan's security. Armed forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia confronted on the border of two states. Azerbaijan perceived these clashes as an attack on the crucial geostrategic corridor through which all the energy and transportation projects pass. The intensification of the Russian military provision to Armenia in the midst and aftermath of the clashes and Russian-Armenian joint military drills created an additional threat perception in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani authorities very negatively reacted to the Russian actions by publicly expressing their discontent regarding the provision of military supplies to Armenia. Azerbaijan demonstrated its principled stance on this sensitive issue by aggravating it through public statements of the president and his foreign policy advisor and through the media. Thus, there was a change in Azerbaijan's rhetoric towards Russia after the Tovuz incident. Although this created tensions in Baku-Moscow relations, the two countries proceeded with their strategic partnership in various spheres. It should also be mentioned that on the official level, Russia remained neutral in its reaction to the conflict and did not choose any sides.

The perception of an imminent threat as a result of the clashes and tensions with Moscow prompted Baku to further consolidate its military, political, and economic partnership with Ankara. Turkey's unconditional support to Azerbaijan during the clashes has intensified and deepened the cooperation between the two countries. The intensification of military cooperation can be evidenced by the drastic rise of Turkish arms supplies to Azerbaijan, the largest joint military drills in the recent history of two countries, and regular mutual visits of high-level military officials. Ankara-Baku cooperation similarly consolidated in other spheres as well, which can be reflected in the formation of common media and communication platforms and the deepening of economic cooperation. Consequently, the enhancement of the Azerbaijani-Turkish partnership has been determined as one of the fundamental changes in Azerbaijan's diplomacy since the Tovuz incident.

The results of the study also determined that one of the major implications of the Tovuz skirmishes was the reconsideration of Baku's stance on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the context of changing geopolitical circumstances in the region and the impasse situation in the negotiation process, the Tovuz clashes have been identified as a triggering event that prompted Baku to switch to harsh measures and use

military force in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey's unconditional support during the conflict and the neutral stance of Russia also created an opportunity for Baku to liberate the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Although the military cooperation between Baku and Ankara has intensified after the clashes and there have been some tensions in Baku-Moscow relations, the results of interviews demonstrated that Azerbaijan's security strategy did not fundamentally change. Azerbaijan did not make a pivot in the security strategy in the direction of the explicit confrontation (balancing strategy) with Moscow, but rather made short-term tactical maneuvers to demonstrate its discontent with Russia's policies. There are a lot of analogous situations in Azerbaijan's modern history when such measures have been employed in foreign relations. Azerbaijani elites proceeded with hedging strategy with respect to regional powers. Azerbaijan's attempts to influence Moscow's policies through the communication channels and media reflect the binding engagement element of Azerbaijan's hedging strategy. The deepening of military cooperation with Ankara is a part of the limited balancing component of Azerbaijan's hedging strategy. The increased engagement of Turkey in regional affairs and the mutual political support between Ankara and Baku reflect the dominance denial element of Azerbaijan's hedging policy. Thus, Azerbaijan continued following the balanced approach in its relations with regional powers and continued its autonomous foreign policy based on national interests.

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Appendix 1. List of interviewees

Dr. Anar Veliyev (Dean and Associate Professor of School of Public and International Affairs, ADA University). December 8, 2020. Skype.

Farhad Mammadov (Valdai Club Expert; Former state serviceman at President Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan; Former Director at the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan). December 9, 2020. Skype.

Dr. Farid Shafiyev (Chairman of the Center for Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center); Former Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Canada; Former Ambassador of Azerbaijan to the Czech Republic). December 9, 2020. Skype.

Dr. Fariz Ismailzade (Executive Vice Rector of ADA University, Board member of Amcham Azerbaijan). December 10, 2020. Skype.

Dr. Vasif Huseynov (Senior Research Fellow at the AIR Center). December 24, 2020. Skype.

Turan Gafarli (Assistant Researcher at TRT World Research Center). December 25, 2020. Skype.

Appendix 2. Interview questions

- 1) How do you evaluate Azerbaijan's security strategy towards major regional and global powers right before Tovuz clashes?
- 2) Tovuz incident was the first clash of such a large scale directly on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border since the first Karabakh war. Taking into account the crucial strategic importance of the Tovuz region, how did Azerbaijan react to the threats to its security?
- 3) Do you think Azerbaijan has changed its diplomacy towards major regional and global powers immediately after the Tovuz clashes?
- 4) There was massive transportation of military equipment from Russia to Armenia during clashes and these issues were brought by the President of Azerbaijan to a serious discussion with Vladimir Putin. Despite, Shoigu's statement that it was construction materials delivered to Gyumri military base, Hikmat Hajiyev was not satisfied with this reply. Do you think there is a pivot in relations with Russian Federation?
- 5) Right after the Tovuz clashes, Azerbaijan conducted joint military exercises with Turkey as a response to the Russo-Armenian military drills. What would you say are the implications of enhanced Ankara-Baku relations in general and specifically regarding Russia?