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Araştırma Makalesi

A PRAGMATIC POLICY CASE: US-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union had changed the world politics in which the US has found opportunities for having a new type of foreign policy perspective. Newly independent countries took interests of the US since some of them own significant energy resources and strategic location. Azerbaijan as a country which suffered from a large-scale war became a target of the economy and energy-oriented policies. The US foreign policy approach towards Azerbaijan has been identified differently by various administrations. The country's energy-rich position was the first priority for Clinton administration and after it became a geostrategically important state during Bush administration. It can be argued that the unstable world politics directly affected the position of Azerbaijan, and the US officials evaluated this country from different dimensions. Obama's declining influence in the region was replaced by the Trump administration with a new perspective to balance Russia and Iran via the existence of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus region. At the same time, this energy-rich area slightly becomes a scene of militarization. This article seeks to analyze the main determinants of the US foreign policy priorities in the relations with Azerbaijan since the early 1990s with unstable and changeable regional and global dynamics. For having a clear approach, governmental policies have been explained periodically with domestic and foreign policy issues as well as official statements of high-level policy-makers.

Keywords: US-Azerbaijan Relations, South Caucasus, Energy, Security, Struggle Against Terrorism

BİR PRAGMATİST POLİTİKA KONUSU: ABD-AZERBAYCAN İLİŞKİLERİ

Öz

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması dünya siyasetini değiştirmekle birlikte ABD'nin de yeni dış politika perspektifine kavuşmasına neden olmuştur. Bağımsızlığına kavuşan yeni devletlerin bazıları zengin enerji kaynakları ve stratejik konumlarından dolayı ABD'nin özel ilgisini çekmiştir. Büyük ölçekli bir savaş yaşamış olan Azerbaycan da ekonomi ve enerji bazlı politikaların hedef noktası haline gelmiştir. ABD dış politikasında Azerbaycan'ın yeri her hükümet tarafından farklı şekillerde tanımlanmıştır. Ülkenin enerji konusundaki özel konumu Clinton yönetiminin politikaları için öncelik haline gelmiş ve sonrasında ise Bush yönetimi sürecinde ülke jeostratejik olarak önemli bir partner olarak kabul edilmiştir. Dünya siyasetindeki beklenmedik gelişmelerden dolayı ABD'nin her dönemde bu ülkeyi farklı açılardan değerlendirdiği söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla, Obama'nın bölgedeki azalan etkisi Trump yönetiminin Rusya ve İran'ı Azerbaycan üzerinden dengeleme girişimiyle değiştirilmiştir. Aynı zamanda enerji yönünden zengin olan bu bölge silahlanma yarışına da sahne olmaktadır. Bu makalede ABD'nin 1990'ların başından itibaren Azerbaycan'la ilişkilerindeki önceliklerini belirleyen unsurları değişken bölgesel ve küresel dinamiklerle analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yalın bir yaklaşıma sahip olmak için, hükümetlerin politikaları iç ve dış politika konularıyla ve yüksek seviyeli politika yapıcılarının resmi konuşmalarıyla incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD-Azerbaycan İlişkileri, Güney Kafkasya, Enerji, Güvenlik, Terörle Mücadele

1. INTRODUCTION

The US became a dominant player in the Caucasus region after the Cold War period. For the US foreign policy posture, this region was an unexplored but renowned one. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has obtained great opportunities to take an important position in the region with the establishment of energy, economy, and military relations. The geopolitical importance of the newly independent countries was indispensable for the US to carry out huge projects.

Azerbaijan, that locates near to the Caspian Sea and lies on the middle of the Caucasus region, has been center of attention for the US government from the first days of the independence because the country has enormous energy sources and hosts significant trade routes from east to west. This advantage was one of the main priorities of the US foreign policy approach towards post-Soviet geography for implementing huge projects.

From the year of 1991, the US administration has established a pragmatist policy and handled the issues under the regional opportunities. Therefore, the Caucasus region with newly established three states became part of that policy, and Azerbaijan was evaluated differently than others. The collapse of the Soviet Union was the meaning of the opening of energy resources for the US. So, this mostly shaped the American foreign policy towards Azerbaijan. After a while, a Caspian outlook was formed for the region to handle issues related to Iran and Russia, major regional powers. At this point, Azerbaijan remained as a significant partner for the new rivalry.

It should be noted that the bilateral relations couldn't have a chance to emerge during the period of Ayaz Muttalibov, the first president of Azerbaijan. In his short term presidency, the US also couldn't form any specific policy towards Azerbaijan and the region. As another reason, his pro-Russian foreign policy concept negatively affected the situation. Failures in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, economic imbalance, and social troubles caused the victory of Ebulfez Elchibey for the presidential post in 1992. His anti-Russian policy contributed the US involvements in the region and opened the way of creating global energy projects. After his term, the next president Heydar Aliyev created a concept of balance politics.

