

Neo-Ottomanism and its Impact on the Conflict of Artsakh

Oleksandra Honcharova
BA International Relations
CWIBP3
Supervisor: Associate Professor
Dr. Fejes-Nádai Julianna

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Introduction

This study aims to examine the rebirth of neo-Ottomanism together with its consequences for the conflict in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Ankara's foreign policy is based on a political philosophy known as neo-Ottomanism, which revives aspects of the Ottoman Empire's identity and power. The historical birth of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism describes the foundation that formed neo-Ottomanist doctrine and influenced regions affected by it. It first established Islam as a center of unification in the 19th century, later at the beginning of the 20th century focusing on Turkic identity to restore the power of the Turkish nation. Consequently, the formation of AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) introduced the new ideology of neo-Ottomanism under the leadership of Erdogan in 2001.

Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism focuses on the formation of 'greater Türkiye' and religious nationalism to reinstate previous glory equivalent to that of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, there have been notable changes in the Artsakh conflict, which is defined by ethnic and territorial conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, influenced by external forces including Türkiye's neo-Ottomanism. The relations connecting Azerbaijan and Türkiye based on these ideologies eventually resulted in their unity in the expansionist arena which happened to fall, among others, in the Caucasus region, specifically Armenia.

A significant part of this study is dedicated to the analysis of the historical development of neo-Ottomanism. It will describe its two forms, specifically Erdogan's ideology. Consequently, it will focus on the history of Artsakh and the sovereign complications it encountered during the 20th century. Later, it will show the evident presence of neo-Ottomanism in the Artsakh dispute and the final dissolution of Artsakh as a sovereign republic. The study will find that the influence of neo-Ottomanism is present in various factors, including military assistance, cultural interventions, and diplomatic maneuvers. Finally, through analyzing the intricate relationship between neo-Ottomanism and the Artsakh conflict this study will contribute to an understanding of contemporary geopolitics in the South Caucasus.

The research question of this paper is how neo-Ottomanism affected the war in Artsakh, including further expansionist concerns in the Caucasus region.

This paper is based on a secondary resource review and content analysis, where a wide range of materials will be used to provide a complete overview of the neo-Ottomanist effect on the Artsakh dispute. The materials included are academic literature, media sources, official documents, and journals. By analyzing these materials, the study will answer the questions regarding the effect Türkiye's ideology exerts on Artsakh and the danger it creates for the world. The research will also reveal expansionist ideas found within neo-Ottomanism by analyzing Erdogan's responses to different conflicts around the globe.

1. Neo-Ottomanist Historical Foundation

1.1 Pan-Islamism

The historical foundation of neo-Ottomanism builds on a complex past of caliphate and tanzimat. The Ottoman caliphate appears to be illegitimate, as the sultans were indifferent to the cult of their spiritual title of caliphs and its special significance up until the last third of the 19th century. As a result, they were not interested in emphasizing the Ottoman Empire's status as a caliphate. Their political authority and military prowess had long been enough to justify their rule over the conquered territories' Christian and Muslim populations. Aceh and other Muslim states were linked to the Porte from the 16th century, demonstrating their acceptance of the Sultans' spiritual supremacy as the Muslims' leaders and protectors. It is evidence that, regardless of the title Sultans officially had given themselves, they held a legitimate religious authority that was uncontested for many centuries (Fadeeva, 1989).

Islam was a sufficiently adaptable and ubiquitous system to legitimize the usurpation of supremacy if such justification was required. The reform era which spanned the final third of the 19th century was more about keeping with the Europeanization of the empire's socio-political and cultural establishment than religious doctrine.

The need for a theological defense of the sultan's authority over the Arab world and other Muslim-populated areas that remained under the empire did not resurface until after fresh military setbacks and the breakdown of the Ottomans' ideology. At that point, the caliphate was reinstated. Furthermore, the advent of pan-Islamism was linked to nearly a century of European power growth in the Near and Middle East.

Three movements coexisted in the politics and ideology of the Porte during the transitional years of 1871-1888: the fading Ottomanism, the emergence of Turkic nationalism, and pan-Islamism (Ongur, 2014).

According to Irma Fadeeva, a gradual shift from the tanzimat policy, which had started as early as 1871, was observed from the early years of Abdul Hamid II's rule. The pan-Islamist ideology served as the cornerstone of his foreign and domestic policy. Despite lacking the necessary financial means and political standing to carry out his intentions, the sultan declared that he recognized his unrestricted power as caliph not just inside the Ottoman Empire but also in the Muslim world at large. In the final quarter of the 19th century, pan-Islamism emerged as a rival to Europeanization. It was a response to the tanzimat's unavoidable computation errors. When the majority of the Christian-inhabited Balkan regions broke away from the empire, the ruling class embraced the ideology of pan-Islamism to keep the remaining Muslim provinces.

