

Yayın Deęerlendirme / Book Review

Karabakh: From Conflict to Resolution. Edited by Muhittin Ataman and Ferhat Pirinççi. SETA Publications, 2021.*

Avnihan Kırışık**

The book titled *Karabakh: From Conflict to Resolution*, published right after the Second Karabakh War, which resulted in the victory of Azerbaijan, is a work that has been prepared while iron is hot to shed light on the new situation in the conflict over Karabakh. The 394-page book was published by SETA Publications in 2021. The editors of the book are *Muhittin Ataman and Ferhat Pirinççi*. Ataman and Pirinççi, both are professors of International Relations, are known for their work on foreign policy and Middle East Studies.

Looking at the authors of the chapters in the book, it is seen that academics and researchers from different institutions contributed to the work. Moreover, contributing to the interdisciplinary character of the book, authors from different disciplines evaluate the conflict over Karabakh from social, political, legal and military aspects.

There are *seventeen articles* in the book, which consists of four parts. In these articles, the problem is dealt with comprehensively, both in its broad sense and in its narrow sense. In the broad sense, it is a conflict that has lasted for more than 100 years, and in the narrow sense, it has lasted for 30 years. In this context, it is possible to start the Karabakh problem in the 19th century, when Russia annexed the South Caucasus and reorganized the borders. It is also mentioned that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the problem turned

* You can refer to this article as follows:

Kırışık, Avnihan. "Karabakh: From Conflict To Resolution. Edited by Muhittin Ataman and Ferhat Pirinççi. SETA Publications, 2021.." *bilig*, no. 104, 2023, pp. 207-215.

** Research Assistant, Mersin University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations – Mersin/Türkiye

ORCID: 0000-0001-5552-3958

avnihan.kirisik@gmail.com

into an armed conflict during the dissolution of the USSR. As it is known, Azerbaijan liberated 7 districts in and around Karabakh from occupation and the conflict over Karabakh reached a partial solution in 2020. Hence, the Karabakh conflict is comprehensively examined in the book from different angles in different periods. In this respect, the book possesses a potential to be seminal work for students and researchers studying on the subject.

Going into the details of the book, the first section begins with the article written by the book editors Muhittin Ataman and Ferhat Pirinççi. According to the authors, the history of the conflict goes back to the early 1800s. As known in the literature, these years were the period when the territory of Azerbaijan was divided between Iran and Russia. During the division, Northern Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, remained under Russian control. Thus begins the process “From a Frozen Artificiality to an Inevitable Solution”, which also constitutes the title of the article. The authors problematize the conflict over Karabakh from five aspects. First, the demographic interventions of the Tsarist Russia in Karabakh and the borders drawn by the USSR detached from the historical reality make the Karabakh issue an *artificial historical conflict*. As in the article, in 1991 when the USSR collapsed, Armenia occupied Karabakh. During the First Karabakh War, which lasted until 1994, the occupation expanded to include Lachin, Kalbajar, Agdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Qubadli, Zengilan regions surrounding Karabakh. This created a *sovereignty issue* for Azerbaijan, constituting the second aspect of the conflict. Third, considering the people were displaced from their homes during the occupations, the issue is a *humanitarian problem*. The Khojaly massacre, in which hundreds of Azerbaijani Turks including children and the elderly were killed during the war, and the like, constitute the humanitarian dimension of the problem. Fourth, the continuation of crimes against humanity and occupations despite resolutions and calls by international organizations, leads to a *problem of the dysfunction of international law*. Fifth, the fact that the conflict over Karabakh is a means of protecting the identities of the Armenian diaspora and its lobby makes the issue an *identity problem*. After this analysis, which draws the framework of the problem, it is explained that the problem has become a frozen conflict due to the *low cost of the deadlock* as well as the de facto territorial gain of Armenia. Even though the fire never ceased, the clashes decreased after the

ceasefire in 1994 and the situation stabilized. It is mentioned that while Azerbaijan diversifies the countries it is dealing with both in its foreign policy and armament towards 2020, Armenia remained largely dependent on Russia on both issues. The authors assert that considering the increase in defense expenditures of Azerbaijan, the deterioration of the unsustainable status quo became inevitable after Azerbaijan opened the gap in terms of military power. In September 2020, the Second Karabakh War started after the provocations of Armenia on the front line. After 44 days of conflict Azerbaijan saved a significant part of its occupied lands. With the addition of diplomatic success, Azerbaijan reached a ceasefire by ensuring the withdrawal of Armenia. According to the authors, this situation transformed the process from a frozen conflict into a *dynamic* one.