There are various researches on this subject in the literature. While some of them focus on different aspects of the bilateral relations, others analyze Western presence in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mostly, these sources provide analysis and information of two decades from the early 1990s. Developments in the Obama and Trump

periods are not included in most of the sources. For meeting the necessities of the last decade analysis, the researcher applied to the scientific articles and online sources.

As one of the references of this research, Thomas de Waal's book *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* has importance to understand the political situation in the South Caucasus in the 1990s. Its pure outlook to the conflict resolution process made possible to analyse the third-party involvements. Another prominent analyst Svante Cornell's research *The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan* presents detailed information on the bilateral relations. Especially, US involvement in the region after the conflict period and interpretation of the Section 907 issue are essential guides.

Moreover, Gareth H. Jenkin's *Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals: Turkey's Relations with Iran* research is providing the necessary background of 1990's leadership decisions of Azerbaijan. This source becomes helpful for understanding the regional balance in that period. A Turkish book *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Kafkasya* written by Kamer Kasim is a significant source which includes the US policy towards Azerbaijan. Political, economic and energy relations until 2009 are the main focal points of the book. Covering the Clinton and Bush periods made a big contribution to the literature.

Under the light of various sources, this interpretive article seeks to fill a gap in the literature by finding the main determinants of US foreign policy approach towards Azerbaijan with a three-decade-long perspective. The starting section presents Azerbaijan's energy power and conflict dilemma and the Clinton administration's political choices. The following sections provide information and analyses of the security partnership in the Bush period, changeable behaviors in the Obama period and new perspectives and expectations in the Trump period. Unstable political affairs in the global system have shaped the bilateral relations in a positive and negative way. Thus, this article utilizes a helpful approach by classifying the periods and presenting sufficient information.

2. MAJOR ENERGY PROJECTS AND REGIONAL CONFLICT DILEMMA IN THE CLINTON PERIOD

Azerbaijan's independence was recognized by the US on December 25, 1991. On that day, President George H.W. Bush announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union and expressed his opinions for the upcoming situation of the former Soviet countries by pointing out the importance of security policies and democratic principles for the new governments (New York Times, 1991). These two principles significantly shaped the US-Azerbaijan relations for a long time.

From the Clinton period, we can argue the application of both principles to those countries worked well. According to Clinton, security measures could be taken only for vital interests. Thus, his period is criticized as being hesitant between isolationism and interventionism (Feulner, 1996). However, a free access to resources and promoting free economy became the dominant effects of his term. Relations with Azerbaijan ascended around this approach from the first period.

The two countries opened embassies in both Washington DC and Baku in 1992 and, the diplomatic relations started (U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan, 2019). There are some specific points of the US-Azerbaijan relations mutually which should be mentioned to understand the bilateral ties. On one hand; the strong position of the Armenian lobby in the US, Nagorno-Karabakh problem with Armenia and regional balance among big powers can be counted as major elements which shape the relations.

On the other hand; expectations and concerns of the US were mostly caused by the Russian influence and Iranian presence in the region, energy/economy benefits, democratic transformation of Azerbaijan and establishing a new order to meet interests of the US as well as the European Union, respectively. When it comes to the expectations and concerns of Azerbaijan, some critical issues directly affected the relations which are American aid program, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and major energy projects.

2.1. US Aid Sanctions to Azerbaijan

From the first period of the relations, Azerbaijan faced a major difficulty in the case of the American aid program. As former president George H.W. Bush underlined the importance of the establishment of democratic principles in his well-known speech in 1991, the US government prepared an aid program under the name of Freedom Support Act (Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act) (The American Presidency Project, 2018). It was a program to fulfill purposes to promote freedom and open market in the former Soviet states.

However, Azerbaijan was prohibited to be part of this program, namely any form of governmental aid from the US with the regulation of Section 907. It was stated as, *"Until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh"* (Waal, 2013). As a well-known reality, the role of the Armenian lobby in the US was obvious in the occurrence of this case. After all of these events, Azerbaijan began a diplomatic struggle for terminating this decision.

It was a paradox for the US aims to promote democratic development in the region by expelling Azerbaijan and embracing others (Cornell, 2006). Azerbaijan couldn't obtain a chance to utilize economic aid as well as to adopt democratic values quickly as the US targeted with the package.

On the other side, while the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been a negative factor in the region since there was no hope for a peaceful settlement in the middle of escalation, the role of the Armenian lobby in the US began a series of aggressive activities on everything related to Azerbaijan. This was as the major problem in the relations between the US and Azerbaijan in that first period. This also directly affected the US approaches towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and indirectly the US power in the region. However, it couldn't damage whole dimensions at all, and the relations proceeded on different issues such as economy and energy.