However, the theological reformist theories of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani were far more liberal than official pan-Islamism. He based his teachings on the idea of *ijtihad*, or the freedom of interpretation of the Qur'an. He stated that neither the advancement of Muslim countries nor the most recent scientific discoveries are refuted by the Qur'an.

If the idea of al-Afghani included efforts to reconcile ethnic and religious divides that had historically led to catastrophic wars, Abdul Hamid II's policy was built on escalating and intensifying religious and national tensions. The conservative and fanatical segment of Muslims, which at that time were the majority of the population, found it intriguing. Armenians were subjected to widespread persecution and massacres as a result of this strategy. The brutal repressions were an indication of the Ottoman Empire's fragility as it was nearing the end of its existence (Fadeeva, 1989).

1.2 Pan-Turkism (Turkism)

Turkism, or pan-Turkism, was one of the major ideological currents that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It became the next political movement to define the Turkish nation, to prevent the Ottoman Empire from losing critical political, social, and economic processes. The significant development of this ideology lay in the Tatar era of the Russian Empire, specifically Tatar scholars from the Crimea and the Volga area. It was the notion of creating a large Turkish

state that would include all the Turkic-speaking people of the Caucasus, the Volga-Ural area, Crimea, the Middle East, and Central Asia (Devidze, 2022).

According to Iskander Gilyazov (1970), pan-Turkism was perceived differently by distinct cultures. In Russia, it was regarded as an expansionist movement of Turkic peoples led by Turkey, with the ultimate goal of establishing a common Turkic state and pursuing a chauvinistic attitude towards other states. In Soviet historiography, this trend was particularly apparent and played a significant role, as will be observed later.

Particularly in the period of 1940s-1970s, when the phrase pan-Turkism was genuinely associated with racism and fascism, and the general idea of nationalism acquired a bad connotation. This viewpoint was imposed by communist ideology and therefore, as stated by Gilyazov, should be rejected.

Gilyazov referenced the work of the French historian Leon Kaun “Introduction to the History of Asia, Turks and Mongols”, highlighting the role of the study of Turkic history in Turkey. This book became immensely famous in the Republic of Türkiye towards the end of the 19th century. He believed that the Turkic people were descended directly from the Mongols. Moreover, Kaun defined Mongols as a “racial aristocracy” and exaggerated the actions of Timur and Genghis Khan, portraying them as “superhumans”. He stated that Turks are far more skilled fighters than the Arabs or Persians. The Turkic people were poisoned by the Arabs using the Qur’an, which caused them to lose their sense of nationalism and weakened them. As a result, the establishment of a global Turkic empire was hindered. Some scholars claim that Kaun was directly responsible for the emergence of concepts of Turkic unity among intellectuals in Turkey (Gilyazov, 1970).

Ziya Gökalp was the most well-known figure of pan-Turkism in the Republic of Türkiye at the start of the 20th century. Gökalp believed that language ought to be the primary means of integration for Turks, and that language autonomy was a requirement for political independence. Furthermore, a nation-state’s language has to be reviewed and cleansed of foreign influences. The theoretical underpinnings of pan-Turkism, which broadly speaking served as a basis for the contemporary Turkish state, were originally developed by Ziya Gökalp. For him, the state was actually the nation, hence he was strongly against multinational empires, which he believed were bound for rapid deterioration. Based on this, nation-states should aid their tribal members in multilateral states (Gökalp and Devereux, 1968).

Of all the ideologies that thrived in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, only pan-Turkism was given historic opportunity during World War I. The Turks themselves failed to gain any political benefits from WWI; instead, the Turkic and Muslim components became cards in a larger political game. The previous state of affairs in the world, including the fall of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, the creation of the Soviet state and its satellite republics, and the liberation of colonial people, potentially trapped advocates of pan-Turkism. Moreover, the general belief among the winning nations was that the 1915 killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were the result of pan-Turkist actions (Gilyazov, 1970).

Reha Oguz Turkkan in 1939 introduced the symbol of the gray wolf (Bozkurtcu) as part of Turkish identity (Burris, 2007). His publications were banned and revived multiple times in the form of different journals. Later, his Turkism caused the formation of the ultra-nationalist movement of The Gray Wolf, which played a significant role in relations between Türkiye and Armenia.

Following the start of World War II in 1939-1940, through their diplomatic channels, England and France attempted to support pan-Turkism, which would serve as a pretext for Türkiye's entry into the war against the Soviet Union (USSR). At the French and British pressure, the Finnish ambassador in Budapest made a trip to Ankara where he urged the Turkish government to take notice of the Soviet Turks who were awaiting "liberation from the soviet yoke". However, Turkey remained firmly impartial and refused to fold under pressure.

Once again, attempts were made to exploit pan-Turkism as a tool in a bigger political game, this time against the USSR. Moreover, Germany's endeavors were also unsuccessful and soon forgotten. However, by the beginning of 1945, Türkiye took a strong stance against pan-Turkism, condemning some of the active believers to 2 to 10 years of forced labor (Gilyazov, 1970).

