

REASONS BEHIND AZERBAIJAN'S SUCCESSFUL LIBERATION WAR

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Both Azerbaijani and international community have been somewhat surprised by the rapid and successful campaign of Azerbaijani military forces to liberate the territories, occupied by Armenian military forces since 1993. This campaign has started on September 27 and within six weeks, Azerbaijan has liberated four of the seven surrounding regions of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region as well as its historic city Shusha, which is located in the difficult mountainous area. The agreement, signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia has effectively formalized the capitulation of Armenia in the battlefield. Armenia has agreed to withdraw from Lachin, Kalbajar and Agdam regions as well.

It should be noted that the first Karabakh war which has erupted in 1987 and moved to the active military phase in early 1990s has lasted in total seven years. During this period, Armenia has achieved significant military superiority in the battlefield, has successfully occupied close to 20% of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized lands and ethnically cleansed around one million Azerbaijanis from their homes. UN Security council has passed four resolutions in early 1990s calling for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian military forces for these territories, yet these resolutions remained on paper. More than 27 years of negotiations under the supervision of the OSCE's Minsk group have not produced any results and the Azerbaijani internally displaced persons continued to live under miserable conditions.

What are the reasons that that Azerbaijan has been able to pursue such a successful military campaign and liberate areas which have taken Armenian almost 7 years to occupy? In this article, we will analyze three main factors that have played a role in this success.

Growing military mightiness

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has found itself in unexpected war with Armenia and lack of any central and organized army. Soviet Union did not allow ethnic republics to maintain strong army units. Thus, Azerbaijan needed to quickly build its army while defending its lands from the Armenian aggressors at the same time. Learning by doing did not work well at that time. The army units lacked modern equipment, close coordination and strong motivation. Many volunteers who wanted to protect their homeland were unified in small groups, which were patronized by local commanders and community leaders rather than Minister of Defense. Each lost region was an addition to the loss of morale and motivation. At the end of this process, some military commanders have even turned against each other and Azerbaijan even faced the threat of

the civil war. Azerbaijan's political leadership at that time was weak, while Armenia was getting much needed assistance from its strong Diaspora abroad.

This time, however, Azerbaijan has managed to demonstrate its army in the most organized and modernized manner. In the past 27 years, using the growing economic potential of the country, Azerbaijan political leadership has built a very sophisticated army. Trainings by foreign experts, purchase of the most modern equipment, better coordination and most importantly unified strong command significantly differ today's army from the army of 1990s. Azerbaijan's national leader Heydar Aliyev has managed to create a centralized army. Central command and coordination have worked well and all military units of the Ministry of Defense have outnumbered the Armenian army both in quality and quantity of the force. Military experts already call this phase of Karabakh war as the "first war of the future", considering the active and precise usage of the drones and how they have made the tanks and other heavy equipment rather insignificant in the battlefield. Azerbaijani soldiers were especially courageous and effective in the battles around Shusha, which was extremely difficult and uphill struggle for them.

Armenian army, on the opposite, looked rather demotivated, disorganized, disoriented and certainly could not resist the power of the strong Azerbaijani army. All fake news and rumors about foreign mercenaries on the side of Azerbaijani army were only aimed at distracting the attention from the bitter reality and finding excuses for the military losses without providing any single video evidence. On the other hand, Armenia itself was actively using volunteers and recruits from other countries to try to keep the occupied territories under control.

Diplomatic advance

In 1990s Azerbaijan was very little known in global arena. The informational blockade and lack of general knowledge about the realities on the ground led to situations in which the international community was indifferent to the occupation of the Azerbaijani lands. Strong Armenian diaspora has managed to brainwash the American and European politicians and pass various pro-Armenian bills in the national parliaments. Many countries provided Armenia humanitarian aid, while Azerbaijani refugees lacked proper care.

Yet, the expanding diplomatic corps of Azerbaijan and the proactive policy of President Ilham Aliyev has gained much respect and support for Azerbaijan's cause in the international forums and organizations. In 2011 Azerbaijan was elected to the UN Security Council, which was a big success for a country of such small size. Azerbaijan actively works with European and American policy makers and governments in the fields of energy, anti-terrorism, security and economic cooperation. At the regional level, Azerbaijan was one of the founders of GUAM, Turkic Council and currently chairs these organizations at the same time chairing the 124-member strong Non-

Aligned Movement. Strong cooperation exists with the Islamic World (OIC), UNESCO and ISESCO in the field of multicultural co-existence of religions and ethnic groups. All of these organizations have condemned the Armenian occupation of the Azerbaijani lands and have created a firm support foundation for Azerbaijan's liberation war.

One can observe that the second Karabakh war has brought wide multinational support for Azerbaijan. Even the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which is a military block led by Russia and providing traditional strong support for Armenia, has refrained from active interference, considering the strong bilateral ties between Azerbaijan and its member states- Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. UN, EU, OIC, NAM and many other organizations have once again displayed strong support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Political leadership of Azerbaijan looked strong, confident and in close unity with the general public.

The role of Turkey

Many experts in the region have been asking a simple question: "Even if Azerbaijan has strong army, economy and diplomacy, would it still be able to liberate its lands without strong political support from Turkey?" Although history doesn't like subjunctive tense, it is clear that Turkey has been a vital and critical factor in this success. As indicated by President Aliyev in numerous interviews, Turkey has provided strong political and moral support to Azerbaijan. Turkish political leadership, including President Erdogan, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and Defense Minister Akar have been in close touch with Azerbaijani counterparts and voiced strong desire to back Azerbaijan till the end of this campaign. Such strong support has deterred other outside powers from getting involved into the conflict, sent strong message to the international community that Azerbaijan is not alone in this fight and that time has long come to settle this conflict and liberate Azerbaijani lands from the occupation.

Azerbaijan has been actively using Turkey and Israel produced drones and other military equipment. Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to be bound by major regional strategic projects such as BTC oil pipeline, Southern Gas Corridor, Baku-Kars Railway and many others. A famous motto "One Nation-Two States" has been effectively translated into practical cooperation in many fields of life and as President Aliyev often says, there are no two other states in the world that enjoy such close fraternal relations. It is not a coincidence that Turkey is now part of the peace process and guarantor of cease-fire in the South Caucasus, as indicated in the bilateral agreement between the Defense Ministers of Russia and Turkey.

Azerbaijan is determined to fully develop and reconstruct the liberated areas and ensure safety and security of all of its citizens in the region, including Armenians too. Only through peaceful co-



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existence of two communities in the region, one can achieve a lasting and sustainable peace for South Caucasus.