

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Realist Evaluation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Armenia-Azerbaijan and its Strategic Implications for Russia

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Abstract: This Paper examines the lengthy-strolling Armenia-Azerbaijan warfare over Nagorno-Karabakh and its strategic ramifications for Russia using each classical and neorealist theories of worldwide family members. It investigates two major queries: (1) How does the Nagorno-Karabakh war illustrate fundamental realist concepts? (2) What outcomes has the struggle had on Russia's strategic pastimes and local power dynamics? The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, which has its roots in the fall of the Soviet Union, is characterized by way of fierce nationalism, territorial claims, and violent outbursts, the maximum current of which occurred in 2020. The actions of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which both region a higher precedence on navy might, alliances, and territorial manage than on liberal or legal requirements, are explained by using realist principle, which emphasises anarchic global family members, countrywide interest, and energy struggles. Russia's involvement serves as any other instance of realism in motion. Moscow continues near commercial and electricity hyperlinks with Azerbaijan, even though it has an army base in Gyumri and a formal alliance with Armenia via the CSTO. A realism approach to control both sides and hold Western powers out of the place is reflected in this twin engagement. Russia reinforced its regional power after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh crisis by negotiating a truce and deploying peacekeepers. Turkey's support for Azerbaijan heightened regional complexities, reflecting power struggles and realist alliances influencing stability and geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus. All things considered, the battle is a prime instance of realist dynamics in submit-Soviet geopolitics, where regional conflicts further larger strength agendas and exhibit the continuing applicability of realism in comprehending worldwide affairs.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Strategic Implications, Armenia, Azerbaijan, South Caucasus, Case Studies, Russia, CSTO, Geopolitics, Realism

Introduction

One of the most unstable and unresolvable conflicts in the post-Soviet sphere for a long time has been the Armenia-Azerbaijan battle over Nagorno-Karabakh. The battle has exploded into bloodshed on occasion, maximum lately at some stage in the 2020 conflict that led in massive territorial adjustments and the deployment of Russian forces. it's far rooted in ethnic tensions, ancient grudges, and conflicting claims to sovereignty. Nagorno-Karabakh, that's placed in the South Caucasus, is strategically located at the assembly factor of Europe and Asia. it's miles in the middle of a region that is marked with the aid of problematic geopolitical rivalries among Western pursuits, especially the ones of the us and the eu, and local powers like Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

The motivations and movements of the principal gamers inside the struggle are tested in this take a look at using realism concept, which locations an emphasis on state-centric contention for survival, strength, and strategic gain. via doing this, it seeks to illustrate how protection worries, strategic dreams, and balance-of-electricity dynamics affect the behavior of each overseas and regional powers. Realism offers

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a useful prism via which to see both the broader regional alignments and actions that either worsen or reduce the struggle, in addition to the continued instability in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia's feature as an electricity broker and mediator is given special consideration. Russia has usually performed a stabilizing however self-serving function in the warfare as a formal protection guarantor via the Collective security Treaty organization (CSTO) and an ancient supporter of Armenia. Moscow simultaneously strives to preserve its have an effect on over the South Caucasus by portraying itself as an important player in nearby protection and upholds practical connections with Azerbaijan. This looks at uses a realism paradigm to analyze how Russia manages its conflicting goals of preserving its strategic dominance and balancing nearby energy.

With the aid of dissecting those tactics, the analysis advances our know-how of how realist imperatives—like the want for strategic depth, influence, and deterrence—continue to impact the Nagorno-Karabakh war and limit the chance of an enduring peace. eventually, the take a look at presents insights into the methods in which wonderful-energy politics and regional security preparations interact in post-battle regions in which geopolitics, ethnicity, and sovereignty converge.

Theoretical Framework: Realism in International Relations

A typical theoretical framework in international relations, realism places a strong emphasis on survival, strength, and the anarchic man or woman of the global order. Classical philosophers like Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, who believed that human nature become basically self-involved and power-hungry, are credited with giving upward thrust to realism. There are two styles of present day realism: structural (or neorealism) realism and classical realism.

In keeping with Hans Morgenthau's definition of classical realism, objective legal guidelines derived from human nature regulate global politics. States behave in pursuit of prestige and strength, and countrywide hobby takes precedence over morality. Kenneth Waltz's structural realism, then again, stresses the anarchic shape of the worldwide system and contends that states' movements are determined with the aid of their capacity to distribute assets instead of by using their inherent nature.