In the next chapter, Nesib L. Nesibli asks the question “Why is Karabakh so important to Azerbaijan that you have been fighting over it for a hundred years?” He explains that the region currently known as Nagorno-Karabakh is an artificially created place. It is one third of Karabakh region, part of Azerbaijan in the historical process. Nesibli emphasizes that Karabakh and the city of Shusha was flourished as a cultural center during the 19th century. It is possible to say that Nesibli differs from other authors in the conceptualization of wars related with the conflict over Karabakh. Nesibli includes the conflicts after the First World War in the order of wars as the *First Karabakh War*. He refers to the conflicts that took place during the dissolution of the USSR as the *Second Karabakh War*, and the 44-day war in 2020 as the *Third Karabakh War*.

Meşdi İsmayilov deals with the significance of Karabakh for Armenia in the third chapter. He analyzes why the Karabakh is significant in the perspective of Armenia. Accordingly, there are two dimensions, one is *historical-ideological* and the other is *military-geopolitical*. Its geopolitical significance is a dependent variable on the ideological one. In the ideological dimension, there are theses that *prove* that Karabakh and East Azerbaijan belonged to Armenians in the past. These theses are actually the basis of the *Greater Armenia* ideal. After discussing these theses and the Greater Armenia ideal, İsmayilov endeavors himself to refute them. Alongside with his refutation İsmayilov asserts that Armenian claims on Karabakh are related with *Ressentiment* ideology. The resentment ideology is defined as *state of being*

unable to obtain something one wants to possess due to powerlessness, and he claims that this situation brings violence and war along with it.

Focusing on the background of the Karabakh conflict, the second section begins with the chapter entitled “Karabakh’s Historical Background” by Ömer Göksel İşyar. In the chapter, İşyar defines the geography called Karabakh and explains the history of the region. The conflict process can be understood by reading the article which is a descriptive study. The article covers the events from the collapse of Tsarist Russia until 1992, when Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence.

In the second chapter of the section, Hecer Qasimova looks at the conflict from the perspective of international law. The question of “How Nagorno-Karabakh became a problem?” is analyzed by dividing it into two periods: the foundation phase of the USSR and the collapse of the USSR. The relationship between the *people’s right to self-determination* and Nagorno-Karabakh is discussed through the interpretation of international legal norms such as the founding treaty of the United Nations (United Nations Charter).

The book continues with the chapter in which Araz Aslanlı wrote “Causes and Outcomes of the First Karabakh War”. He underlines that the current state of the problem emerged in the 1980s, while causes of the conflict over Karabakh can be traced back to the 19th century. As it is known, Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic attempted to join Armenia in 1988 and the fuse of the conflict was ignited. By 1992, the scope of armed conflicts had expanded. Armenia received military support from the USSR while Azerbaijan did not yet have a regular army. Hence the conflicts resulted in the victory of Armenia. As detailed in the chapter, despite the United Nations Security Council resolutions, Armenia occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding regions, contrary to the principle of *inviolability and territorial integrity of borders*. Aslanlı claims that the period until the ceasefire in 1994 was the main development that determined the current nature of the problem.

Araz Aslanlı also wrote the next chapter as a continuation of the previous one, together with Yalçın Sarıkaya. In this chapter, diplomatic activities carried out during and after the First Karabakh War are compiled under the

title “Diplomatic Negotiations And The Minsk Process In The Karabakh Conflict”. Accordingly, the initiatives to solve the conflict and the reasons for the failure of intermediary states and intermediary international organizations are sought. As it is indicated Armenia’s actions followed every step taken for a solution. These actions were military operations, massacres and occupations that show that there is no *sincerity* in Armenia’s attitude towards peace. It is thought that belief in a solution has diminished over time, as Russia, the permanent co-chair of the *Minsk Group* formed under OSCE, has left the problem under control but unresolved. According to the authors, the fact that the status quo is in favor of Armenia. Armenia aims to create a legal basis for the actual situation shaped by the occupation. Authors assert that this situation is one of the main reasons for the failure of diplomatic initiatives.