1.3 After the 2000s

The development of neo-Ottomanism as an ideology and policy in the Republic of Türkiye can be credited to Recep Erdogan. The Party of Justice and Development (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP) was founded in 2001 by the former mayor of Istanbul. In contrast to its predecessors, the AKP did not base its Islamic identity at the center of its strategy. In fact, its

leaders made it clear that their party was not Islamist and that democratization, not politicization of religion, was its main goal.

In November 2002, despite being a relatively new party, the AKP was able to secure enough seats in the parliamentary elections to take control of the 550-seat parliament. In April 2007, the party was elected to power in Türkiye. Since then, the party has dominated the majority of the parliament for almost a decade. However, with only 40.9% of the vote in the general elections held in June 2015, the AKP experienced its first temporary defeat. Despite that, in November 2015, during an early general election, the party quickly regained its parliamentary majority (Bardakçi, 2016).

Recep Erdogan resigned as prime minister in August 2014. Ahmet Davutoglu, a prominent member of the AKP and former foreign minister, took his post. Erdogan continued to be active in public life, campaigning for and obtaining the ceremonial position of president. But it soon became evident that he would advocate for amending the constitution to give the president more authority. Proposed amendments to eliminate the prime minister's position and increase the power of the president were put to vote in April 2017. Although the referendum was successful and a date was set to implement the changes, originally set for November 2019. They eventually were put into effect only after Erdogan was reelected as president, together with the new administration taking office in July. Davutoglu left the party in late 2019 to found the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi); in 2020, the Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi, DEVA). Both parties, AKP and DEVA, expressed support for going back to the parliamentary form of government and showed that they share the desire to remove Erdogan from office (Britannica, 2019).

Neo-Ottomanist political doctrine and methods, although regarded as unfeasible in many aspects, have gathered more attention in today's democratic globe. It can hardly be called an innocuous and secure political theory that is only discussed in scholarly settings, after all the seed of neo-Ottomanism has been planted into a strong foundation of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Incipient into the mindset of the Turkic nation after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the attempts to convert Islam from a religion to an ideology to construct a form of a union

between the lands no longer in possession of the Republic of Turkey. All affected the formation of neo-Ottomanism in its two forms. They will be discussed later in this paper (2).

Moreover, with the events occurring in the modern world, Turkish gradual adoption of neo-Ottomanist principles as official policy raises concerns for European civilization. Especially for the countries previously belonging to the Ottoman Empire and those currently having Turkic nationals residing on their territory, for instance, Bulgaria. Also, it is important to note that the Caucasus region also falls into a threatening position, since the strengthening of the Republic of Turkey regarding this doctrine, brings forward the everlasting division of territories between the Republic of Armenia and Turkey (Hristov, 2019).

2. The Two Forms of neo-Ottomanism

The main two forms of neo-Ottomanism can be distinguished by the two rivals - Ahmed Davutoglu and Recep Erdogan. Each has its plans and policies built on a similar foundation but are distinct in Türkiye's foreign policy plan formation.

2.1 Davutoglu's Strategic Depth Doctrine

According to Davutoglu, Türkiye's historical experience, cultural agency, and geographic determinism will all be combined to create a regional hegemon. While Davutoglu promoted the idea of having 'zero problems with neighbors', Erdogan has succeeded in initiating conflicts with almost all of Türkiye's neighbors (Sotiriadis and Maziad, 2020). Ahmet Davutoglu has used the idea of "strategic depth" to direct the foreign policy of Recep Erdogan's administration since taking over as a chief foreign policy advisor (Murinson, 2006). The famous book by Davutoglu bears the same name as this idea. The roots of this theory are 'the multi-dimensional' foreign policy of the Erbakan government, Davutoglu's creative approach to geopolitics, and Ozal's neo-Ottomanism (Robins, 1999). This doctrine's central claim is that historical and geographical depth are perquisites for strategic depth. Turkey therefore has a considerable amount of geographical depth due to the historical footprint of the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, the former puts Türkiye at the epicenter of numerous geopolitical spheres of influence. Davutoglu mixes two geographical regions in his geopolitical vision: "the southern flank of Central Asia" and "the region from the Northern Caucasus in the north to Kuwait in the south", stressing their

belonging to Islamic civilization provides unity to imaginary society. Except for Armenia and the Christian portions of Georgia, this region is an essential component of Islamic civilization, hence the alleged clashes of culture are insignificant causes of the chaotic climate. The only real civilizational clash in this region is related to the Karabakh dispute (Davutoglu, 1998).

The current civilizational crisis can only be resolved by dialogue and a free exchange of values. This contrasts with the criticism of Western-led globalization, which is an attempt to homogenize diverse cultures. Ahmet Davutoglu's revitalized neo-Ottomanism is an expression of his intellectual hostility towards Turkey's westernization process and his philosophical critique of it (Murinson, 2006).