Prominent offensive realism John Mearsheimer contends that states have to need most strength if you want to survive. Realist idea offers a clear framework for comprehending nation behavior in areas where wonderful electricity interests collide, which includes the South Caucasus."

Among the basics of realism are:

- ▶ **Statism:** the main player in global politics is the country.
- ▶ **Survival:** ensuring each state's own survival is its pinnacle precedence.
- ▶ **Self-assist:** States ought to rely on their own protection in anarchic structures.
- ▶ **Strength and Protection:** To guard their pastimes, states goal to accumulate power.

Those principles display up in the strategic calculations of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh warfare. State electricity is driven with the aid of the need for local supremacy, security assurances, and territorial control conduct steady with realism presumptions.

Historical Background of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Azerbaijan's internationally identified borders include the mountainous, ethnically Armenian-majority place of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has lengthy been a hotbed of ethnic strife, territorial disputes, and conflicting nationalist claims. After the Russian Revolution and a quick time of independence for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the South Caucasus location become covered into the Soviet Union inside the early 20th century, which is when the war first started out.

Beneath Joseph Stalin's "divide and rule" policy, the Soviet authorities controversially determined to include Nagorno-Karabakh in the borders of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) inside the early 1920s whilst additionally giving it the repute of a self-reliant oblast (known as the Nagorno-Karabakh self-reliant Oblast, or NKAO). because the vicinity's Armenian network, who at the time accounted for about 94% of the populace, continued to be politically subservient to the Azerbaijani SSR, this administrative structure institutionalized ethnic hostility and planted the seeds for future war.

Because of authoritarian control, interethnic hostilities had been normally subdued for the duration of the Soviet generation. though, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh persisted to harbor grudges and wanted to unite with Soviet Armenia. those lengthy-standing grievances got here to the floor inside the mid-1980s with the appearance of glasnost and perestroika. whilst Nagorno-Karabakh's nearby parliament determined to split from Azerbaijan and be a part of Armenia in 1988, it sparked retaliatory pogroms towards Armenians in Azerbaijani cities which includes Baku and Sumgait, as well as big-scale protests and ethnic violence. these occasions signaled the begin of open battle and intercommunal strife, which quickly intensified as the Soviet Union approached disintegration the first Nagorno-Karabakh warfare (1988–1994) broke out towards this backdrop of waning state authority and nationalist passion. Over one million human beings, together with both ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis, were displaced by means of the combating, which is stated to have killed 30,000 people. to be able to create a non-stop land hall between Armenia and the enclave, ethnic Armenian forces, supported by means of the Republic of Armenia, were able to capture not best Nagorno-Karabakh however additionally seven neighboring districts of Azerbaijan. even though no kingdom, which include Armenia, formally recognized the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh (also called the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic), ethnic Armenian government took control of these areas and proclaimed it to be independent (Valeriano, 2009b).

A ceasefire mediated by way of Russia ended energetic hostilities in May additionally 1994, but it did not settle the underlying political conflict. even as Azerbaijan upheld its worldwide criminal declare to the vicinity, the ceasefire left Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions below de facto Armenian sovereignty. America, France, and Russia co-chaired the employer for protection and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk institution, which changed into entrusted with mediating a nonviolent resolution. however, the warfare remained unresolved no matter a long time of negotiations, numerous proposals, and excessive-degree summits due to the fact neither aspect become prepared to make concessions on important troubles like Nagorno-Karabakh's statehood or the repatriation of displaced people.

The ceasefire's vulnerability became highlighted by sporadic escalations and border clashes. numerous hundred squaddies and civilians had been killed throughout the so-known as four-Day conflict in April 2016, which turned into one of the maximum superb flare-ups. Azerbaijan has shown its increasing potential and resolution to trade the fame quo via pressure by means of modernizing its army and dramatically increasing its protection price range through the years. The small-scale struggle served as a prelude to a greater great and very last combat that could arise only some years later.

Following years of escalating hostilities and fruitless diplomatic attempts, Azerbaijan started a full-scale navy campaign in September 2020 in a try and retake the areas lost in the course of the first Nagorno-Karabakh warfare. Azerbaijani forces improved quickly way to superior conflict processes and superior drone era, specially from Israel and Turkey. They reclaimed massive regions of land over the direction of six weeks, inclusive of the strategically important city of Shusha (Shushi), that's simplest 10 kilometers from Stepanakert, the provincial capital. The warfare induced substantial damage and hundreds of deaths.