2.2. Peace Expectations on the Nagorno-Karabakh Problem

The Nagorno-Karabakh region which is an integral part of Azerbaijan became a scene of a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia from the early 1990s. The problem occurred after secessionist claims of local Armenians in 1988. The dispute turned into an ethnic and regional conflict in a short time while the Soviet Union was collapsing. A referendum was held between local Armenians, which concluded with unification demands with Armenia by leaving the authority of Azerbaijan (Cornell, 1999).

A full-scale war began in 1992 with the invasion operations of Armenian army towards various districts near to the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) tried to adopt a mediation role with third-party involvements but couldn't be successful in this attempt. In the same year, for building a peaceful process, OSCE established Minsk Group for successful management of the conflict with third-party activities. After a while, the US became part of co-chairmanship position of this group along with Russia and France, and the country put efforts till today for ensuring peace. Until the ceasefire agreement in 1994, Azerbaijan has lost 20% of its territories which includes the Nagorno-Karabakh as well as adjacent regions (Azvision, 2015). This problem has cost the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and this problem reshaped policy choices with the contribution of nationalist identity (Rumer, Sokolsky, & Stronski, 2017).

This conflict directly threatens the peace and security in the region but there is no proper result despite the intensive efforts of the Minsk Group and other mediators. In this context, the US has found a chance to be part of regional security and stability with the formation of the Minsk Group. At the same time, the country couldn't be successful in this

way due to the fragile ties with Azerbaijan, which was a result of the Armenian lobby activities. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem became a milestone for consolidation of Russian power in the region, and the US has spent a big time to propose its own deal for peace. At the same period, Russia began to restore the power loss after the Soviet collapse and gradually increased its military troops in the region to become a dominant power again. This situation played a crucial role to make a new image for Russia and this negatively affected the newly emerged Western initiatives and their long-term policies. Therefore, this can be counted as another main problem between the US and Azerbaijan for the Clinton period. From that time, the US foreign policy concept was formulated to stop and limit Russian and Iranian threats in the region.

2.3. Gaining Benefits from the Regional Projects

Azerbaijan which has lost a big part of its territories has built a new type of foreign policy direction after the first president, Ayaz Muttalibov. His pro-Russian policy was replaced with pro-Turkish and pro-Western types during the period of the second president, Ebulfez Elchibey. He put a big effort to establish a strong relationship with Turkey and uncompromising stance against Iran, and partially Russia (Jenkins, 2012). Energy became an important issue for Azerbaijan in the case of foreign policy structure in this period and Elchibey aimed to exclude Russia and Iran from all of the upcoming projects by Azerbaijan. He also had a short period of the presidency like the previous president, and couldn't have enough time to realize long-term projects. After him, a prominent political figure from the Soviet time, Heydar Aliyev came to power and carefully created balance politics to keep Azerbaijan away from possible threats in the unstable regional balances.

Oil resources of Azerbaijan attracted the attention of several Western companies, primarily British Petroleum (BP) in the early 1990s. With the desires and projected initiatives of these companies, oil should have been transferred by a regular pipeline system from Azerbaijan to the West. The first offer was introduced in 1992 to realize this goal. It was an essential opportunity to transfer Azerbaijani oil as well as reaching other Caspian and Central Asian resources. This kind of approaches made Azerbaijan as a center of attention in front of the world in the case of energy geopolitics. The US had desired to involve in this process and made several commercial agreements with Azerbaijan to obtain economic facilitations for American companies (Ok & Kocaman, 2013). The known oil reserve of Azerbaijan was estimated at 3.3 billion barrels (Ok & Kocaman, p. 2), therefore, the country needed assistance of professional companies to use and transfer the oil properly. Finally, the first agreement was signed for developing and processing the Azeri, Chiraq, Guneshli oil fields on

September 20, 1994. In the literature, the agreement was signed by giant international oil companies (Eyvazov, 2016) and it is announced "Contract of the Century" because of its essential importance for the world after the Cold War order (Karimov, 2015).

For the US perspective, it was important to build a pipeline with a route which bypasses Russia and Iran. On the other side, bypassing Armenia was a priority of Azerbaijan due to the ongoing conflict (Kasim, 2009). Clinton administration actively joined the process of the pipeline establishment and president Clinton expressed his own opinions to Heydar Aliyev in regard of protecting mutual interests (Babalı, 2005). This rapprochement was meaningful for the regional geopolitics, and demands of Azerbaijan became more acceptable for the US since that period. In the case of energy security issues, in the north, the Chechen problem of Russia, and in the west, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were main threats for both sides. With the desires of monitoring regional security, the US appointed a special envoy for the energy affairs in the region (Cagaptay & Gencsoy, 2005). From this time, the US approach towards Azerbaijan was mostly affected by energy benefits, and this caused a steady relationship. In the following years, the Clinton administration supported new kind of energy initiatives of Azerbaijan and gained a chance to involve in Central Asian energy affairs (Babalı, p. 41).

In a short time, Azerbaijan took the advantages of its geopolitical importance, and joined another type of Western-oriented projects such as INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe) and TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia).