The process of the *Second Karabakh War* is examined with its causes and consequences in the third part of the book. In this context, firstly, “The Road To The Second Karabakh War” was written by Ferid Şefiyev and Vasif Huseynov. They underline that a non-Karabakh leader became the head of the country for the first time in 20 years, after the unrest in 2018 in Armenia. Although there was a *détente* after this development, which lit a glimmer of hope for peace and solution, it was not permanent. The declaration of the *new war for new territories* formula by the Minister of Defense of Armenia, David Tonoyan, has been one of the indicators that the tension has risen again. The new prime minister Pashinyan’s actions weakened the *patience of the Azerbaijani people* and that gave the signs of what was to come. The following two actions of Pashinyan are emphasized by the authors: the rhetoric *Karabakh is Armenia* and his confession that prolonging the negotiations was a method. As it is known, following these developments, the Second Karabakh War broke out on 27 September 2020.

Looking at the next chapter it is seen that answers are sought to some questions. Despite Armenia’s nearly 30 years of ceasefire violations and provocations, why did Azerbaijan respond now, on September 27, 2020, rather than before? How did the conflicts, which were cut short before, lasted until *liberation* this time? Metin Mammadlı analyzes these questions and gives the answer of *Azerbaijan’s Changing Paradigm*. He states that four main factors caused the paradigm shift. The first is the changes in Armenian

politics in 2018. As a result of these changes, Armenia's relations with Russia were shaken. It was noted by the authors that Armenia-Russia relations had an important role in the continuation of the occupation. The second factor is the adoption of the new military doctrine. The third is the new trends in Russian-Turkish relations. The last factor is the increasing importance of Azerbaijan in *regional geopolitics and foreign policy* preferences. In this context, it should be underlined that Mammadlı attaches importance to the implementation of a multilateral policy to *reduce risks* as a foreign policy strategy.

In the next chapter titled "The End Of Azerbaijan's Strategic Patience And The New Equation In Karabakh", similarly to the previous one, Ferhat Bıçakçı and Mehmet Çağatay Güler seek answers to their questions: *Why now?* and *How did it happen?* They propose four basic dynamics that determine the process they call *the end of Azerbaijan's strategic patience*. The unsustainable status quo is the first dynamic. The second is the increase in Azerbaijan's military capacity. Another dynamic, one of the factors mentioned by Mammadlı in the previous chapter, is the favorable conjuncture with the foreign policy implemented by Azerbaijan. The last one is Türkiye's involvement in the conflict in favor of Azerbaijan. According to the authors of the chapter, the equation that emerged after the war is listed as follows: the strengthening of Russia's influence, Türkiye's increasing influence in the region, and the decrease of Iranian influence.

Vasif Huseynov, the author of the chapter titled "The Postwar Situation In The South Caucasus" descriptively summarizes the situation after the 44-day war. Huseynov emphasizes that Karabakh is the primary factor for both communities in the nation and identity constructing processes of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the post-Soviet period. Likewise, he states that the conflict over Karabakh always takes the first place in the political agendas and economic expenditure priorities of these countries. The author concludes that if the *Trilateral Statement* can be implemented, prosperity and security will be established in the South Caucasus.

In the chapter titled "Azerbaijan's Military Operation In The Second Karabakh War: A Technical Analysis Of The Victory" written by Murat Aslan, the Azerbaijani victory is examined from a military perspective. Murat Aslan answers the question, "Was Azerbaijan's victory in the Second

Karabakh War accidental?” The author emphasizes the importance of synchronization of political environment and military strategy in achieving victory. It is stated that there is a condition to carry out a military operation without a problem of legitimacy. For the author, it is the formation of the conditions for the concept of *just war*. With the map attachments, the execution and development of the operation is analyzed in terms of military. In this chapter, Murat Aslan draws attention to a different result from the studies in the other chapters of the book. This result is that Armenia will use the post-Second Karabakh War period to prepare for a new attack, as seen in previous experiences in which it abused the ceasefire processes.

The last chapter of the section is titled as “Armenia’s Military Activities In The Second Karabakh War And International Humanitarian Law”. Yücel Acer draws attention to Armenia’s attack on civilian settlements and therefore civilians, while the war is expected to take place between the armed forces on the front line. In the chapter, Armenia’s use of methods prohibited by international humanitarian law during military operations is evaluated from a legal framework.