2.2 Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism

Recep Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism will be analyzed in detail in this paper since it plays a crucial role in my research. A classical, civilizational paradigm of the Ottoman Empire's heritage grounded by political, military, and economic might is revived by Turkish neo-Ottomanism, in contrast to other Islamic ideological models, to create a "greater Türkiye" (Sotiriadis and Maziad, 2020). When it came to balancing the demands of the democratic against religious, Turkish against Kurdish, and center against the outsides, Erdogan's primary strength up until 2013 was his ability to create a sufficient image that the majority of the population saw in him a leader who defends and unifies, they so desperately needed.

However, following 2013, Erdogan underwent a dramatic transformation. He was now captive to his anxieties and absorbed by the fortune he acquired over his years in office. The foundational component of Erdogan's identity is his understanding of Ottoman history, which made him prone to dictatorship and manipulation.

One individual, operating in a media-controlled environment and using a combination of nationalism and Islamism, controls the entirety of the nation today. Even now, the specter of autocratic Sultanism lingers. Türkiye's social and political divisions today resemble those of the latter days of the Ottoman Empire, lacking the factor of national unity. In the sphere of politics and authority, *quibiscum viis* - "by whatever means" - appears to be Erdogan's credo. The idealized latest Ottoman era, when Turks were the rulers of one of the greatest empires in history and the sword and shield of a beautiful Islamic civilization, is the foundation of Erdogan's

geopolitical vision. Erdogan among others feels an overwhelming sense of national humiliation and injustice (Yavuz, 2020).

The concept of neo-Ottomanism is strongly associated with this new version of religious nationalism which he claims was lost due to westernization. Providing youth with mandated education in religion and history is one of the goals, as it is assumed to be the only way to address moral issues and emotions of inferiority and humiliation in public settings. Thus, Erdogan is transforming some public schools into Imam-Hatip seminaries, which are traditional training centers for Sunni Muslim clergy. Proper public schools are closing, whereas Iman-Hatip schools are opening in practically every Turkish neighborhood, reaching 4,500 schools in total (Gall, 2018).

In addition, he holds the westernized system responsible for the mistreatment of Muslim people. By frequently highlighting the deplorable agony endured by Muslims in Myanmar and Palestine, Erdogan builds on the shattered feeling of Turkish national pride. Moreover, his idea of building a new Ottoman Empire is getting physical with the urban planning of the “Ottoman project”, demolishing neighborhoods to make room for structures of the Ottoman past. A crucial example is an order issued by Erdogan to reclassify the Hagia Sophia as a mosque in July 2020, following the Council State’s annulment of the Cabinet’s decision in 1934 to establish the landmark as a museum.

After Erdogan came to power, propaganda movies and series also became prominent. These films all center on a single, strong leader who guided the nation to victory. Through media manipulation, Erogan has already rewritten the code governing the public, civil society, and educational system. His government is rewriting history textbooks to reflect his interpretations of the past (Yavuz, 2020). Erdogans’ motivations to be politically involved and support Muslim nationalities causes an undeniable danger to those Christian populations surrounding them. One of the main examples is the Artsakh region which fell victim to Erdogan’s neo-Ottomanism and his support given to Azerbaijan.

3. Brief History of Artsakh

Historically, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) has been a province of several Armenian kingdoms. It is situated on the eastern edge of the Armenian Highlands. Artsakh saw an unparallel period of cultural progress around the start of the 5th century, after Mesrob Mashtots invented the

Armenian alphabet. Furthermore, it was in the Amaras Monastery in the southern region of Artsakh that the first Armenian school was established by him. With multiple key gospels recorded there, Artsakh has always been one of the major Christian cities. The Gospel of Khoranashat, for example, was composed in 1224 for Queen Vaneni (Against Xenophobia and Violence, 2013).

The eastern lowland expansion of Artsakh, which was invaded by nomadic Turkic tribes in the 15th century, was referred to as “Karabakh” (Galichian, 2023). Many of the churches and monuments dedicated to Christianity that had been constructed in earlier centuries were destroyed during this time. The native Christians themselves were progressively driven into the mountains by the nomads as the Turko-Islamic colonization grew in the late Middle Ages. Consequently, the majority of native Armenian people in the central parts of what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan was gone. This formed a catalyst for the ongoing conflict between the Turkic tribesmen of the southwest Caucasus, who identify as Azerbaijanis since the 1920s, and the Armenians of Artsakh (ARACS, n.d.).

Russia gained control of Transcaucasia’s territory in 1813. In 1867, by decree of the Emperor all of Transcaucasia was separated into five provinces: Kutaisi, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Yelizavetpol, and Baku. Artsakh was included in the province of Yelizavetpol. Up to 1918, these administrative divisions persisted with slight modifications.

From May 1918 to April 1920, Karabakh existed as a de facto separate nation. By law in essence, Nagorno-Karabakh was no less than other Republics of the South Caucasus; it had a National Council, a government, military forces, and other distinctive features of statehood. Shushi was a wealthy and successful city until Turkish and Azerbaijani armies raided it in March 1920, pillaging and setting it on fire. Tens of thousands of Armenian citizens were massacred, and Shushi was destroyed (Against Xenophobia and Violence, 2013).