Additionally, the country has taken a part in a pro-Western regional organization GUAM which was established by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova in 1997. After a while, Uzbekistan has joined in 1999 and withdrew its membership in 2005. These countries initiated in a new type of cooperation as former Soviet states with the aim of integration to the Trans-Atlantic community. The members changed the name into GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Cooperation in 2006 due to new policy prospects on democratic values, economic relations, regional security and human rights (GUAM, 2017). Due to its strategic geography, GUAM has gained advantages of several regional economic projects with the support of the Western countries (Bittner & Ibrahimli, 2018).

Functions of this organization were seen as an anti-Russian political attempt by granting supports from Europe and the US because all members states' geographical locations are eligible to bypass Russia in any kind of energy and transportation projects. On the other hand, some member states suffered from territorial conflicts in which Russia has shown interests (Kuzio, 2008). Territorial conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia of Georgia,

Nagorno-Karabakh of Azerbaijan and Transnistria of Moldova made these countries more concerned in the regional security issues (Peimani, 2009).

The lack of any supportive authority pushed them to form a regional organization which seeks mediators from the West. Also, the US has launched financial assistance to GUAM members for realizing regional projects (OECD, 2013). It became another essential indicator of US involvement in the region.

Consequently, the Clinton period had various opportunities and challenges in the relations with Azerbaijan. American leadership had adopted a pragmatist way to approach for regional affairs and tried to formulate new approaches in the case of balancing Russian and Iranian presence. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Section 907 issues became major problems and these directly affected the prosperity of Azerbaijan as well as peace and security in the region. On the other side, energy and economy became peak topics for mutual interests, and especially for US position other regional players. We should note that role of the Armenian lobby in the US is a part of its domestic policy, and as we understood from the American foreign policy tradition that domestic affairs come first in the way of shaping foreign policy directions. Therefore, the Clinton administration became highly hesitant and reluctant to change this situation.

3. STRENGTHENING THE RELATIONS IN THE BUSH PERIOD

The Bush period which lasted between 2001 and 2009, includes major challenges for the US foreign affairs towards the post-Soviet geography. Due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush adopted one of the most significant foreign policy doctrines in US history. Unilateralism became a core element for global security and preventive war appeared as the main tool of this approach. A global struggle against terrorism began and it continued with the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Azerbaijan, as a Caucasus and Caspian country, was accepted as a strategic ally for the US in fights against terrorism. Consequently, energy-based relations turned into a security-based type.

3.1. Establishment of the Strategic Partnership

The country opened its airspace to the US flights, and President Heydar Aliyev declared his explicit support for global security. In the upcoming process, Azerbaijan sent soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq and made military cooperation with the US, including drills and exercises in the region (Holley, 2003).

This step caused some positive results for both sides. For the US; ensuring more supports for Afghanistan operation, protecting energy security, becoming more active in the peace talks of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and strengthening current relations with

Azerbaijan can be argued as major points. For Azerbaijan; obtaining security guarantees of the US, taking advantage in the Nagorno-Karabakh talks, becoming a rising power for global security issues and keeping its important position for energy needs of the world appeared as considerable developments. Surely, balance situation with Iran changed and Azerbaijan faced new political dilemmas because of its collaboration with the US. Additionally, this step created a new perspective for Azerbaijan's foreign policy as becoming a partner of NATO. The country rapidly integrated into NATO military cooperation and achieved the way of balance politics as Heydar Aliyev formulated. On this way, Azerbaijani soldiers have fought in Kosovo and Iraq and, Baku administration showed its willingness for having deep cooperation.

Another important step was taken with the Nagorno-Karabakh talks. The US has actively involved in the peace talks and stressed official respects towards the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. As an essential initiative of The US as a co-chair of Minsk Group, both conflicting sides, Azerbaijan and Armenia, were hosted in Florida's Key West island in April 2001. US Secretary of State Colin Powell has described the aim of the meeting as "mutual compromise" (Asbarez, 2001). American officials urged the two sides to make the focus on an imminent peaceful settlement. It was a symbolic step in the peace talks of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which the US has desired to show its undeniable mediator role.

3.2. Waiving Section 907

As mentioned in the first part, Section 907 of the United States Freedom Support Act has prevented a strong relationship among the countries from the early 1990s. Although the Clinton administration gave importance to the pressures of the Armenian lobby, this situation totally changed during the first period of the Bush administration. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US Senate has adopted an amendment to waive Section 907 by confirming the president's free decision on this issue to obtain Azerbaijani support for military operations in Afghanistan (Iyikan, 2009). Conclusively, the primary negative element of the US-Azerbaijan relations eliminated. In 2002, Azerbaijan has received $50 million aid for the promotion of human rights and democracy as well as consolidation of the free market economy (RFERL, 2002). It became one of the most successful parts of the bilateral relations.

