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NAGORNO KARABAKH CONFLICT AND THE HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTRACTABILITY

DAĞLIK KARABAĞ ÇATIŞMASI VE ÇÖZÜMSÜZLÜĞÜN BÜTÜNCÜL ANALİZİ

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ABSTRACT

The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict turned into an "intractable" conflict since the parties did not compromise despite the long-lasting efforts of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The realist approaches, which dominate the Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) field, cannot fully explain the complex dynamics of the intractable conflicts due to their power-oriented logic focusing on the system-level analysis. The evolving constructivist literature could not abundantly engage in CAR field despite it contains useful insights for the conflict analysis. This study assumes that the dynamics of the intractability can be explored by examining the mutual constitution of the material and ideational factors by considering the interplays at the unit-regional, and system levels. In this regard, this study aspires to develop an analytical approach by enhancing the analytical framework of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which enables the integrated use of the realist and constructivist assumptions and the conduct of the analysis at all levels, with the constructivist assumptions and contribute to constructivist research in CAR field. In the light of the case study, this work proposes an analytical framework, which conducts the analysis of the intractability in a nonlinear way

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and rests on the inference that material and ideational factors generate different effects on the protraction at various levels.

Keywords: Intractability, Conflict Dynamics, Conflict Resolution, Karabakh Conflict, Constructivism.

ÖZ

Dağlık Karabağ Çatışması, Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı (AGİT)'nın yıllardır devam eden çabalarına rağmen tarafların anlaşamaması nedeniyle çözümsüz bir çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Çatışma Analizi ve Çözümü (ÇAÇ) alanında yaygın olan gerçekçi yaklaşımlar, "çözümsüzlüğün" nedenlerini güç odaklı mantıkları ve sistem seviyesine odaklanmaları nedeniyle tam olarak açıklayamamaktadırlar. Son yıllarda gittikçe gelişen inşacı teori ise ÇAÇ alanında oldukça önemli öngörüler içermesine rağmen bahse konu alana henüz yeterli seviyede katkı sağlayamamıştır. "Çözümsüzlüğe" yol açan dinamiklerinin; çatışmaların nedeni olan maddesel ve düşünsel etkenlerin birbirlerine olan etkilerinin bütüncül bir yaklaşımla; sistem, bölge ve aktör analiz seviyeleri dikkate alınarak incelenmesi suretiyle belirlenebileceği öngörülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın temel amacı, gerçekçi ve inşacı yaklaşımları birlikte kullanmaya imkân veren Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksleri Teorisinin tüm analiz seviyelerini esas alan analitik çerçevesinin, inşacı öngörüler ile zenginleştirilerek "çözümsüzlüğün" analizinde kullanılabilecek bir analitik yaklaşım geliştirmek ve ÇAÇ alanındaki inşacı araştırmalara katkı sunmaktır. Vaka analizi ışığında, çözümsüzlüğün analizinde doğrusal olmayan bir yöntemi esas alan; maddesel ve düşünsel etkenlerin çözümsüzlüğe farklı seviyelerde farklı tesirler yaptığı tespitlerine dayanan bir analitik yaklaşım sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çözümsüzlük, Çatışma Dinamikleri, Çatışma Çözümleme, Dağlık Karabağ Çatışması, Konstrüktivizm.

INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan and Armenia engaged in a full-fledged war in 1992. After the ceasefire agreement signed in 1994,

parties could not compromise to sign a peace agreement due to the conflicting interests. The risk of a renewed war, which may spill over in the South Caucasus, is still present and could generate significant consequences.

Today, the situation is neither peace nor war. Because neither of the parties is prepared to cede ground to the other, an impasse persists. Therefore, Nagorno-Karabakh is called an archetypal intractable conflict (Crocker, Hampson and Aall 2004; Zartman, 2005). Intractable conflicts are regarded as complicated, involving win-lose issues and not existing "zone of possible agreement." According to Coleman (2000: 429), intractable conflicts are "recalcitrant, intense, deadlocked, and extremely difficult to resolve."

The present conflict literature can be classified under three broad categories: a. rationalist (realist) approaches, b. psychological theories, c. postmodern explanations. Among these, realist approaches dominate the literature and; after the end of the Cold War; other approaches started to develop gradually.[1]

Conflict and war are the central themes in IR and the leading realist perspectives define them as the natural consequences of anarchy and struggle for security and power (Jackson, 2009: 173). Thus, they tend to make power and interest-centric explanations (Wendt, 1999: 93). As Coleman (2006: 542) underlines, the proponents of realism see intractable conflicts "*as 'real conflicts' of interest and power, which exist objectively due to scarcities in the world and are only exacerbated by such psychological phenomenon as fear, mistrust, and misperception.*"

Due to this logic, rationalist and positivist approaches provide limited insights into the conflict analysis and their resolution. Their major weaknesses are regarded as in the followings: a. they ignore the ideational factors influencing material decisions, b. they have narrow scope concerning the causes of the conflicts, c. they provide limited insights into the "genuine conflict resolution or transformation" (Jackson, 2009: 173), d. they fail to examine the agent-structure relationships, e. they either downplay or ignore regional level (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:28).

On the other hand, the evaluation of constructivism in IR offers powerful insights and analytical frameworks for the analysis of the root causes. According to the constructivist perspectives, "*intractable conflicts, then, are less the result of scarce resources, incendiary actions of parties, or struggles for limited positions of power than they are a sense of reality, created and maintained through a long-term process of meaning making through social interaction*" (Coleman, 2006: 545).

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[1] According to Coleman (2006: 542), there are five major paradigms employed in the field: realism, human relations, pathology, postmodernism, and systems. Except for realism, other paradigms focus generally on the cognitive issues.

In this sense, constructivist understanding enables us to study the social context and culture as well as to analyze the identity formation and structure-agent construction. Their study is utmost of importance to recognize underlying factors in the construction of conflict. Because, the investigation of the social and cultural contexts will allow us to identify and understand constitutive effects of cultural products, such as myths, symbols, beliefs and discourses in the construction of agent, interests, and motivations. Furthermore, we can elucidate the decisive role of elites in the manipulation of the ideational factors to mobilize the masses in conflictual processes. [2] Finally, the constructivist account of the identity construction can reveal the role of the particular identities in the formation and sustainment of the conflict. Therefore, the constructivist accounts are promising to "*capture certain features of intractable conflicts in international politics that are less obviously accounted for by other explanations*" (Wendt, 1999: 277).

Developing and employing a constructivist concept can contribute to filling the gap in the literature of Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR). As other scholars also underlined, the review of the existing constructivist studies discloses that they are less concerned with the analysis of the conflicts (Jackson 2009: 177, 182). Therefore, this study aspires to advance the constructivist research by devising a holistic concept that combines material and ideational factors in the analysis to cope with the complexity of the intractable conflicts. Such an attempt might help us to develop an IR-based conflict analysis approach. In this sense, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)[3] fits perfectly and offers the most suitable analytical framework that can be beneficial for the development of such a concept.

There are many other reasons to use RSCT. First, its regional focus offers more insights to identify conflict dynamics that are usually initiated by interactions occurred at the regional level. Second, its interconnection the global level with the unit level provides more analytical power (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:27). Third, its focus on the territoriality of the ideational factors, such as fears and enmity, enables us to better comprehend the construction of the regional security dynamics. Fourth, its "regional clusters" logic serves in capturing the essence of the security dilemma, securitization and balancing behaviors (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:44, 45).