3.1 Pretext of pan-Turkism: Armenian Genocide

The Armenian genocide was initiated under the pretext of saving the Ottoman Empire from total collapse under the notion of pan-Turkism, which was discussed in detail earlier in this paper (1.2). In 1913, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), came to power and became the head of state. They promoted the establishment of an entirely Turkish state and held an

ultra-nationalistic worldview. The greater plan of CUP was to drive out Armenians from the Empire and its surrounding regions to establish a new pan-Turanian empire.

The Ottoman government began the systematic extermination of the civilian Armenian population in April 1915. Up to the Empire's demise and the Republic of Turkey's establishment in 1923, persecutions persisted with differing degrees of severity (Adalian, n.d.). There were two million Armenians living in the collapsing Ottoman Empire preliminary to World War I. There were less than 400,000 by 1922. A genocide, according to historians, claimed the lives of the remaining 1.5 million people (Kifner, 2007).

According to what I previously mentioned in part 1.1, a sultan, endowed with unlimited power, presided over the Ottoman government, which had its headquarters in Istanbul (Constantinople). The Turks were combative people who followed Islam. Being a Christian minority, the Armenians were treated as second-class citizens and were not granted the usual protection laws. They were not assured of the security of their properties or lives. Also, they could not participate in governance since they were not Muslims, and they had to pay harsh taxes. The demands of political groups for administrative reforms in the districts populated by Armenians and improved police protection against Kurdish predatory tribes only stroke more repression.

The Armenian genocide, which began on April 24, 1915, when several hundred intellectuals from Armenia were detained, picked up, and eventually put to death, is commemorated by the Armenian people. In all regions outside of the conflict zones, orders were issued for the deportation of Armenian residents under the cover of a resettlement scheme, during the spring and summer of 1915. Driven hundreds of kilometers towards the Syrian desert were convoys carrying tens of thousands of civilians. It was clear from the inhumane treatment of the deportees - the majority of whom had to walk - that the deportations were primarily meant to be death marches (Adalian, n.d.). Disarmed soldiers were sent to labor battalions, where they were either executed or worked to death (Kifner, 2007). The Ottoman government reduced the Armenian population to a terrified mass of starving people whose identities were crushed in one swoop through methodically planned deportation, systematic massacre, intentional starvation and dehydration, and ongoing brutalization.

The Republic of Türkiye decided to reject the accusation of genocide and refute the idea that the deportations and other atrocities were part of a deliberate scheme to wipe out the

Armenian population. The Armenian population was reduced to a small area, making up no more than 10% of their historical homeland, after the Soviet Army seized control of what was left of Russian Armenia in 1920 (Adalian, n.d.). Genocide was the main crime committed against the Armenian population, which was justified by a newly established political ideology. This provides historical evidence that the Artsakh dispute may be directly impacted by efforts to create a “Greater Turkey” and impose Erdogan’s neo-Ottomanist doctrine.

3.2 Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the USSR

After the Sovietization of the Caucasus region, Karabakh was divided and entitled to two representatives. Mountainous Karabakh Revkom (Revolutionary Committee) represented the Armenian community that dominated in the mountains, while the Karabakh Revkom sought to stand for the whole territory including both Armenian and Turkic communities (Saparov, 2012).

On November 30, 1920, the main body of Bolshevik control in Azerbaijan declared that Nagorno-Karabakh, Zagezur, and Nakhichevan, which Azerbaijan had previously claimed, were now integral elements of Armenia. Furthermore, on June 12, 1921, the Azerbaijani SSR National Council issued a formal proclamation confirming their previous declaration. However, the Azerbaijani government quickly abandoned their earlier promises and redoubled their attempts to seize power over the region (Dekmerjian, 1968).

The border allocation negotiations ended on June 25 without a clear resolution. Ordzhonikidze and Kirov felt compelled to send Narimanov an urgent telegram with a hardly concealed demand that Azerbaijan give up its claim to areas of Karabakh that are inhabited by Armenians, so that the boundary dispute may be resolved peacefully. Such a telegram raised concerns in the Azerbaijani leadership, they realized that the Armenian claim to Karabakh would grow and that Azerbaijan might not win the dispute if such representatives were in power.

July 4, 1921, a vote took place to finalize the fate of Karabakh. In addition to voting in favor of adding Karabakh’s mountainous region to Armenia, the majority of Kavburo opposed holding the referendum over the entire region, which may have resulted in an outcome that favored Azerbaijan. Given the significance of the topic, Narimanov turned to his last hope in a desperate attempt to have the governing body settle the matter, which as a result was sent to Moscow. The conclusion made the following day was among the most perplexing. At a subsequent Kavburo meeting on July 5, Ordzhonikidze and Amayak Nazaretian - secretary of the

organization of Georgian Revkom - proposed a revision of the decision issue in front of Stalin in Moscow. As a result, the prior ruling was overturned, designating Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent territory inside the Azerbaijani SSR (Saparov, 2012).