Due to the new developments, Armenia was not satisfied with this initiative, and President Robert Kocharyan alerted president Bush with a clear note (Panarmenian, 2001). According to him, lifting of Section 907 would cause negative impacts for the regional peace and it can change the political balance. As a response, The US administration declared the waiving of Section 907 has such an importance that the US needs to put effort on the global

terrorism issue and to protect the border security of Azerbaijan (US Department of State, 2003). Additionally, it was stated that this initiative would not damage the regional stability and it doesn't permit occurrence an offensive stance of Azerbaijan towards Armenia. A remarkable change appeared that vital interests have changed the political choices of the US administration in a short period.

The Armenian lobby was owning noteworthy importance for domestic interests of the Clinton period but the global security became a major concern of the newly created Bush doctrine, and it naturally contributed to the emergence of relations with Azerbaijan. It meant that the power of the Armenian lobby decreased rapidly and lost its persuasion power slightly to pressure the US administration (Mardanov, 2011).

It should be noted that third president Heydar Aliyev paid several official visits to the US until his death in 2003. He mainly focused on peace talks about the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, ongoing processes of the energy/economy projects and regional/global security issues. After his death, the concept of the balance politics was adopted and implemented by the fourth president, Ilham Aliyev.

4. PROBLEMATIC RELATIONS IN THE OBAMA PERIOD

Despite the lack of an obvious doctrine, US President Barack Obama's foreign policy approach was mainly shaped by military costs abroad and the unstable financial situation at home. His first period was negatively affected by the 2008 economic crisis, therefore the administration took serious measures to prevent its possible damages to the country's budget. As a result, these negative outcomes have influenced all US allies as well as Azerbaijan.

If we focus on bilateral relations, some specific problems can appear as determinant factors of the relations. Firstly, the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia with the support of the US dramatically changed Azerbaijani behavior and belief to the US foreign policy. Secondly, the problem of appointment of the US ambassador for a while negatively affected the relations. At last but not least, the US' weak position in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks can be accepted as another negative point in the relations.

4.1. The Normalization Process Between Turkey and Armenia

Turkey and Armenia have closed borders and there is no diplomatic relationship due to the ongoing conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey explicitly supports the position of Azerbaijan and tries to be more productive for the peace talks. On the other side, Armenia has historical claims over the Turkish territories and accuses Turkish government of being the perpetrator of the so-called "Armenian genocide" by addressing tragic events in 1915 under the rule of Ottoman Empire.

In this period, an important political step was taken, named "Football Diplomacy" in 2008 (Aras & Ozbay, 2008). Turkish and Armenian football teams were selected for the same group of FIFA World Cup qualifier. Armenian administration has invited Turkish president Abdullah Gul to watch the game in the capital city of Armenia, Yerevan. After his visit, both sides displayed a willingness to normalize the relations which remained frozen after a short time of the independence process of Armenia. That period was fragile because of the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, and the western countries tried to create a new process for bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia. As a response to Armenia, Turkish side invited Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan to watch the next game in 2009, in Turkey. With the help of the US officials, the normalization process started, and two countries signed two protocols in Zurich, October 2009.

This process was criticized from the first day by Azerbaijan (Welt, 2013) and it caused disappointment towards the US foreign policy. Azerbaijan was concerning related to the future of the region and the administration obviously explained possible precautions from their side in the case of energy transfer from Azerbaijan to the West. Azerbaijani president Aliyev sent a clear message by rejecting the attendance to the Istanbul summit of the Alliance of Civilizations (Hurriyet, 2009). He also didn't accept the invitation of Hillary Clinton to meet President Obama. Matthew Bryza, the US Assistant Secretary, was ordered to meet Aliyev for discussing the case.

For avoiding misunderstandings, president Obama directly talked to Aliyev for decreasing the tension (Asbarez, 2009). Azerbaijan was highly worried that opening of the Turkish-Armenian borders can cause several domino effects such as a new crisis in the Nagorno-Karabakh and economic advantages for Armenia which is the strategic ally of Russia. Obama administration declared that both things are separate issues and they need to have their own method of solutions (RFERL, 2009). However, these speeches couldn't stop this breaking point in the relations.

4.2. Ambassador Crisis

The US faced a problem of sending a diplomatic envoy to Azerbaijan from 2010. The lack of a US ambassador in Azerbaijan created questions and concerns related to the US administration. While the White House appointed Matthew Bryza as American ambassador to Azerbaijan, he was challenged by several procedures in the Senate (Yıldırım, 2012). Eventually, he started to serve from in early 2011 but not for a long time. The pressure came from the Armenian lobby in the US because the community harshly reacted to his nomination, and created a campaign against this decision by accusing his close ties with Turkey and

Azerbaijan (Sassounian, 2010). Consequently, the US administration has reconsidered the existence and effects of the Armenian lobby to obtain domestic supports. Thus, Baku officials understood that Obama will be pressured by the lobby in every case related to Azerbaijan.