The fourth and final section of the book focuses on *Karabakh policy of regional and global actors*. The policies of *Russia*, *Türkiye* and *Iran*, as the regional actors involved in the conflict, and the *EU* and the *USA*, as the global actors, are examined. The chapter titled “From The Zheleznovodsk Communique to The Trilateral Statement: Russia’s Nagorno-Karabakh Policy” written by Cavid Veliyev is about the policies of Russia. He reminds that all conflicts, from the ceasefire reached in Zheleznovodsk in 1991 to the ceasefires in 1994, 2016 and 2020, were ended by the mediation of Russia. Cavid Veliyev emphasizes four factors that affect Russia’s Nagorno-Karabakh policy. These four factors explain the reasons why Russia did not intervene early in the 44-day war in favor of Armenia: *the geopolitical situation in the region, the foreign policies of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia’s bilateral relations with both countries, and the changing approaches of policy makers in Russia*. Veliyev claims that Russia’s current approach is based on not losing Azerbaijan and Türkiye. As a result of the *Trilateral Statement* that provided the ceasefire, the deployment of troops to the South Caucasus through peacekeeping forces should also be put forward as a situation in favor of Russia.

“Turkey’s Karabakh Policy” was written by Bora Bayraktar in the next chapter. As it is known Türkiye is one of the important actors of the region and one of the parties to the conflict. He mentions that Türkiye, which kept aloof from the subject and made mediation attempts until the USSR collapsed, changed its policy with the deepening of violence and occupation against the Azerbaijani Turks. Afterwards, Türkiye’s efforts to take the issue to international platforms by taking sides with Azerbaijan are presented to the reader in a chronological and comprehensive manner. It is noted that Türkiye led the intervention of the OSCE and the establishment of the Minsk Conference on *March 24, 1992*, which would later be known as the Minsk Group. As a matter of fact, in Türkiye’s relations with Armenia, the termination of the occupation in Karabakh has been put forward as the first condition for developing bilateral relations. Bora Bayraktar underlines that Türkiye openly supported Azerbaijan diplomatically and militarily during the Second Karabakh War, which he called *Karabakh’s war of independence*.

Mustafa Caner wrote “Iran’s Karabakh Policy with its causes, consequences and future”. Iran is a country bordering the southern provinces of Azerbaijan. Clashes and occupation took place in these provinces. As for Caner, Iran, which borders both countries that are parties to the conflict, is one of the important actors of the region along with Türkiye. He asserts that even though Iran makes a statement of neutrality, in practice, it carries out a policy in favor of Christian Armenia instead of Azerbaijan, which is mostly Shiite Muslim like Iran. According to the author, although it is thought that Iran is a country that acts with *sectarian motives*, it is seen in the example of the Karabakh problem that it actually puts its political interests ahead of sectarianism. Caner argues that Iran endeavored to preserve the status quo consisting of occupation and became one of the losers of the Second Karabakh War. Nevertheless, Iran will continue to be one of the determinants of the new equation in Karabakh according to him.

In the last chapter of the book, Nurşin Ateşođlu Güney analyzes the “Nagorno-Karabakh policies of the USA and the European Union” as they are influential in international negotiations and are the global interlocutors of the issue. The chapter deals with the problem “How the Western actors became ineffective in terms of conflict resolution?” in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. How they lost the leadership to Russia in the solution

process and how Russia consented to expand its field in this regard are other questions that make up the scope of the study. In the chapter, it is argued that the USA lost interest in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region after 2008, while the EU failed to fill the void of the USA.

The work, which is introduced and evaluated with the contents of the chapters, sheds light on the past and present of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. It was prepared with the participation of many authors during the period when the armed conflict phase of the Second Karabakh War ended and the ceasefire was reached. This wide participation was able to provide detailed coverage of the meaning attributed to the concept of the conflict over Karabakh, the history of the issue, current developments and the foreign policies of the parties. Analyzing the development and results of the 44-day Second Karabakh War from different perspectives is one of the most important contributions of the work to the field. It should be noted that the book appeals to readers of all levels, including those who are just beginning to be interested in the conflict over Karabakh since the entire process from the beginning of the problem to its current situation is explained.