A great geopolitical turning factor became reached on November 10, 2020, when a trilateral ceasefire agreement mediated by way of Russia introduced a prevent to the continuing warfare. in accordance with the deal, Russian forces had been stationed alongside the Lachin corridor, which serves as a vital conduit among Armenia and the remaining Armenian-managed regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, whilst Armenia

promised to go away a number of the districts across the region. by using solidifying Azerbaijan's territorial profits and reaffirming Russia's position as the main energy dealer inside the South Caucasus, the deal substantially altered the nearby map.

Tensions are still excessive despite the ceasefire. With intermittent battle persisting and peace negotiations generating little result, Nagorno-Karabakh's status continues to be up for debate. moreover, new strategic variables have emerged because of the publish-war environment, together with multiplied Turkish have an impact on within the place and growing worries about safety, ethnic cohabitation, and humanitarian issues. within the publish-Soviet generation, the war keeps functioning a metaphor for the bigger issues of nationalism, territorial sovereignty, and incredible electricity competition.

Realist Interpretation of the Conflict Dynamics

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan implemented rules primarily based on countrywide hobby, survival, and security, consistent with a realist attitude. Armenia's takeover of Azerbaijan's territory at once threatened Azerbaijan's sovereignty. By using utilizing its oil income and strengthening its members of the family with Turkey, a tremendous nearby pressure, Azerbaijan made great investments in modernizing its army.

A realist alliance founded on shared interests, Turkey's army and political assistance in the course of the 2020 warfare verified the way to combat Russian hegemony in the Caucasus and increase affect. For its component, Armenia maintained its stance with the aid of relying on its ancient declare to the location and it's dating with Russia.

But when Moscow took an extra neutral posture at some stage in the 2020 conflict, Armenia's over-reliance on Russia proved to be costly. Russia valued its courting with Azerbaijan and wider strategic stability over inflexible alliance allegiance, as visible by using its lack of direct military engagement regardless of Armenia's participation in the CSTO. (Megoran, 2008b).

Case Studies of Major Conflict Phases

The Frozen Conflict and the 1994 Ceasefire

"The ceasefire created a precarious state of affairs that turned into suited to Azerbaijan however tremendous to Armenia. in addition to solidifying Armenia's strategic intensity, it also brought on diplomatic and financial isolation. Because the truce averted decision and maintained a tolerable degree of volatility, Russia became able to hold leverage over each event.

The 2016 April struggle: "In 2016, Azerbaijan examined the limits of the status quo with a 4-day offensive that in short, recaptured territory. This episode exposed Armenia's strategic weaknesses in addition to Azerbaijan's increasing navy self-belief.

The 2020 Warfare: "Azerbaijan's victory inside the 2020 battle changed the local balance of electricity." Russia yet again acted as a mediator, reaffirming its position as the local arbitrator. Drone war and Turkish assistance allowed Azerbaijan to regain manage of strategic regions. Russian peacekeepers were stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh due to the ceasefire deal that became mediated by way of Russia and signed on November 10, 2020. With this struggle, a frozen warfare gave way to a dynamic strength struggle among several local powers.

Russia's Strategic Interests in the South Caucasus

A key component of Russia's large geopolitical plan to hold have an effect on over its "close to abroad"—the post-Soviet area where it ambitions to maintain primacy and buffer zones towards NATO and ecu growth—is its involvement within the South Caucasus. Russia's efforts that are primarily based on realist principle are influenced by way of the country's desire to project energy, protect its national safety, and forestall the rise of rival facilities of influence in a place it views as critical to its sphere of impact.

On this calculation, Armenia, which has traditionally sided with Russia, offers a critical strategic outpost. Moscow's capability to venture navy may within the region and dissuade enemies is reinforced via the status quo of the 102nd Russian army base in Gyumri, near the Turkish border. Russia's function as Armenia's protection guarantor is formalized with the aid of the deployment of Russian soldiers under the phrases of a bilateral settlement and the bigger framework of the Collective safety Treaty enterprise (CSTO). but Moscow declined to without delay interfere, claiming that the combat passed off outdoor of Armenia's recounted borders, exposing the restrictions and selective application of Russia's pledges at some stage in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh battle. This solution demonstrates a strategic, pragmatic balancing act: keeping impact at the same time as fending off involvement that might endanger Russia's ties with different crucial parties, consisting of Azerbaijan.