Since the beginning, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh have rejected this approach. They had repeatedly petitioned central authorities to merge Karabakh with Soviet Armenia. In this regard, 45,000 people joined the 1965 petition for reunion with Armenia, and later in 1987 the number already constituted 80,000 (Kocharyan, 2016).

4. Role neo-Ottomanism Plays in Artsakh War

4.1 Tensions Between Azerbaijan and Karabakh

Between 1991 and 1994, roughly, Armenia and Azerbaijan saw their worst warfare. In 1991, the Armenian community decided to proclaim independence from Azerbaijan as the Soviet Union began to collapse. This resulted in a conflict, which ultimately turned into a rivalry between Armenia and Baku. Thousands had died and hundreds of thousands had fled on both sides of the conflict by the end of 1993. By May 1994, 14% of Azerbaijan's land was under Armenian control. During that phase, direct talks with the Karabakh authorities began, marking the first time in the conflict that the Azerbaijani government had acknowledged Artsakh as a three-party participant. Consequently, Russian diplomatic talks led to the signing of a cease-fire on May 12, 1994 (Waal, 2013).

The precise number of casualties from the violent conflict is unknown, says Ambassador Rudolf Perina in his interview with Stu Kennedy. Although it is likely closer to a million people who were left as refugees with 20,000 killed and 60,000 wounded. Even though Nagorno-Karabakh only had 200,000 people living there, the refugees were Azerbaijanis who had been uprooted from Armenia and Armenians who had fled Azerbaijan (ADST, 2013).

For the Armenian side, for instance, the Key West (April 3-6, 2001) was a very attractive bargain, perhaps the finest they had ever been offered. The evacuation of Armenian soldiers from occupied Azerbaijani territory, the lifting of the embargo on Armenia, the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced people to their homes, and the status of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh in the event of a definitive peace agreement were among the subjects covered. However, everything fell apart when Azerbaijani President Aliyev began to voice

concerns about unimportant matters and Kocharian refused to budge. It turned out to be a dead end.

From the Armenian side the only complication was that initially, they insisted on including the Armenians of Artsakh in the negotiations. However, it was obvious that Aliyev would not consent to include two Armenian representatives because the only discussions were between Kocharian and him. Kocharian abandoned this idea, resolving many issues (RFE/RL, 2001).

According to Perina, since the Armenians controlled the entire region, they were more of a status quo force than the Azerbaijanis. As a result of the conflict, Turkey and Azerbaijani closed their borders and imposed a trade embargo, leaving the Armenians isolated and attacking most of their frontier. For the Armenians, this had significant financial consequences. The fact that foreigners occupied 15% of what Azerbaijan considered to be their territory posed the biggest issue. They demanded the return of their land (ADST, 2013).

4.2 Artsakh Now and Its Relation to Erdogan's Policy

The Armenian Republic Artsakh, also referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh and protected by the Republic of Armenia, was attacked on September 27, 2020, by the Republic of Azerbaijan. Since then, there has been an unfair war between the roughly 150,000-person population of Artsakh and the nearly 10 million-person population of Azerbaijan. In the meanwhile, certain areas of Armenia, which are Artsakh's ally, have also been bombed and attacked by drones. The situation in Artsakh became even more intolerable when the Turkish government made it clear amid the crisis that it supports Azerbaijan with all of its resources.

Azerbaijan attacked Artsakh in April 2016, sparking a brief but fierce conflict that claimed many lives on both sides. The primary cause of this predicament appears to be the fact that Ilham Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan since 2003, had been attempting for some time to conceal the unfavorable effects of his protracted rule during the Artsakh conflict. Aliyev has been attempting to retake Artsakh with assistance from the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who served as a prime minister from 2003 to 2014 and as a president since 2014.

It is important to note that although the Azerbaijani side has frequently threatened war, even claiming that Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, is a part of Azerbaijan, the Armenian side

has always welcomed talks and peace. Relationships between Armenians and Azerbaijanis are hampered by the hate propaganda against Armenians that has been ingrained in Azerbaijan over the past 25 years due to government manipulation of the Azeri public through digital and social media. Similar to the tactics that Erdogan is using in his propaganda campaign in Turkey (Kartashyan, 2020).

The authorities of Armenia and Artsakh have consistently stated that Turkey is actively involved in the conflict by supplying weapons, exports, and aid. Erdogan has also stated multiple times that he supports Azerbaijan's attempts to occupy Artsakh and blames Armenians for the conflict. In addition, multiple accounts exist regarding Turkey's deployment of Islamic Jihadists to help Azeris on the front lines of the conflict in Artsakh (Jones, 2020).

As previously stated, neo-Ottomanism represents Ankara's perceptions of what will best serve its interests in the post-Soviet sphere as well as changes within Türkiye. While some regimes, like Azerbaijan, are drawn to this ideology, others are aware of the potential consequences of adopting it (Kartashyan, 2020).