Besides these reasons, RSCT allows us to combine different ontologies and conduct analysis at various levels. Because RSCT uses (neo)realist assumptions to analyze systemic effects on the region and unit while it refers to the constructivist

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[2] "*ethno-nationalist elites reconstructed existing group identities into hostile, dehumanized and threatening oppositions, defining their group's interests in zero-sum ethnic terms.*" (Jackson, 2009: 178).
[3] Regional Security Complex Theory is advanced by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in their 2003 book "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security."

assumptions to explore the particular relationship of amity and enmity as well as the construction of fears within a region. In this context, Buzan and Wæver (2003:51) suggest the following analytical framework to analyze the securitization process and security constellation in a security complex.

   a. Domestically generated vulnerabilities,[4]
   b. State-to-state relations,
   c. The region's interaction with neighboring regions,
   d. The role of global powers in the region.

This analytical framework is suitable for the conflict analysis.[5] Because, it allows us to analyze the domestic, regional and systemic conflict dynamics simultaneously that enables us to better identify the nonlinear effects of material and ideational factors on the intractability. In this regard, RSCT will also be useful to, first, explain the effects of system level interactions on the present stalemate (variable d), second, recognize the impacts of the regional interplays on the protraction (variable b and c), third, analyze the role of the domestic factors (variable a), such as unit-level culture, identity construction, fears, and enmity in the formation of the causes and operation of the conflict drivers.

Moreover, the framework of RSCT also fits the analytical framework of the intractable conflicts suggested by Coleman. He (2006, 534-537) depicts characteristics of the intractable conflicts under the following categories: a. Context (historical dominance and injustice, instability and anarchy), b. Issues (human and social polarities, symbolism and ideology), c. Relations (inescapable, destructive relations, oppositional group identities, internal dynamics), d. Processes (intense emotionality, malignant social processes, pervasiveness, and complexity), and e. Outcomes (protracted trauma, normalization of hostilities). As it will be inferred, Coleman's framework refers to many ideational factors, thus, it needs constructivist perspectives to conduct a detailed analysis under each category.

Contrary to the method used by the most CAR theories, which usually focus on the certain aspects of the problems and conduct analysis at the domestic or system levels, the integration of the levels and factors (material and ideational) will also help us to capture the true dynamics of the intractability.[6] As Jackson underlined (2009: 182), investigation of all elements under the framework of

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[4] "*The specific vulnerability of a state defines the kind of security fears it has and sometimes makes another state or group of states a structural threat even if it or they have no hostile intentions.*" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 51).

[5] RSCT proposes that "*conflict stems from factors indigenous to the region*" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 47).

[6] "*It is thus not enough to look at the distribution of power in order to predict the patterns of conflict…Historical hatreds and friendships, as well as specific issues that trigger conflict or cooperation, take part in the formation of an overall constellation of fears, threats, and friendships that define an RSC.*" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 50).

RSCT will offer "*a comprehensive and richly textured understanding of conflict, which in turn is a necessary initial step in conceptualizing conflict resolution.*" Thus, the application of RSCT to conflict analysis will also contribute to the development of IR-based conflict analysis theory that is not isolated from the societal factors.

Before moving to the next section, we also need to study briefly the fundamental constructivist concepts of identity formation and culture of anarchy. Wendt (1999: 198, 224) defines four kinds of identity to analyze the culture of anarchy: a. corporate, b. type, c. role, and d. collective.[7] When corporate/type identity interacts with another corporate/type identity from a different social context, both identities undertake or attribute different "role identities," such as "friend," "rival," and "enemy." Thus, one should figure out the identity layout in a region to understand the scope, content, and quality of the interplays and the effects identities on the intractability.

Akin to the role of the identity, the type of the existing culture of anarchy is also a determining factor to analyze the security constellations of the actors that determine the cooperation or conflict. Wendt defines three types of the culture of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. They have different logic of cooperation based on the prevailing role identities-enemy, rival, friend (Wendt 1999: 247). The degree and type of internalization of the culture is the key factor of analysis.[8]

Bearing in mind the analytical framework of RSCT and insights of constructivism, in the next section, I will briefly outline the aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (NKC). Then, I will strive to the define the interplays and security constellations of the stakeholders by investigating the domestic setting in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the interests and policies of the regional actors (Turkey, Iran, and Russia) and the intervention of the external powers (the USA and EU) in the second section.

In the third section, I aspire to figure out the underlying dynamics of the protraction arising from the interplays at various levels. In this context, I will study the identity conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the effect of the regional culture and the drivers of the interplays among conflicting parties and other regional actors (Turkey, Iran, and Russia). Thereafter, I will examine the effects of the external penetration on the polarization of the region and side effect on the protraction.

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[7] "*Personal/corporate identity is a site or platform for other identities. Type identity is a social category and corresponds to regime types or forms of state. Role identities are not based on intrinsic properties and as such exist only in relation to others. Collective identity is a distinct combination of role and type identities.*" (cited in Wendt, 1999: 225, 227, 229).

[8] Type of internalization: by coercion or by interest or by belief in legitimacy (Wendt, 1999: 266).

In the fourth section, I will analyze the inferences from the case study with respect to the framework of RSCT to explain the domestic, regional and systemic dynamics protracting the conflict. Finally, I will outline a holistic analytical framework that can help to analyze intractable conflicts and contribute to the constructivist research in CAR field.

1. ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT

A Brief Outline of the present Situation

The area of conflict locates in the South Caucasus and encompasses the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and the western part of Azerbaijan. In the epicenter of conflict stays the small enclave Nagorno Karabakh. Karabakh is a geographic region extending from highlands of the Lesser Caucasus down to the lowlands between the Kura and Aras rivers (Karakoç, 2011:1004). It covers 4.800 km^2 (5.1 % of Azerbaijan's territory) (Figure 1).

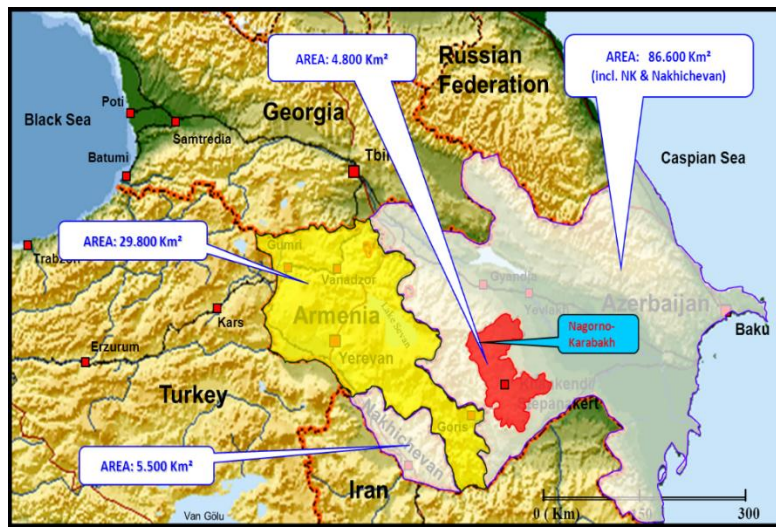**Figure.1: The Area of Conflict and Conflict Parties**

Figure.2: Area of Conflict and Line of Contact

Presently, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians control 92.5 % of the enclave by occupying seven districts entirely (Kelbajar, Lachin, Kubatly, Jebrail, and Zangelan) and two districts partly (Fuzuli and Agdam). The occupied territory outside the former NKAO amounts to 7.409 km^2 (Figure 2) (Doc-2, 2005: 1).

After the cease-fire, a Line of Contact (LoC) was established between parties. Presently, both armies deployed in the fortified defense positions and they skirmish occasionally. There are no peacekeeping forces or observers on the line of contact. The only asset to control cease-fire arrangement is the OSCE's Office in Tbilisi and its periodic monitoring activities on LoC.

Escalation Process Causes and Triggers

The Gorbachev's reform programs called as "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" triggered the separatist movement in the Nagorno-Karabakh and encouraged Karabakh Armenians for the unification with Armenia (Melander, 2001: 58). Their enduring attempt was regarded as the first sign of "separation."