Strategic ambiguity and pragmatism function the guiding ideas of Russia's approach to Azerbaijan. Even even as Azerbaijan has sided increasingly more with Turkey, a NATO member and developing local pressure, Russia nonetheless keeps diplomatic family members, power cooperation, and fingers sales with Baku. This -pronged approach is a conventional realist pass: by interacting with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia continues its own dominance in local affairs via stopping any usa from being definitely reliant on a competitor force. so as to firmly establish itself as a safety arbitrator and deter other international gamers from seizing the initiative, Russia negotiated and sent a peacekeeping pressure to Nagorno-Karabakh following the 2020 struggle Pomeroy, 2023).

Past bilateral ties, Russia's overarching intention inside the South Caucasus is to offset Western enlargement. The area is turning into a website of strategic competition as the West appears to be relaxed transit routes that keep away from Russia and diversify its electricity resources. Russia's position as Europe's major strength dealer is in chance of being challenged through the eu's expanding strength relations with Azerbaijan, mainly thru the Southern gasoline hall. in the intervening time, Moscow perspectives America' assistance for Armenian civil society and democracy-constructing projects in addition to NATO's alliances with Georgia, a kingdom that aspires to join, as intrusions on its lengthy-status sphere of influence.

Realistically speak to me, the South Caucasus serves as a strategic buffer area, and Russia's sports are supposed to preserve strategic depth whilst preventing adversaries from gaining access to its borders. Russia seeks to maintain manipulate over the parties via the use of its military might, monetary clout, and diplomatic mediation to neutralize disputes in preference to end them once and for all. Russia is capable of assert its function as an important pressure in regional affairs through taking benefit of instability the usage of this tactic.

Russia's typical objective of keeping a multipolar order wherein it continues nearby hegemony and prevents Western establishments from unchecked increasing into Eurasia is in the end pondered in its strategic position in the South Caucasus. Moscow maintains to steer the path of the Armenia-Azerbaijan struggle and the nearby strength dynamics to its gain with the aid of combining army presence, selective involvement, and realpolitik international relations.

Post-2020 Regional Dynamics and Russian Policy Evolution

A brand new local order has emerged in the wake of 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh; one this is posing a developing chance to Russia's long-status hegemony within the South Caucasus. An essential improvement in regional security arrangements became the outlet of the Turkish-Russian joint monitoring middle in Aghdam. Turkey, which has always supported Azerbaijan, become given a reputable presence on the floor in a dispute settlement method that Russia has traditionally managed for the primary time. With Turkey emerging now not only as Azerbaijan's ally but additionally as a co-stakeholder inside the South Caucasus' geopolitical destiny, this alteration signifies a redistribution of electricity.

Russian domination is seriously challenged with the aid of Turkey's assertive foreign coverage beneath President Erdogan, that's prompted with the aid of aspirations to growth Turkish influence in former Ottoman regions and for the duration of the Turkic world. Turkey has installed itself as a local energy broker through using army help, financial funding, and cultural diplomacy; it often fills the voids created by way of Russia's steadily overburdened sources and reactive diplomacy. Realistically speaking, Moscow's hegemonic role is successfully challenged by Ankara's expanding function, which adds a brand new pole of have an impact on to the local balance of electricity.

The consequences of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine are making its maintain in Ukraine even weaker. Further to depleting Russia's monetary and navy belongings, the struggle has broken its popularity and tender strength among its put up-Soviet allies. Armenia and other governments which have historically trusted Russian help have visible speedy adjustments of their foreign regulations due to the invasion. Armenia has been turning increasingly more westward after turning into dissatisfied with Russia's state of being inactive during the 2020 war and its feeble response to Azerbaijani invasions after the truce. underneath Moscow's tighter control, Yerevan might had been impossible ten years in the past, but it has in view that sought stronger connections with the USA, the EU, and even NATO.

The Russian peacekeeping project's vulnerability changed into similarly highlighted in 2023 via resurgent tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh, in particular the blockades of the Lachin hall, which serves as an important conduit among Armenia and the enclave. The 2020 ceasefire agreement's provisions were undermined when Azerbaijan efficiently regained manage over get right of entry to routes in defiance of Russian troops. Similarly to undermining its popularity as a safety assure, Russia's slow response to these occasions has expanded Armenians' political and public disenchantment with Moscow. Armenia's strategic realignment has been elevated through the belief in Yerevan that Russia has either failed or been unwilling to meet its commitments (Lewis, 2022).