4.3. Passive American Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Problem

The Nagorno-Karabakh problem didn't occupy the agenda of the Obama administration sufficiently if we compare it with the examples of the Clinton and Bush periods. The US only fulfilled its obligations as a co-chair of OSCE Minsk Group, and repeatedly mentioned peace callings for both sides without any concrete step.

According to Obama's Caucasus policy, the primary issue was the Turkish-Armenian normalization process for two reasons. Firstly, the Russo-Georgian War changed the regional balances, and the US should have taken serious measures for establishing a new order. Secondly, the emergence of Russian power in the Caucasus should have been balanced with the presence of different actors such as Turkey. Therefore, Obama mostly focused on possible developments for the Turkish-Armenian relationship. In return, Turkey could have played a dominant role in the conflict management process of the Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, the Obama administration couldn't manage the period and created ineffective and inconclusive projects in the region.

5. NEW PERSPECTIVES IN THE TRUMP PERIOD

The US policy towards the South Caucasus region had declined during the Obama administration which mainly focused on the relations with Russia. Since it negatively affected the bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, expectations were lowered in the case of regional economic, security and military affairs.

The last president Donald Trump period has created its own and unique foreign policy perspectives on every kind of cases for each country. Azerbaijan has found its special position in this new period. The security-based approach of the Trump administration highlighted the importance of Azerbaijan's previous collaboration in the fight against terrorism. The US officials explicitly appreciated Baku even though there are no practical outcomes as same as the Bush administration.

In May 2018, Trump sent a congratulatory message to Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Caspian Oil and Gas Show. In his message, Trump pointed out the Azerbaijan's importance on energy needs of the world and the regional security expectations in the region (US Embassy in Azerbaijan, 2018).

The most significant rapprochement happened in 2018 when US National Security Advisor John Bolton paid an official visit to Azerbaijan. There are several factors which

caused his visit to Azerbaijan along with other South Caucasus countries in the same travel. These are mostly shaped by balance attempts against Russia and Iran. He defined Azerbaijan, 'the only country bordering both Russia and Iran.' This noteworthy definition was made to point out the strategic importance of this country for the US, and it gives a clear message to understand the new political approaches towards the region.

Since Azerbaijan and Iran have a dynamic relationship (Civilnet, 2018), Bolton guaranteed the US will not harm to Azerbaijan during the new sanction process toward Iran (Turan, 2018). The two countries have implemented various projects although they had a tense relationship in the early 2000s. After the new sanction plans to Iran, Azerbaijan has worried about its negative outcomes. Therefore, Bolton's convincing speech created a soft atmosphere.

During his visit to Baku, he also emphasized the importance of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and Southern Gas Corridor in the discussion of the regional project (Hoagland, Cekuta, Nifti, & Cheriegate, 2018).

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, he said the US is aware of its responsibilities as a co-chair of the Minsk Group and serious measures will be taken (Turan, 2018). Here, it can be argued that the US aims to show its presence against Russia on the conflict resolution issue as well as arms sale. When he visited Yerevan as the next destination, Bolton obviously criticized Russia's arm selling to both countries and shared opinions that the US will consider selling weapons. He said American military equipment is better than the Russian (AP, 2018).

Moreover, the US criticizes the human right issue in Azerbaijan due to political arrests (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Also, media freedom becomes another concern for Washington. Although this is not a new issue, the US still maintains to decrease the tension for making Azerbaijan a stable ally because the country has an enormous geographical location for major energy and economy projects (Azernews, 2018).

Shortly, the Trump administration plans to increase the US influence in the region by giving more importance to Azerbaijan to balance Russia and Iran. A new type of cooperation is expected for the near future because the main priority of the US is to be more active especially with the economy and military means.

6. CONCLUSION

The relations between the US and Azerbaijan have emerged with different dimensions of various administrations. From the early 1990s till the middle of 2010s, both countries followed a way of mutual benefits. The US couldn't create a proper foreign policy concept

towards Azerbaijan till the late 1990s but bilateral perspective contributed to the emergence of energy/economy cooperation. Clinton's view of the country was shaped by two main parameters: economic benefits abroad and domestic political concerns at home with the efforts of the Armenian lobby. We can argue that the Clinton administration adopted a calm way of peace solutions on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem.

The Bush administration became a turning point with the necessities on security issues, and in doing so, accepting Azerbaijan as a strategic ally. This term was mostly affected by military supports of Azerbaijan to the global struggle against terrorism. The US administration welcomed this effort by waiving Section 907 which was preventing Azerbaijan to have any form of governmental aid. At this period, the role of the Armenian lobby decreased and geostrategic importance of Azerbaijan increased. Also, the proximity to Afghanistan and Iraq gave big geopolitical importance to the country.