Successive adverse incidents occurred in the end of 1987 and in the beginning of 1988 altered (Melander, 2001: 58) "separation" phase [9] into "divergence" phase.[10] Accordingly, in the end of 1988, the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian Supreme Soviet announced the unification of the Armenian Republic and NKAO (Melander, 2001: 58). Then, the ethnic conflict escalated in a spiral manner. Namely, both sides supplied with large quantities of heavy weaponry fought deadly that led to the "destruction" phase. In January 1992, Armenian forces captured Khojaly and massacred numerous Azeri civilians. This pogrom transformed the inter-ethnic conflict into a full-scale inter-state war (Melander, 2001: 72).

After two years of fierce fighting, Russian Federation brokered a cease-fire agreement that became effective on 12 May 1994. The war caused some 22.000 to 25.000 deaths and more than one million refugees and IDPs in both countries (Balayev, 2013: 13). After the ceasefire, parties could not compromise to sign a peace agreement. Because, while Azerbaijan strives for her territorial integrity and favors a solution with the highest autonomy to Armenians within Azerbaijan, in contrast, Armenia insists on an independent state solution as per the de facto situation.

Contemporary Stage of the Conflict and Peace Efforts of OSCE

Today, it has turned into a frozen conflict. There are four UN resolutions condemning Armenian occupation. However, neither of them was implemented.

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[9] Parties start to focus on differences that lead them to distance from each other.
[10] In this phase, parties take their opposite position.

From 1992 until now, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been striving to settle this conflict, which is in its region. Minsk Group, established as a body of OSCE in Budapest Summit, has managed the negotiation process between the parties. Overall, the past 24 years, the Minsk group has developed and proposed several peace plans for the settlement of the conflict. Parties have rejected the plans each time. The first three plans were; package, step by step, and a common state formation. In 1999, the OSCE initiated a new strategy resting on the face to- face meetings between the presidents of both sides (Başer, 2008: 95).

Since 2006, the mediators conducted the peace process according to the so-called "basic principles" or "Madrid principles." The original document (14 articles) have been updated several times according to the demand of the parties. However, both parties rejected various proposals in the past years. The Russian initiative to host bilateral talks between presidents also did not help to get a breakthrough from the stalemate.

Geopolitics of the Region

The Caucasus locates between Asia and Europa. It was/is the homeland of different civilizations and, thus, had/has a chaotic past. Today, Great Powers show their interest in the region due to its geo-economic importance.

After the discovery of oil in this region, the South Caucasus also became economically important besides its geopolitics. During the Cold War period, this region became "the Flanks" of both Blocks. NATO and Warsaw Pact paid particular attention to this region and deployed massive forces to deter the other side.

After the Cold War, this region maintained its importance for the West and Russia, due to its geopolitical and economic advantages. But, the economic significance of this region transcends over its military value, because this region contains 8.5% of the proven oil reserves and 37.8% of the proven natural gas reserves of the world (Doc-1, 2012).

Today, two opposite axes prevail in the South Caucasus. Russia, Iran, and Armenia constitute the first axis, whereas the USA, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia aligned in the second axis (Cornell, 1999: 5). In the next section, the interplays among these actors will be examined to deduce some insights.

2. INTERPLAYS AND SECURITY CONSTELLATIONS

Considering the analytical framework of the RSCT, we can identify the security constellations of the actors through the analysis of the following factors: the pattern of enmity, regional cooperation, the intervention of the intra-regional

powers, and the penetration of external powers. Accordingly, we can define Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as the inter-regional players, Russian Federation, Turkey, and Iran as the intra-regional players, USA, and EU as the extra-regional players. In the next section, these factors will be studied. Due to the limited space, I will omit Georgia.

Inter-Regional Players "Conflicting Parties"

Armenia's Domestic Settings

Nationalism, a central concept in the understanding of the nineteenth-century Armenian political thought that affected Armenian securitization processes and foreign policy (Libaridian, 2004: 51). Elites and politicians usually manipulate patriotism to oppress the opposition (Libaridian, 2004: 212). They strive to keep alive the bitter memories of the past and use them to mobilize the masses on the ethnic and religious ground. In this respect, they treat Karabakh as a taboo and a tool to regulate domestic politics. In this regard, Karabakh clan (natives of Nagorno-Karabakh) dominates the Armenian domestic and foreign policy by championing the Karabakh conflict and pushing Armenia to the sphere of Russia.[11] Thus, Karabakh constitutes the most significant dynamic of the domestic setting.

The second important dynamic is the Armenian diaspora that traditionally intervenes in domestic politics (Nasibli, 2008: 142). Diaspora pursues the strategy of recognition of "genocide" and relates it to the NK Conflict.

The third dynamic is the pro-Russian forces and Russian economic dominance. The collapse of the Soviet Union generated the sense of vulnerability in Armenia and led to the isolation since she lost the direct connection with Russia (Hovannisian, 1994: 262). The ambivalent western policy created a belief that the West would not guarantee the Armenian sovereignty.[12] Furthermore, due to the regional isolation, economic and military weaknesses, Russia gradually took control of the Armenian energy market and created a high-level dependency on Russia in the economic and security sectors. Thus, Russia secured many leverages to manipulate the internal politics of Armenia.

The fourth dynamic is the corrupt and incoherent state system. The manipulation of elections, endemic corruption, suppression of opposition, and bad

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[11] "*The Karabakh-clan, personified by the elite who have been in power since 1998, including former-President(s) Robert Kocharian and (…) President Serzh Sargsyan, controls the political and economic life in Armenia; privileges close relations to Russia due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and therefore pursue a traditional approach to the maintenance of power.*" (Freire and Simão, 2013: 180).

[12] Suny (2010: 19) explains it as follows: "*Long before the Russo–Georgian War of August 2008, Armenians, perhaps reluctantly, made a pragmatic choice: once straddling West and East became impossible, they sided with the Russians.*"

governance preclude the generation and exercise of a rational foreign policy. The major political actors, the Armenian National Movement (ANM) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), do not agree on the course of the foreign policy. In this regard, ANM maintains to establish constructive relations with Turkey without preconditions, whereas ARF relies on "third force," which is Russia, to protect Armenia against the Turkic threat. In recent years, revisionist thinking became a central aspect of the Armenian foreign policy (Hunter, 2000: 30).

Armenian Apostolic Church is another significant actor in the definition and exercise of domestic and foreign policies. The church advocates for the recognition of "genocide" and supports revisionist policies. Armenian politicians prefer to establish close relations with the church that reinforces their legitimacy.

This brief review demonstrates that memories of the past, Karabakh Conflict, elites' manipulations, and pro-Russian forces shape the foreign and security policies of Armenia as well as her corporate and type identities. The existence and operation of these identities need a durable Turkish threat. In this regard, Armenian elites strive to revitalize the Turkish threat that serves in the cohesion of the Armenian society. Therefore, based on their self-esteem needs, protraction of the NK Conflict serves in the solidarity of the nation.

Azerbaijan's Domestic Settings

Contrary to Armenia, the Azeri nationalism is still in progress since the early 1900s. According to Suny (2000: 160), Azeri nationalism is "*an articulate nationalism*" which is not deeply internalized by all facets of the society. Akin to Armenia, elites manipulate the myth-symbol-complexes to secure the stability of the regime and increase social cohesion. Azerbaijanian elites also exploit the Karabakh Conflict to suppress oppositions and justify their internal and external policies (Chen, 1999: 30). In this regard, Karabakh, as it is the case in Armenia, functions as a political symbol. Therefore, the Karabakh Conflict is the most decisive domestic dynamic affecting both foreign and security policies.

The second chief dynamic is the leader-centric administration. [13] As experienced in other authoritarian regimes, specific interest groups and power centers clustered around Aliyev that hinders the development of more plausible domestic and foreign policies.