There is, in fact, a grave risk associated with this ideology - namely, the risk of losing one's independence and falling under Turkish rule. Erdogan's external policy demonstrates that he has a relatively expansive approach and consistently seeks to meddle in other governments' internal affairs, for instance in Syria, Libya, and Cyprus. It is unclear how far Erdogan can take his drive for expansion. His declaration in 2020, "Jerusalem is our city, a city from us," was made very apparent. It would be wise to give careful thought to this declaration (Ahren, 2020).

4.3 Türkiye's Ties with Azerbaijan

Türkiye established diplomatic relations with all of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan when the USSR collapsed in 1991. However, given the belief that Turks and Azeris are people of the same blood, their contact is the closest. In 2011, two agreements were signed that allowed the countries to cooperate on the joint production of rifles and grenade launchers (Fuller, 2013).

Türkiye made a clear shift from its long-standing position on Nagorno-Karabakh when it formally offered Baku military support for the first time. Turkish reliance on and investment in Azerbaijan's valuable gas deposits via a southern gas corridor was the main reason for this

unexpected and seeming support. Additionally, reciprocity remained a cornerstone of the new pragmatic era in Baku-Ankara ties.

In 2017, the states initiated defense cooperation and trade channels by signing a defense and strategic partnership agreement. The Azerbaijan State Oil Company also made significant investments in Turkey. Moreover, Baku purchased drones during a period of economic unrest in Turkey, which turned out to be divine assistance. Consequently, Türkiye's reaction in Nagorno-Karabakh was fueled by hatred toward Yerevan and an alignment of interests with Baku.

Neo-Ottomanist doctrine, as previously mentioned, demonstrates the desire of the Turkish government to leave a mark on the region. Thus, in an effort to strengthen Türkiye's standing as a regional force, President Erdogan has meddled and participated in a number of regional conflicts. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Azerbaijan has also maintained Turkic values. In the South Caucasus, it is seen as a tactical advantage to further Turkish objectives. Both regional players benefited from masterstroke in the absence of Artsakh Armenia (Rashid, 2021).

4.4 Neo-Ottomanist Expansion Attempts

In place of the West's objectives of economic expansionism, Türkiye has promoted a strategy of economic cooperation with Africa. In contrast, Türkiye's territorial expansion – which reflects a notion of neo-Ottomanism – is aimed at recovering the lands that it formerly controlled by advancing into northern Syria. As of 2020, Turkey took over Syria's Idlib and Afrin provinces (Sahar, 2020).

After a thorough analysis of the situation, it can be said that the Republic of Türkiye is actually advancing the neo-Ottomanist ideology by consolidating its power over strategically significant areas. It has added over 30,000 soldiers to its Northern Cyprus force, demonstrating that it is not stopping. In relation to coastal gas finds in Cyprus, Türkiye has also asserted territorial claims (Bozkurt, 2023).

Moreover, Türkiye has strengthened its influence in Central Asia by forging commercial connections with the region. The creation of TAKM (Turkish military force), which is perceived as NATO's Turk variant, demonstrates the extent of the relationships. This force includes Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia (Biró, 2021).

Türkiye also demands the restitution of the territory that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire. These lands include modern-day Armenia, parts of Georgia, and Eastern Thrace, now part of Greece. Türkiye might potentially attempt to annex the regions given China's annexation of Ladakh, India's unlawful occupation of Kashmir, and the unpunished Israel's colonization of Palestinian territory (Sahar, 2020).

In Davutoglu's expansionist strategy, Türkiye should focus on a number of different countries separated by levels. Part of Serbia's Muslim-majority Sandzak area, along with North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania make up the first level. The remainder of the Balkans – Bulgarian Thrace, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a portion of Greece, and Serbia – are included in the second level. The next expansion territories are determined by the succession of the nations supporting Türkiye's policy, for instance, Azerbaijan.

When it comes to NATO, Nemanja Plotan raised concerns that if the alliance finds it difficult to keep relations peaceful and stable among its members, it would delegitimize the organization and push the whole alliance into crisis (Plotan, 2024). This became a concern when hostilities between Greece and Turkey over the eastern Mediterranean's gas-rich shores grew (Brunet, 2020). Given that the majority of Balkan countries are involved, it is unclear if NATO can effectively stop the expansion.

Beyond gaining complete authority over Artsakh, Azerbaijan has an additional objective that it hasn't been able to accomplish. This is the 'Zangezur corridor,' which is intended to link Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan through the territory of Armenia. This has caused growing fear in the Armenian populace, the possibility of losing sovereignty over the Iranian-bordering region of Armenia that is constantly being referred to as Azerbaijani by Ilham Aliyev (Ivshina and Barabanov, 2023).

4.5 Dissolvement of Artsakh

Stepanakert and Yerevan had been pressured by Baku for a considerable amount of time to begin talks over regional integration and inclusion of Armenians of Artsakh into Azerbaijan. Ultimately, it made the decision to employ force on September 19, 2023. In just one day, its military offensive brought Baku's desired outcome. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic gave in, consented to disarm, and started integration procedures.