The Obama administration became totally different than previous presidents due to regional and global challenges. Obama gave high importance to the domestic issues, and the Armenian lobby took advantage to make pressure on all affairs related to Azerbaijan. Obama's priorities also negatively affected bilateral relations. His term was mostly passive for the peace talks of the Nagorno-Karabakh but he was aware and careful about its dangerous potentials to the regional security. Russian dominance became another factor to reduce US initiatives. Turkey was accepted as a primary actor for the regional balance, and normalization process with Armenia became a source of hope in this way. This caused damages for the long-term US interests in the region, especially for the bilateral relations with Azerbaijan.

Lastly, the Trump administration tries to repair the negative outcomes of the previous policies by accepting Azerbaijan as a Muslim and secular country which supports the collaboration with the US in all manners. On one hand, human rights is a concerning point for Washington and on the other hand, the country has a meaning to balance two important regional actors. Although the case of Iran creates concerns, US officials clearly gave a message that it will not damage to Azerbaijan's economy, there will be tolerance towards the bilateral relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. Therefore, the country needs to focus on the resolution issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to become careful about the sanctions initiative not to damage Azerbaijani economic interests in the region.

American approach towards Azerbaijan mostly base on changeable dynamics in the world politics and partially the domestic pressures which are made by the Armenian lobby. Attitudes and behaviors of leaders are dependent on these factors in which Azerbaijan has some options to shape the relations with its energy and security cards. At this point,

Azerbaijani leadership became successful in the implementation of the balance policy since the Heydar Aliyev period. If both sides are satisfied with the current situation, there is no expectation for a negative outcome for the middle-term. Therefore, Azerbaijan needs to explore new grounds to bolster the ties for a long-term partnership.

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TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla birlikte dünya siyasetinde yaşanan değişimler ABD'nin dış politika yapım sürecini doğrudan etkilemiş ve bu doğrultuda, Sovyetlerden bağımsızlığını ilan eden ülkelere yönelik farklı yaklaşımlar üretilmiştir. Her biri farklı özelliklere sahip olan bu ülkeler arasında, enerji ve ekonomik potansiyeli yüksek olan Azerbaycan farklı bir konumda değerlendirilmiştir. Bu ülkenin merkeze alındığı büyük çaplı projeler geliştirilmiş ve Hazar kaynaklarının dünya pazarına sunulması için her türlü girişim teşvik edilmiştir. Bu, aynı zamanda ABD'ye rakip güçlerin dengelenmesi ve bir oranda cezalandırılması anlamını da taşımıştır. Bölgede Rusya ve İran'ın varlığını her zaman tehdit olarak gören ABD, bölge ülkelerini çeşitli yollarla ortak yapma yönünde çalışmıştır. Ekonomik projeler, siyasi birliktelikler ve güvenlik işbirlikleri gibi alanlarda partner ülke seçimi önem kazanmıştır. Bu, bir anlamda ABD'nin eski Sovyet coğrafyasını anlama ve yeni bir dış politika konsepti geliştirme süreci olarak adlandırılabilir.

1990'lı yılların başlarından itibaren, toprakları üstünde sahip olduğu bölgesel çatışma olan Dağlık Karabağ meselesinden dolayı büyük ölçekli bir savaş yaşayan Azerbaycan, doğalgaz

ve petrol projelerinin parlayan yıldızı olarak ABD hükümeti ve şirketlerinin odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Henüz iç siyasetteki sorunlarını çözememiş durumda bulunan Azerbaycan'ın doğal kaynaklarının değerlendirilmesi ve dış pazara açılması konusunda hızlı ilerleme sağlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, dönemin hükümetini oluşturan Clinton yönetiminin Azerbaycan'a yaklaşımını etkileyen en önemli faktörler enerji ve ekonomi konuları olmuştur. Bu alanlarda büyük başarılar sağlanırken, Amerikan iç siyasetinde etkili bir yere sahip olan Ermeni lobilerinin Dağlık Karabağ meselesinden dolayı yürüttüğü Azerbaycan karşıtı propagandalar ikili ilişkilere olumsuz yansımıştır. Bu propaganda ve hükümete baskılardan dolayı hem Azerbaycan'ın ABD yardımlarından mahrum kalmasını sağlayan yasa onaylanmış hem de Dağlık Karabağ konusunda herhangi bir ilerleme sağlanamamıştır. Bu çelişkili görünen durum ABD-Azerbaycan ilişkilerindeki en sorunlu dönemlerden birisini oluşturmaktadır. Aynı dönemde Dağlık Karabağ sorununun çözümü için kısmi olarak etki gösteren ABD, kökten çözüm için etkili olamamış, barışa yönelik adımları iyi niyet söylemleri seviyesinde kalmıştır.