The weak national coherence is the third dynamic that creates susceptibility in the exercise of robust foreign policy. Azerbaijan consists of some diverse ethnics and various religious sects. Such a composition of the society impedes the

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[13] "*Azerbaijan the upper echelons are reputedly dominated by members of the Aliyev family.*" (Herzig, 2000: 21).

establishment of a coherent corporate identity. Accordingly, it creates sensitive conditions for external manipulation.[14]

Geo-economic and geo-cultural profiles of Azerbaijan constitute the fourth dynamic that also affects the current securitization process. These profiles delineate the high-level interests of external actors; thus, this situation resents Russia and Iran and compels Azerbaijan to seek a delicate balance among relevant actors (Hunter, 2000: 28).

This brief analysis of the domestic dynamics demonstrated that Azerbaijan corporate identity is still re-defining after the demise of the Soviets. The past constituted the basis of the new definition (Tokluoglu, 2012: 337) and Karabakh symbolizes the bitter experience of the past and the unity of the nation. The primordial corporate identity affected the formation of the present type of identity. Accordingly, both identities vigorously set up the current Azeri perception of the world and affected the exercise of the foreign policy.

Intra-regional Players

Turkey

The strong historical and ethnic ties with the nations in the South Caucasus led Turkey to put particular emphasis on this region. After the dissolution of Soviets, Turkey aligned itself with Azerbaijan and exercised an isolation policy against Armenia. The Turkish assistance to Azerbaijan limited to the moral and political support since the diplomatic, military and economic scopes of the conflict outreached Turkey's material capacity.

The South Caucasus is geopolitically vital for Turkey, which provides strategic deep against the traditional Russian threat. Thus, Turkey tends to exercise the policy that can weaken the Russian domination in the region by cooperating with the USA and EU. Furthermore, Turkey sought to limit Iranian political and cultural influence in the region, particularly on Azerbaijan with which she has cultural similarities.

One of the essential pillars of this policy is to minimize the dependency of the regional states on Russia. The construction of the ambitious pipeline projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) and the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) aims to achieve this goal by creating mutual economic benefits.

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[14] "*Russia and Iran succeeded in using the country's heterogeneity and fragile national identity to their own advantage.*" (Mehdiyeva, 2003:275).

The second pillar of this policy is to foster regional cooperation. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the enlargement of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) are the concrete outcomes of this policy. [15]

As a third pillar, Turkey endeavors to settle the regional conflicts which harm regional cooperation and encourage the Russian intervention in the region. As part of the same policy, Turkey showed her eagerness to involve in the mediation process of the regional conflicts. In this context, Turkey became a member of the Minsk Group. However, due to the OSCE's conflict resolution format, this membership didn't help Turkey to be effective in the process.

The analysis discloses Turkey's identity-oriented approach to the region also seeks material gains. Based on her policy towards the region, Turkey favors for the resolution of the conflict and, as a member of the western camp, facilitated the penetration of the west into the region to balance Russia. However, she realized soon the inconsistency of the western thrust and sought to exercise cooperative policies with the Russia and Iran.

Iran

Iran has historical and cultural ties with the region which also plays a geopolitical role for Iran. The dissolution of the Soviet Union created a buffer zone against her traditional enemy Russia; therefore, Iran always supported the new geopolitical setting. However, the existence of Turkic ethnic minorities in the country constitutes a significant concern for Iran that drives her to cooperate with Russia and Armenia. Iran's primary policy is to limit the Turkish influence, which conflicts the Iranian identity and facilitates western penetration. Thus, Iran regards this situation as detrimental to her regime (type identity) and national integrity.

In this regard, the use of the "Southern Azerbaijan" card by some Azerbaijanian politicians against Iran caused great concern in Iran. In return, Iran sought to destabilize Azerbaijan by manipulating her weak national coherence.

Furthermore, she supported Armenia in NK Conflict covertly and sought to strengthen her relationship with Armenia that provides mutual benefits. Having been isolated from east and west, good neighborhood with Iran brings Armenia also to have a windpipe in the south. Similarly, Iran enjoys having a balancing option against Turkey and Azerbaijan.

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[15] Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. In 1992, the Organization was expanded to include seven new members, namely: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan (see http://www.ecosecretariat.org/).

Iran's present policy rests on the fear of Azeri irredentism rather than on the material gains. Consequently, Iran benefits from the prolonging of the NK Conflict since it distracts Azerbaijanian attention from the "Southern Azerbaijan" and serves in gaining Russian and Armenian support against the western sanctions.

Russia

Russia became a major player in the region at the beginning of the 18th century by widening her influence gradually and pushing other actors such as the Ottoman Empire and Iran out of the region. Soviet Russia also continued to dominate the region by using various tools such as "divide and rule," "promoting abhorrence among nations," and "supporting the insurgency."

The collapse of the Soviet Union weakened Russia's dominating position due to the political and economic turmoil in the country. However, she always sought to regain her supremacy. In this regard, Russia's foreign policy towards the region can be studied in three phases:

The first one (1989-1993) is the phase of withdrawal. After the failed August 1991 putsch in Moscow, Yeltsin administration exercised a pro-western foreign policy. Russia neglected the heritage of the Soviet Empire and ignored the developments in the region.

The second one (1993-2008) is the phase of stabilization. Russian elites sought to return imperial policies. In this phase, Russia adopted "near abroad policy" and identified the South Caucasus as an area in which her national interests were at risk. Based on this policy, she defined the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a "national security zone" and declared the right of intervention in any case that poses a threat to her national interest. In this period, the western sponsored colored revolutions (2003-2005), compelled Russia to establish new reintegration projects besides CIS. In this context, three new institutions were founded in the post-Soviet space. Each of them constitutes one pillar of Russian hegemonic strategy: Security, economy, and policy. These are the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC, now it became the Eurasian Economic Union-EEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) respectively.

The third one (2008-present) is the phase of strategic reengagement. This phase is characterized by the invasion of Georgia and the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This phase represents the departure from her defensive position to take an active engagement posture against the western penetration in the South Caucasus. In this sense, the invasion of Georgia

revitalized the Russian self-image as a Great Power (Abushov, 2009: 205) and led small states to readjust their foreign policies confronting the Russian interests and relying on the West (Cohen, 2013: 65).

This brief analysis indicates that the South Caucasus policy of Russia rests on three pillars: political, economic, and security. Considering the political component, Russia strives to maintain her dominant position in the region by intervening in the domestic policies of the small states with employing various leverages, such as imposing an arms embargo, increasing energy prices, and manipulating minorities.[16] Such policies reinforce existing hatred and mistrust that diminish the prospect for the regional cooperation, particularly, among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey (Minassian, 2008: 17).

Based on her political interests, Russia actively involved in the peace process of the NK Conflict. She gained a permanent position as Co-chairman of the Minsk Group in December 1994. Her mediator role made both parties politically more dependent on Russia. Furthermore, in line with the political conditions, Russia supplies both conflicting parties with high-tech weapon systems to prevent them from exercising an independent foreign policy.

In term of economic interests, Russia aims to control the transportation, distribution, and marketing of oil and natural gas extracted or passed through the region. Her dominance brings Russia economic gain and leverage over the policies of the dependent states. By reducing or increasing the supply prices, Russia practices a stick-and-carrot approach to keep "insurgent states" under her sphere of influence and promotes the development of Russian-led organizations.

Russia reasserts her resolution to stop the NATO enlargement and limit the operation of the western energy companies (German, 2012: 1652). Russia depicts the western efforts as a *"violation of equal security."* in the Foreign Policy Concept issued in2008. In this sense, Russia considers Turkey, which has ethnic affiliations with Azerbaijan and Central Asian republics, as the spearhead of the western penetration and her initiatives in the region as dubious and perilous for her security. Consequently, she deployed troops at the Turkish-Armenian border (Abushov, 2009: 202) and maintained close cooperation with Iran.