Realistically talking, these changes display how Russia's capacity to maintain its regional management even as juggling conflicting pastimes is eroding. Moscow now has to stability its pragmatic ties with a more and more assertive and a success Azerbaijan at the same time as preserving leverage over Armenia, its longtime best friend. With growing Turkish dominance, Armenian-Western rapprochement, and a precarious protection state of affairs, the local chessboard has grown more complicated, and Russia's options have become greater restricted.

Russia is facing exceptional pressure on its balancing act, which has continually been the cornerstone of its nearby approach. Its capacity to persuade events inside the South Caucasus is deteriorating, as seen by means of its reduced strategic bandwidth due to the war in Ukraine, growing competition from Turkey, and growing suspicion amongst previous allies like Armenia. With sizeable ramifications for the destiny of Eurasian geopolitics, Moscow runs the hazard of steadily losing control in an area it previously considered to be inside its undisputed sphere of influence if modern-day traits hold.

Realism and the Future of the South Caucasus

In step with realist principle, the battle will preserve in cycles of escalation and impasse until the nearby strength shape modifications. Armenia's safety reliance on Russia has grown greater precarious, even as Azerbaijan has an advantage because of its navy might and partnership with Turkey. Russia's destiny energy depends on its capability to uphold a navy presence, arbitrate conflicts, and save you Western infiltration and Turkish enlargement. however, the modern balance might be disenchanted by way of the decline in its legitimacy in Armenia and the possibility of accelerated Western involvement. This place remains a traditional theater of energy politics for realism. each participant is concerned in strategic positioning; none are stimulated by way of the idea of humanitarianism. Peace will most effective rise up from a stable balance of electricity; ethical arguments are not going to bring about peace (Lewis, 2022).

Conclusion

Whilst regarded via the lens of realism theory, the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh highlights the competitive nature of global family members, power politics, and strategic pastimes' ongoing relevance. The motivations and behaviors of both regional and additional-nearby actors can be certainly defined with the aid of realism, which places a robust emphasis on nation-centric conduct in anarchic international systems. The significance of self-help, power stability, and the pursuit of country wide interest over normative or cooperative values is evident in each degree of the warfare, whether or not it is characterized by means of war, an uncomfortable ceasefire, or diplomatic maneuvering.

The state of affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh serves as an example of the way volatile situations may be sustained via changing alliances and security worries. Azerbaijan's army enlargement and alliance with Turkey, Armenia's dependence on Russia for safety, and the West's selective involvement all illustrate a bigger trend of aggressive country behavior. The contributors have put relative gains, strategic advantage, and proscribing rival impact beforehand of lengthy-time period dispute resolution based totally on commonplace requirements or worldwide regulation.

Russia's involvement in the warfare serves for instance of the complexities of excellent strength conduct in a multipolar setting. Russia has lengthy dominated the South Caucasus and has maintained its dominance via an aggregate of tough and tender energy techniques, including military outposts, arms sales, international relations, and peacekeeping. however, its supremacy is currently being challenged more and more. The stability of power has modified drastically due to Turkey's ascent to prominence in the area, especially its resolute backing of Azerbaijan at some point of the 2020 battle. at the identical time, Moscow's hegemony as the region's protection arbitrator is gradually eroding due to Western reengagement with Armenia, particularly inside the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion with Ukraine.

These events advocate that the South Caucasus' strategic surroundings are converting, marked with the aid of a growth in multipolarity and the disintegration of hitherto solid alliances. Azerbaijan's strong regional stance, Russia's suffering ability to maintain its historical dominance, and Armenia's attempts to broaden its overseas coverage alliances all represent a complicated realignment of strength. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute continues to be a geopolitical tool utilized by greater effective nations to preserve or growth their influence within the vicinity on this unstable context.

All matters considered, realism theory gives a robust framework for comprehending each the continuing nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh battle and the changing local dynamics surrounding it. The war is a microcosm of broader worldwide trends, in which states' actions are inspired greater with the aid of alliance modifications, power struggles, and strategic contention than through the values of peace or collaboration. The South Caucasus will stay a geopolitical warm spot, pushed extra by way of strategic kingdom actions than via any lasting dedication to nonviolent coexistence, so long as worldwide politics are dominated by means of the realism principles of anarchy, survival, strength, and strategic hobby.

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