The Lachin corridor, which is the only route connecting Armenia and Karabakh, was reopened by Azerbaijan on September 24, 2023. First, a partial blockade was implemented in December 2022, followed by a full effective blockade by April 2023, causing a severe shortage of food, medication, and other necessities in the area. The Armenian population started to disperse widely from the area. There is little chance that those who fled the territory will ever decide to come back. For Baku, this is a positive outcome. It will be easier to merge these lands with Azerbaijan if Armenians would become the minority of the region (Solovyov, 2023).

The capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, declared that its anti-terrorist action was limited, essential to restoring order, and devoted to peace. On the other hand, there were many claims of war crimes during the preceding onslaught, which saw Azerbaijan retake land from the local Armenian people. The fighting was severe. Although evidence was provided that the strikes were taking place near large towns and population centers, the ministry insisted that weapons were not being utilized against civilian positions.

According to Laurence Broers, the Caucasus programme director at a Conciliation Resources peacekeeping agency, isolation of the local populace and increased application of pressure on hundreds of thousands of residents to evacuate areas, Baku seems to be trying to weaken the determination of the Artsakh Republic (Roth, 2023).

During the special Security Council meeting held on September 21, 2023, members addressed the final military offensive launched by Azerbaijan. The French Minister of European and Foreign Affairs emphasized that Azerbaijan's national security was not put in danger, stressing the need for sincere guarantees for reaching a peaceful resolution. The United States representative stated that Azerbaijan has a responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law and to allow humanitarian organizations to deliver aid without any obstacles. The German Minister argued that it is unacceptable for ethnic Armenians to be uprooted and forced to leave Karabakh. The Armenian Minister called for action and blamed the Council for being inactive in answering their calls for help. However, the Azerbaijani Minister stressed that the Council has to reject Armenia's demands and blamed the latter for continuous military actions against Azerbaijan's sovereign territories. Moreover, the Minister of Türkiye supported the Azerbaijani statement and added that Armenia spreads false information about the situation (Latest Clash between Armenia, 2023).

The situation eventually exhausted the region of Artsakh and caused mass fleeing to Armenia and finally the dissolution of Artsakh. After more than 30 years of separatist rule, Karabakh Armenian official, Samvel Shahramanyan has signed a decree dissolving all state institutions of unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh by January 1, 2024. He declared that day to be the end of the republic's existence.

Since then more than 70,000 Artsakh residents have entered Armenia, according to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who stated that they make up more than half of the 120,000 ethnic Armenians (Sauer, 2023).

The clear winners are Azerbaijan and Turkey. This means that they will have the power to set the terms for what comes next. Armenia finds itself in a vulnerable position. With 2.8 million residents, it has been compelled to take in approximately 100,000 refugees and faces the prospect of an invasion by the Azeris. The fact that Baku refers to the remaining Azeri section inside Armenia as “Western Azerbaijan” preserves strategic uncertainty even if both sides have offered to accept the other side's territorial integrity (Hedlund, 2023).

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact neo-Ottomanist ideology exerted on the war in Artsakh. It was found that neo-Ottomanism emerged from two political doctrines previously adopted by Türkiye in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, which led to the formation of strong ties towards Islam and Turkic identity within their governmental system. Moreover, the rivalry between Armenia and Türkiye has existed since the beginning of the religious tensions in world history, including previous massacres of the Armenian population led by Turkish officials under the notion of pan-Turkism. It was researched that the unconditional support of Türkiye given to Azerbaijan in the 30-year conflict with the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic has led the latter to dissolution and loss of sovereign integrity, as well as putting Armenia in further danger of possible invasion. It was also determined that the use of neo-Ottomanist ideology in the Turkish political system has the potential to affect not only the South Caucasus region but also other territories which correspond to Turkish interests.

It is also important to note that this war served to highlight the fact that, while accountability for breaking international law is condemned in theory, in practice, humanitarian crises and full-scale blockades – the Lachin corridor blockade – couldn't be prevented by the

international community. Moreover, it was observed that the country with a greater military power was able to disregard the demands of a weaker state and accomplish its goals entirely by the use of violence and threats. Regardless of the number of mediators and negotiations that took place to reach a peaceful resolution throughout the years, Azerbaijan implemented extensive military operations just a day after some improvements were made.

To elaborate further on the expansionist potential of Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism more detailed research is required. The Turkish relatively new ideology continues to develop connections and ties with different countries, potentially preparing them for geopolitical moves Türkiye has developed. Therefore, constant analysis is required to understand whether it poses a real danger to the international world, more specifically Armenia. The thorough analysis of Türkiye's governmental attempts to get involved in different international disputes and the legitimacy of the official claims to the land previously belonging to the Ottoman Empire could provide a further understanding of the role it played in the Artsakh conflict.

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