The protraction of the conflict serves in the political, economic, and security interests of Russia that enable her to manipulate conflicting parties and establish a regional balance against the external powers.

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[16] "*Russia has also aggressively pursued blocking potential natural gas export competitors from entering the European market, such as Iran, Azerbaijan and producers in Central Asia, and works assertively to retain control over Central Asian export.*" (Kakachia, 2011: 18).

Extra-Regional Players

The USA

In the mid-1990s, American geopolitician Zbigniew Brzezinski (1998) recommended that the United States, as a hegemonic power, shall improve her relations with the regional countries. However, the USA hesitated to intervene in the region since she considered it as the "backyard of the Russia" (Cornell, 1999:10; Libaridian, 2004: 246). Nevertheless, the USA preferred to penetrate the region by implementing the following mechanisms provisioned by the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999:[17] a. military training programs, b. partnerships formations under the umbrella of NATO, c. offering financial and diplomatic aides, d. conducting support programs.

Cohen (2013: 53) classifies U.S. interests into three broad categories: security, energy, and democracy. In this regard, the South Caucasus does not have a primary position in the USA's global security conception. Hence, the USA involves in the region only to support friendly states, contain Iran (Cohen, 2013: 52), and conduct her operations in Afghanistan.

Akin to Russia, the USA also desire to control the flow of the regional energy resources. Accordingly, she backed the Caspian oil extraction and its transportation through pipelines projects to alleviate European energy dependency on Russia and diversify energy supply bypassing the Persian Gulf (Cornell, 2001: 374; Rasizade, 2003: 361).

The promotion of the immature democracies in the region is also another central interest. The interconnection of these states to the outside world would bring many benefits to the West such as the containment of Russia and Iran. It may also constitute the basis for spreading out the western ideals in the region even into Central Asia (Cornell, 2001: 384; Croissant, 1997: 355).

Considering these interests, the USA cooperated with EU and Turkey. She encouraged Turkey as a role model to the regional countries for the market economy and democracy (Fotiou, 2009: 19; Kakachia, 2011:19).

However, the USA's policy towards the region was inconsistent and incoherent. The selective and biased policies led to many disappointments in the region, particularly, in Azerbaijan and Georgia.[18] Although the USA has a permanent seat in Co-Chairmanship of Minsk Group, she behaved reluctantly and exercised controversial policies against Azerbaijan by not supporting UN

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[17] http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/hr1152
[18] Banning the weapon sales to Azerbaijan and turning blind eye to the Russian invasion of Georgia.

resolutions about the Armenian invasion of Azerbaijanian territories, imposing weapon sales sanctions and harshly criticizing her domestic policies. On the contrary, due to the domestic political pressure exercised by the powerful Armenian diaspora, the USA allocated more funds to Armenia (the second largest US aid receiving nation in the world) and tolerated her domestic political abuses.

In sum, the USA exercised cooperation and containment strategies to realize her regional interests. She sought to cooperate with Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, whereas she attempted to contain Russia and Iran (Tsantoulis, 2009: 250). These strategies evoked a counter-formation made up of Russia, Iran, and Armenia (Markedonov, 2013: 37). However, the USA maintains to exercise her indifferent policy towards the region, accordingly, she does not firmly support the conflict resolution process.

EU

South Caucasus is a significant region for EU due to its economic value. Thus, EU established intense cooperation with the regional states in the following fields: energy, security, and promotion of the democracy.

The EU is dependent on the energy supplied by Russia. In this regard, the South Caucasus and Hazar region with its abundant energy resources offer an alternative energy outlet for Europa. Moreover, the EU needs also to develop alternative transit routes to the emerging markets of the Central and Eastern Asia.[19] Thus, the region plays a significant strategic role for EU.

The EU considers unresolved conflicts as a risk for her regional interests. Thus, EU encourages the intra and inter-regional cooperation that might contribute to the reconciliation of conflicts and the stability of the region (Fotiou, 2009: 16). In this regard, EU actively takes the initiative in the conflict resolution process. As a sign of this policy, EU assigned a special representative to the region in 2003, implemented various policies and programs such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and invited Azerbaijan and Armenia to participate in the Eastern Partnership in 2008.

In line with her economic and security interests, EU seeks to promote new democracies in the "Near Abroad" of Russia. Georgia's peaceful "Rose Revolution" encouraged EU to support Armenia and Azerbaijan in improving their democracies (Moga, 2012:386).

EU exercises soft power to penetrate the region. However, EU's internal political inconsistency restricted the effective exercise of the soft power and

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[19] TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to EU).

impeded her penetration into the region. EU's political failures harmed its credibility and made its mechanisms less effective and attractive. Moreover, due to the special social context of the region, which attaches great importance to hard power, regional states perceive EU as a weak partner concerning regional security matters. Consequently, this lack also hampered the implementation of EU's strategies to bind the regional countries economically and politically that might serve in the resolution of the conflict.[20]

3. UNDERLYING DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT ARISING FROM THE INTERPLAYS AT VARIOUS LEVELS

Inter-Conflicting Parties

The root causes of the current antagonism rest on the Armenian and Turkish identity conflict. In this respect, both nations have conflicting corporate identities since they consist of many contradicting elements such as religion, disputed territories, and bitter memories. Accordingly, both corporate identities produced some self-esteem interests against each other. Therefore, both identities magnified the past mutual atrocities and attributed to each other the "rival" or "enemy" role identities, which prevent the formation of a collective identity. The lack of collective identity precludes cooperation and compromise; thus, it protracts conflict. The domestic dynamics, explained in the preceding section, also continuously bolster the existing identity conflict and leave less space for reconciliation.

The present cultures of both societies are prone to reinforce the existing enmity pattern by revitalizing old memories. This type of culture empowers nationalist elites and they use this advantage to mobilize the masses. In return, these elites strive to maintain this cultural peculiarity and prevent any domestic attempt aspiring its transformation. Elites are advertising the transformation efforts of the current identities as a threat to the national solidarity and use symbol-myth-complexes to avert such efforts. Consequently, such social contexts also affect the regional culture by fostering mistrust, generating enemy role identities, triggering security dilemmas and weakening cooperation.

Under such domestic conditions, elites and masses tend to securitize symbolic issues and they behave less rationally. Thus, we can conclude that ill setting of the domestic policy plays a primary role in the protracting of the conflict.

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[20] For example; Armenia abruptly decided to join the Russia-led Customs Union in 2013, while was also negotiating with the EU on the trade agreement (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements-DCFTA) under the Eastern Partnership Program.

Intra-Regional Actors

The domestic setting and its representation through foreign policies determine the regional culture of anarchy. The regional culture usually induces problematic type identities and conflicting role identities that affect the scope and effectiveness of regional relations. Therefore, as Libaridian (2004: 286) asserts, actors tend to cooperate with the states, which have identical identities.

Occasionally, the weak internalized Lockean culture of anarchy reverses to Hobbesian culture and its self-help security logic also negatively affects the regional cooperation.[21] They comply with the rules and norms of the Lockean culture selectively or by force. Thus, the present interplays are short termed, and interest oriented. Such a logic lead states to balance each other rather than to cooperate. A brief examination of the identity layout discloses the extent and quality of the present interplays. In this regard;

Azerbaijan and Turkey have identical corporate identities. The strong ethnic ties and components of type identities (secular and western orientated) transcended over the sectarian differences that could undermine the close cooperation. Both actors attribute "friend" role identity to each other, thus they formed a strong collective identity that facilitated intense cooperation.

Azerbaijan also shares some common elements (religion and same sect) of co-operating identity with Iran; however, the ethnic differences and type identity conflict (secular vs religious) hindered the formation of a collective identity and restricted the area of interplay.