Clinton yönetiminden sonra göreve gelen Bush hükümeti ile ikili ilişkilerde yeni bir sayfa açılmıştır. Bunun asıl nedeni 11 Eylül 2001'de ABD'de yaşanan terör saldırısıdır. Bu süreçte terörizme karşı küresel bir savaş başlatan Bush yönetimine en çok destek sağlayan ülkelerden olan Azerbaycan, bu defa jeostratejik öneme sahip bir ülke olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu önemli süreçte, ABD yardımlarını önleyen yasa kaldırılmış ve Azerbaycan'la herhangi bir sorunun olmamasına özen gösterilmiştir. Azerbaycan ise buna karşılık olarak NATO'nun tatbikatlarına katılmış ve Afganistan'a asker göndererek işbirliğini artırmıştır. İlişkilerin en iyi dönemi olarak adlandırılabilecek bu süreçte ABD bu ülkeyi Müslüman ve seküler bir model olarak kabul etmiştir. Ayrıca ülkenin Afganistan ve Irak gibi çatışma bölgelerine yakın olması da önemini artırmıştır. Bu dönemde Ermeni lobilerinin ABD hükümetine baskısının önemsenmediği görülebilir. Azerbaycan'ın bir güvenlik partneri olarak Ermeni lobilerinden daha fazla öneme sahip olarak değerlendirildiği bu süreçte, Azerbaycan ordusunun kalitesi de yükselmiştir. Bu faktör de, Dağlık Karabağ konusunda ülkenin elini güçlendiren unsurlardan birisi olmuştur. Bu dönemde barış görüşmeleriyle ilgili olarak ABD'nin önemli adımlar attığı da bilinmektedir.

İlişkilerin duraklama sürecine girdiği Obama yönetiminde ise, ABD'nin öncelikleri daha çok Rusya üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Kafkasya'daki etkisini giderek kaybeden ABD, bu bölgede Rusya'nın artan etkisine karşı bir politika geliştirememiş ve bu durum doğrudan Azerbaycan'la olan ilişkilere de yansımıştır. Öte yandan, ABD iç siyasetinde yeniden varlık gösteren Ermeni lobilerinin Azerbaycan karşıtı çalışmaları sonuç vermeye başlamıştır. Bunun

örneklerinden birisi olarak, Azerbaycan'a uzun süre büyükelçi gönderilememiş, gönderilen Matthew Bryza ise yine bu lobiler tarafından hedef alındığından dolayı kısa süreli olarak görevde kalabilmiştir. Buna ek olarak, Dağlık Karabağ meselesinin çözümü için arabuluculuk faaliyeti gösteren Minsk Grubu'nun eşbaşkanlarından olan ABD, bu konuda yeterlilik gösterememiş ve süreci Rusya'nın inisiyatifine bırakmıştır. Bu süreçte Rusya'nın siyasi ve askeri alanlardaki etkinliği artmış ve Azerbaycan ile Ermenistan'a silah satışı yükselmeye devam etmiştir. Bu süreçte Dağlık Karabağ'da yaşanan yeni çatışmalara dahi sessiz kalan ABD'nin güvenilirliği sorgulanır hale gelmiştir.

Obama döneminin hasarını onarma adına iyi niyet adımı atan Trump yönetimi ise bölgeyi küresel güvenlik için önemli bir alan olarak ele almıştır. Özellikle Azerbaycan'ı Rusya ve İran'a karşı denge merkezi olarak gören Trump yönetimi bölgeye özel önem verdiğini belirmiştir. ABD Ulusal Güvenlik Danışmanı John Bolton'ın Azerbaycan'a yaptığı ziyarette bu ülkeyi Rusya ve İran'la komşu olan tek devlet olarak tanımlaması denge politikası yönündeki görüşleri kuvvetlendirmiştir. Aynı zamanda Bolton'ın Rusya'nın bölge ülkelerine silah satışını artırmış olmasından duyulan rahatsızlığı dile getirmesi ve ABD'nin de benzer bir girişimde bulunmasının mantıklı olacağını açıklaması bölgede yeni bir ABD politikasının oluşacağı yönünde beklentiler meydana getirmiştir. Dağlık Karabağ konusunda daha aktif bir ABD etkisinin olması gerektiğini belirten Bolton, bu sorunun devamı konusunda Rusya'yı suçlamıştır. İran konusunda sert yaptırımların devam etmesi gerektiğine inanan Trump yönetimi bu süreçte Azerbaycan'ın endişelerini de ele almaya başlamıştır. İran ile önemli ekonomik ve enerji işbirlikleri bulunan Azerbaycan'ın ağır yaptırımlar sürecinde olumsuz etki görmemesi için elden gelen çabanın sunulacağını belirten ABD, İran'la olan ilişkileri konusunda Azerbaycan'ı zor duruma düşürmeyeceği sözünü de vermiştir. Tüm bu gelişmeler, Trump döneminde Azerbaycan'ın yeniden değerlendirileceği yönünde beklentilere neden olmuştur. Özellikle rakip güçlerin etkisinin azaltılması ve ABD'nin bölgede yeniden baskın bir politika izlemesi için yeni bir dış politika perspektifi oluşturulmaktadır.