The tragic incidents occurred in 1915 deeply affected Armenian's identity formation and its construction. As a result of the incompatible corporate identities, she took a defensive position against Turkey. Similarly, Turkey also formed an assertive corporate identity that facilitated the implementation of the isolation policy against Armenia, since her occupation of Karabakh is regarded by Turkey as an attack on the Turkish and Azeri collective identity.

Armenia and Russia have similar corporate and type identities. They have a common religion, similar culture, ancient friendship, and governance traditions, as well as an immature democracy. Accordingly, they developed a similar belief system and interests regarding the Turkish identity. Furthermore, the "victimization" sense of the Armenian corporate identity ushered the protection of a similar corporate identity, which is Russian identity. Consequently, they

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[21] Hobbesian culture promotes the formation of enmity through facilitating the emergence of "the domestic interest groups," "in-group solidarity," "discourse of danger," and "in-group bias," which provide "a cognitive resource" for enmity (Wendt, 1999: 275, 276).

attributed to each other the "friend" role identity that facilitated the formation of a strong collective identity.

Although Armenia and Iran do not share similar elements in their corporate identities, common animosity towards Turks and the fear of the Turkish domination of the region affected their corporate identity formation. Moreover, the collective past under the same empire created cultural intimacy between two societies. Their type identities also have some common elements such as weak democratic culture and autocratic decision makers. In sum, these similarities led both sides to consider each other as "friend" and facilitate the establishment of a collective identity. Therefore, Iran indirectly supports Christian Armenia in the NK Conflict and conducts intensive economic relations with her even though she champions the Islamic values.

The corporate identities of Russia and Turkey inherit conflicting elements. Both nations consider themselves as the defender of their civilization.[22] As a result, they constructed contradicting interests and fought with each other to realize them throughout history. Even today, Russia considers the ethnic and linguistic ties of Turkey with the Turkic states in the region and Central Asia as an existential threat (due to the risk of disintegration), whereas Turkey assesses Russia's patronage of the Armenian claims and her support to the separatist and terrorist fractions in Turkey as a threat to her existence.[23] Accordingly, both states antagonized each other, regarded themselves as "enemy" or "rival" and remained in the opposite camps. Thus, Russia and Turkey cannot form collective identity and are expected to establish only tactical relations as long as they share similar material interests as it was seen in the periods of 1921-1939 and experienced currently against the US' assertiveness in the Middle East.

Despite they share some common elements (i.e. religion and a shared past) in their corporate identity, Turkey and Iran are archrivals because of the conflicting interests emanating from the sectarian differences. Before the entry of Russia in the region, Iran and Turkey were the rivals competing for the control of the region, such a long rivalry developed narratives full of stereotypes. After the Islamic Revolution, Turkey's secular and Iran's Islamist type identities became another source of conflict between the two states. All these differences led Turkey and Iran to form an only weak and temporary collective identity that prevented genuine cooperation.

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[22] The Turkish corporate identity uses the master narrative that "*Turks are the defender and spearhead of Islam,*" while the maxim of "*the last bastion and spearhead of Orthodox Christianity, and Moscow as a Third Rome*" reflects the mindset of the Russian corporate identity (cited in Abushov, 2009: 190).
[23] "*The Russian and Armenian alliance was based as much on religious affinity as on long-range political calculations regarding the restoration of Armenia in some form, at the expense of Turkey.*" (Swietochowski, 1995: 37, 38).

The fear of Pan-Turkism and western penetration forced Iran and Russia to improve and strengthen their relations. Both states consider their Turkic minorities as a potential threat for their unity. They believe that any manipulation of these minorities might trigger the disintegration process. Therefore, the common sense of threat imposes both states to collaborate. Moreover, the type identities of both states resemble each other, since they have autocratic regimes. Accordingly, Russia and Iran regard each other as "tactical friend" that enables the formation of a temporary collective identity.

When considering the dynamics of the current interplays, we can conclude that the ideational factors transcend over material factors. Therefore, the actors' positions in the NK Conflict reflects simply the existing identity links among actors. In this context, the lack of collective identities operates as the significant factor foiling the cooperation in the region besides the lack of economic and political capacity (Libaridian, 2004; Henze, 2000; Hunter, 2006). The study also demonstrates that the existing economic and politic cooperation remains mainly limited to the interplay within the emerging two axes.[24] In the light of this explanation, we can consider the lack of regional cooperation based on ideational differences as the second significant factor impeding reconciliation.

Extra-Regional Interplays

Nuriyev (2000, 141) regards the present competition of the Great Powers in the region as similar to the "Great Game" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played by Russia, Britain, and Germany (Rondeli, 2000: 51). In this context, the political, economic, and military penetration of the West induced the traditional security dynamic of the Russian corporate identity inflicted by the fear of "encirclement" (De Haas, 2009: 4).[25]

The western involvement in the region has three dimensions: sovereignty and security; energy and trade; democracy and good governance. These dimensions are the reproduction of western corporate and type identities. In this regard, the West strives to form similar type identities (sovereign and democratic states) in the region that can facilitate its penetration by employing various means, such as development aids, trade facilitation, construction of pipelines, and investments. However, western selectiveness (i.e. unmatched responses to the Crimea Crisis and the NK Conflict), ineffectiveness in the conflict resolution process, and failure in offering security guaranties undermined its credibility.

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[24] Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey established a successful example of the regional cooperation in the construction of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway (German, 2008: 68).

[25] Russia was very upset with the so-called "*colored revolutions*" *(Serbia, 2000; Georgia, 2003; Ukraine, 2004; and Kyrgyzstan, 2005)*, which reinforced the Russian fear of encirclement (Suny, 2010: 13).

Consequently, Armenia entered the Eurasian Economic Union, while Azerbaijan reassessed her pro-western orientation

When considered the regional culture of anarchy, the western engagement in the Caucasus triggers a security dilemma on the Russian side based on the fear of change of the geostrategic balance in the region (Abushov, 2009: 201; Nation, 2007: 30). Thus, Russia tends immediately to securitize any activity, which is perceived as revisionist and backed by the West. Since Russia did not yet fully internalize the norm of sovereignty, she usually reacts by employing hard power to materialize her interests as seen in the invasion of Georgia and Crimea. Against this tendency of Russia, the West, however, lacks a unified strategy and firm commitments to alleviate the security concerns of the regional states. Under these circumstances, the conflicting parties Armenia and Azerbaijan behave cautiously in developing their relations with the West.

In sum, the western penetration and containment efforts trigger the Russian security dilemma and initiate a securitization process that negatively affects the resolution of the conflict.

4. ANALYSIS "THE IMPACTS OF THE COMPETITION ON THE NK CONFLICT"

The NK Conflict can be best defined as a clash of national interests like self-determination [26] and territorial integrity. [27] For the Azeris, the separatist movements of Armenians are a security problem that threatens the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. In contrast, for the Armenians, it is a fight for independence and survival of the national identity.

Today, most of the states prioritized the norm of the territorial integrity over the norm of self-determination. However, even though western states continuously back this norm, the implementation of this norm depends on the support of the Superpowers and Great Powers or consensus among them as experienced in the cases, such as Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and Yugoslavia's attack to Croatia and Bosnia in the years1992-95. In these cases, the international community and the USA strongly supported the territorial integrity norm. On the other hand, in the case of Kosovo in 1999, the USA and other

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[26] Zacher (2001: 229) explains the weakening of this norm as follows: "*While self-determination for ethnic groups is at times viewed sympathetically by liberals, it is "trumped" by their recognition that the logical outcome of allowing self-determination for every national group would be continual warfare.*"

[27] The progress of this norm can be classified in three stages: a. emergence (after the end of World War I and the provision of the League Covenant-Article 10), b. the acceptance (the adoption of Article 2(4)-UN Charter in 1945), c. internalization (the 1975 CSCE's Helsinki Final Act). Consideration of the territorial revisionism as the source of the world wars, the risk of the use of nuclear weapons, and the economic interdependence served in the internalization of this norm (Zacher, 2001: 227, 234).

European Powers supported the norm of self-determination. Therefore, the interests of the of the Superpowers and Great Powers are the key factors in the implementation of these norms. This fact implies that we cannot consider the clash of these two norms, namely the interests of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as the major factor prolonging the conflict.

Presently, the negotiation is carried out by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs countries, USA, Russian Federation and France, under the auspices of OSCE. This setting also represents the system-level poles and their aspiration to supervise the peace process. Thus, OSCE's involvement represents symbolic meaning that also suffers lack of leverages and organizational constraints. In recent years, Russia hosted the tripartite meeting among Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. Russia's active engagement can be regarded as a manifestation of her "near-abroad policy" aiming to ensure the full control of the process and restrict the area of movement of other actors. However, the western parties strive to maintain their positions by insisting on conducting the mediation process under the auspices of OSCE. These tactics of the West and Russia indicate the system-level competition for the region.

This study reveals that we must analyze the protracting dynamics of this conflict at various levels. As Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) indicates, I will conduct system level analysis with help of the neorealist perspectives, while I refer to the constructivist insights for comprehending the regional and domestic conflict dynamics, where ideational factors come to the foreground.

The examination of the interests of the USA, EU, and Russia implies that the primary cause of the protraction of the NKC rests on the system competition for the region and its natural resources. Neorealists define the interplay in the international system by employing materialistic logic. Thus, they describe the international system as "anarchic" and "self-help" world, in which states are competing with others for power-maximization because power is the best means for survival. According to them, the security dilemma, in which states regard other's aggregation of security capacity as a threat to their security, arises due to the null-sum relationship in the international system. Therefore, actors seek to balance the strongest actor in the system.[28] For the neorealists, "the Balance of Power" logic that rests on the distribution of material power among states in the international system is essential for the sustainment of the security at the system level. The exercise of that logic leads to the formation of various power polarity ranging from unipolarity to multipolarity depending on the material capacity at the hand of the Great Powers. Naturally, Super/Great Powers dominate and

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[28] Waltz (1979: 127) claims that "*if secondary states are free to choose they flock to the weaker side for it is the stronger side that threatens them.*"

shape the system level interplays because these states command the significant military and economic resources that are not possessed by other states in the system (Waltz, 1979). In this regard, the small states will exercise various cooperation strategies with Super/Great Powers, such as balancing, bandwagoning, chain-ganging, hedging, buck-passing, and tethering to realize their interests in a conflict with a small state. The present foreign policies of Armenia and Azerbaijan fits this neorealist proposition and they aspire to take an advantageous position in the conflict with the support of the Super/Great Powers.

The neorealist approaches, however, fail to explain the dynamics of the cooperation and conflict at the regional level. Nevertheless, Buzan and Wæver (2003: 52) suggest a regional approach to security that provides more insights to analyze the complexity of the problem. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003: 47), regions are not only made up of material factors but also of "*the fears and aspirations of the units.*" Therefore, RSCT, besides system level, also focuses on the regional and domestic levels and regards amity and enmity "*as essentially independent variables*" in its analytical framework.

In this sense, the Nagorno-Karabakh is located within the post-Soviet RSC, and it is the smaller Caucasus subcomplex. [29] Considering RSCT's analytical framework, the analysis of the following factors may yield fruitful insights concerning the protraction of the NK Conflict:

- Domestic settings,

- Enmity patterns,

- The ambitions of the intra-regional actors (Russia, Iran, Turkey),

- The western penetration.

Therefore, a regional approach to the conflict should consider the two conflicting parties Armenia and Azerbaijan and Great Powers Russia USA and EU as well as regional powers Turkey and Iran. However, due to the scope of this study, I will exclude EU, out of the analysis.

At the unit level, the following four key components characterized the conflict dimension: domestic settings, formed identities, enmity patterns, and ambitions of the actors. The analysis of these components requires a constructivist logic. According to RSCT, the contemporary relationships among the states are a result of their past interactions. Thus, the outbreak of conflict is not a result of

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[29] The post-Soviet RSC is made up of Russia and four subcomplexes: the western group of states (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova), the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). For most of the states in the post-Soviet RSC, security concerns relate primarily to other states in the subcomplex plus Russia ((Buzan and Wæver 2003: 55).

system-level interplays; instead, it is a result of ethnic contention over territory, conflicting corporate identity formation, and persisting enmity. Therefore, the present domestic setting (cultural products, security discourses, and elites' mobilization), identity conflict and enmity patterns between two parties prevent the establishment of genuine and lasting cooperation.

Buzan and Wæver (2003: 47) contend that each RSC has its "*pattern of rivalry, balance-of power, and alliance patterns among the main powers."* Thus, one should seek the triggers of the security dilemma and dynamics of the securitization within the region. In this sense, a less internalized Lockean culture of anarchy, which sometimes reverses to the Hobbesian culture, prevails in the region. Depending on the internalization degree of the culture, different security logics emerge and govern formed bilateral relations. In the S. Caucasus, "enemy" and "rival" role identities dominate the regional interplays that preclude cooperation. Consequently, the identity conflict among Turkey, Iran, and Russia as well as their material interests make the situation more complicated and allow less room for compromise.[30] These flaws in inter and intra-regional relations keep the conflict dynamics alive that promotes the protraction of the conflict. Also, the magnitude of the existing material links shall be explored by investigating economic relationships (trade, energy, investments, etc.) to understand the quality and content of the cooperation.

Buzan and Wæver (2003: 59) differ Great power RSCs from ordinary RSCs due to their system-level impact on balancing and subset position affecting the global polarity. Therefore, the South Caucasus, as a sub-region of Russia's RSC, is expected to play a significant role in the power game between two opponents. In this regard, the global power balance struggle drives the USA and Russia to limit opponent's control capacity over the resources. Thus, the competition between them is a significant factor that affects the outcome of the conflict. In this regard, Russia's fragile Great Power status forces Russia to bring the region under her firm control. Russia strives to regulate the flow of fossil energy resources, curb Turkish influence and stop the western penetration in order to secure her dominance. Russia knows that any failure might lead to degrading her Great Power status. On the other hand, the USA does not ignore the region due to its fossil resources but prefer to maintain a low posture because of her intense involvement in the other strategic regions. Even though we observe a low-level tension and competition between two powers, the settlement of the conflict depends on their compromise. However, Russia's regional and global interests seem to be more decisive since she dominates the South Caucasus, which is a part of post-Soviet RSC.

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[30] "*Since, the Karabakh issue is tied up with geopolitical games of big regional and extra-regional power, the issue has encountered with more complexity.*" (Valigholizadeh, Zakie and Barany, 2013: 205).

RSCT suggests that the regional combatants can request intervention from the Great Powers (Buzan and Waever 2003: 46). In this context, Armenia tries to maintain the status quo while Azerbaijan attempt to revise the current state. However, their material capacities fail to achieve their goals, and they need external support from the great and regional powers. Consequently, Armenia aligns with Russia and Iran, while Azerbaijan orients towards the West and Turkey. Armenia's bandwagoning with Russia aims to secure her existence and deter Azerbaijan from capturing Nagorno-Karabakh.[31] Azerbaijan seeks to balance Russia in a sensible way due to the fears emanating from the bitter past memories. Consequently, Armenia voluntarily offered to be the fore-post of Russia in the South Caucasus, and Azerbaijan played "oil card" aiming to interrelate western powers to conflict. Their present strategies facilitate the external penetration and link the regional conflict dimension to the system level dynamics. In this context, the NK Conflict turned into a proxy struggle between the global and regional powers and it reflects obviously the system-level polarization.

Because of the inherent Great Power logic, both Great Powers also sought to cooperate with the client of her opponent. The USA provided development assistance to Armenia, but Armenia behaved sensibly in developing her relations with the USA not to confront with Russia. On the other hand, Russia sold high-tech military hardware to Azerbaijan to keep her in the sphere of influence and weaken her western orientation.[32] By doing so, Russia seeks to maintain the delicate military balance between two enemies and manipulate their foreign policies.

Linking regional conflict dimension to the system level dynamics helped both USA and Russia to materialize some of their interests in the South Caucasus after the mid of the 1990s. But Russia and the USA are not willing to allocate additional resources to solve the conflict in favor of one party. Because the existence of the conflict does not pose any immediate threat to their vital interests, instead it continues to serve to strengthen their foothold in the region. In this regard, Russia obtained military bases in Armenia and started to control the energy market of Armenia. Similarly, the USA supported the construction of BTC pipeline, her oil companies engaged in Azerbaijanian oil and gas sectors, as well as she cooperated with Azerbaijan in her "War on Terror" campaign conducted against Taliban.

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[31] According to Schroeder (1994: 430), states seek to ally with the strongest power for the sake of protection at the expense of their independence.
[32] Under the military-technical cooperation, Russia delivered military hardware worth more than $4 billion (Nichol, 2013: 11).

The present deadlock guarantees the dependency of Armenia on Russia and inclination of Azerbaijan to both poles and it also facilitates the further penetration of the USA into South Caucasus, exploitation of the Caspian resources and getting Azerbaijan's support against Taliban and Iran. In this regard, considering the present unipolar moment[33] (the USA) at the system-level and Russia's unipolarity at the regional level (in post-Soviet RSC), we can argue that their competition at the regional level became balanced through the prevalence of two opposite axes (Russia-Iran-Armenia vs. USA-Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia). This balanced state implies that the deadlock will continue. However, according to the insights of the RSCT, Russia is the only power, which can pressure the conflicting parties into peace processes (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 47). The present state does not hurt Russia's vital interests. But, any US penetration to the Middle East (i.e. an attack on Iran) may drive Russia to force conflict parties to compromise for the sake of the regional stability as she did during the Soviet era.

5. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the dynamics of the NK Conflict at multi-levels thanks to the analytical framework of the RSCT. This enabled us to focus both on ideational and material factors that yielded more insights to comprehend the underlying factors that protract the conflict. We can conclude the followings for the NK Conflict: first, memories, past lessons, and cultural products led to the formation of the contradicting corporate identities and generated an ill-designed domestic setting that continuously reinforces the enmity patterns at the unit level. Second, the incompatible corporate and type identities fomented not only "rival" or "enemy" role identities that foiled the formation of the collective identities but also drove to the establishment of the balancing dyads at the regional level. Third, the existing domestic setting, regional culture of anarchy, and balancing dyads facilitated the external penetration of the Great Powers into the region that ties the conflict to the system level.

Based on the analysis of the NK Conflict, this study implies some points concerning a. the essence of intractability, b. analysis of the stakeholders' interests reinforcing intractability, and c. conduct of its resolution process. These points are elaborated below:

For the first point, the complexity of the intractable conflict rests on the multi-causality and nonlinear effects of the relevant factors. The interplay of ideational and material factors at various levels (unit-regional-system) generates numerous dynamics of the intractability. Therefore, one shall examine the

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[33] Buzan and Wæver (2003: 30-39) defines present powers as "superpowers," "great powers," and "regional powers." According to them, we experience "a moment of unipolarity" formulated as follows: 1 Superpower (USA)+ 4 Great Powers (EU, Japan, China, and Russia).

following factors to identify these dynamics: a. the formative moments, b. domestic setting (elites, interests centers, state apparatus, ethnic coherence, the origin of nationalism, public discourses, political orientation), c. type of prevailing cultures of anarchy and cultural products (myth-symbols-complexes, beliefs, attitudes, values, discursive issues, fears, simmering hatred etc.) as well as the degree of internalization at unit-regional-system levels, d. the constructed identities (corporate, type, role identities), their components and the existing identity layout (the strength and type of identity links among stakeholders), e. the strength of the operating material links among stakeholders. These factors might constitute the basis of an analytical framework to capture the essence of intractability. However, further research is needed to explore other factors of analysis.

For the second point, the analysis of the effects of the ideational and material factors in the formation and protraction of conflict indicates that the ideational factors play the primary role at the unit level, while the ideational and material factors are significant at the regional level. On the other hand, the material interests of the Great Powers take the primacy at the system level. At first sight, one can argue that material interests are the most decisive factors for the motivation of the stakeholders in the conflict. However, as constructivism suggested, the ideational factors are giving the meaning to the material interests as also confirmed in our case.[34] For instance, the involvement of Turkey and Iran into conflict seems to be materially-driven, but, actually, their involvement is ideationally-driven and the competition between them stems from the long-lasting cultural confrontation in the region that generated fears triggering security dilemma. In this regard, a true analysis of conflicts needs to identify the origin of the motivation (material or ideational) of the conflicting parties and other relevant actors. Thus, the discovery of the drivers (material or ideational or mixture) of the interests constructed at different levels (unit-region-system) is the predominant issue in the analysis of the protraction.

For the third point, the study based on the framework of RSCT demonstrates that the peace process shall be designed and conducted in line with the findings of the conflict analysis that discloses the essence and dynamics of the intractability. It shall address to them with proper methods by considering the interplays at all levels. The peace efforts at the unit level will require much time, but it has the prospect to build a more durable peace. On the other hand, a conflict can be solved by exercising less effort and spending less time if the regional and system level stakeholders use powerful leverages. Nevertheless, such a peace will be less durable and prone to be broken. In both cases, the interests, whether materially or

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[34] When considered Iran`s fear of the Turkish dominance of the region and Turkey`s fear of Iranian cultural and political influence on the actors.

ideationally driven, of the Great Powers will play the key role in the resolution of the conflicts.

The dominant realist paradigm hindered the development of a holistic approach in CAR. Because the rationalist accounts of neo-realism cannot use the ideational factors and conceive conflicts exclusively by focusing on the top (material factors) of the iceberg but without concerning its submerged part (ideational factors). In contrast, constructivism offers useful insights for the analysis of the ideational factors. Therefore, as Jackson (2009: 172) rightly argued it is "*the most well-suited of all the main IR approaches to understanding conflict and conflict resolution.*"

The employment of RSCT and its enrichment with constructivist insights enable us to exercise a holistic approach that combines material and ideational factors as well as focus on three levels. This is a useful logic to understand the key role of the following issues in the CAR: a. cultural products, b. the domestic setting, c. various identity types, as the driver of interests, d. the culture of anarchy in a region, e. existing enmity patterns among regional actors leading to securitization, and f. the drivers of the external involvements (penetration). Such logic seems promising to identify the real causes of conflicts and the true dynamics of their protraction.

In this study, I attempted to outline the overall frame of a concept that can be used for the IR-based conflict analysis. Focusing on the various levels is not new an approach in CAR, however, the innovative dimension of this attempt is the investigation of the mutual constitutive effects of ideational and material factors with a focus of conflict analysis conducted at three levels. [35] Its compatibility with the Coleman (2006)'s framework makes this concept more beneficial to identify and address the dynamics of the intractability. However, the integration of two concepts needs further research. By proposing such a holistic concept, this study will also contribute to the constructivist literature dealing with CAR when considered the relatively less amount of the constructivist analysis in this field.

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[35] "*Greater empirical research and more case studies are needed to explain a number of puzzles: How do both material and ideational factors construct hostile identities?*" (Jackson, 2009: 186).

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