

Regional and International Cooperation to Reduce Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict

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Abstract

Almost two decades since conflict broke out between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, two northern neighbors of Iran, in Nagorno – Karabakh region. Although military conflict in this region has minimized with the existing ceasefire, and reaching a sustainable agreement is likely to be happened by the two parties. Close regional and international cooperation seems necessary more than ever in order to reduce conflict in Nagorno – Karabakh region. The main objective of this study is to give a thorough presentation of the regional and international cooperation in order to reduce Nagorno – Karabakh regional issues and hazards.

Hereunder is the main question raised by the researcher: “To what extent regional and international cooperation is effective in reducing Nagorno – Karabakh conflict?”

The hypothesis of the present study is that the interrelated nature of security in the international system and Caucasus region causes convergence among neighboring countries to reduce conflict in Caucasus and Nagorno – Karabakh regions. Taking advantage of the analytic – descriptive method and also benefiting from reliable and authentic sources, it can be concluded that the interdependence of threat will lead to the increased mutual costs in this study. This issue will cause formation of convergence in the Caucasus region, so that it will lead to the reduced conflict and tension in Nagorno – Karabakh region.

Keywords: Nagorno – Karabakh region, interdependence of threats, regional and international cooperation

1. Introduction

Nagorno – Karabakh conflict is regarded as a unique conflict which has been turned from an insignificant local conflict into an important regional war. Of course, it should be noted that although the conflict has remained at regional level, it has the capacity to be turned into a global crisis. It should be kept in mind that the Russian Federation is losing its influence in the Caucasus region and the United States of America is seeking to reduce the influence of Russia in the Caucasus region. The approach taken by western countries, U.S. and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is to interfere and enter Russia's backyard exerting pressure to Russian Federation. Accordingly, every change in the structure of the region can put Caucasus region available to U.S. and NATO and can also strengthen the stance of the U.S. and its regional allies i.e. Turkey and Israel. Given the above issue, regional situation can lead to weakening the status of Russia and Iran in the region. (Ahmadian, 2010)

Given the above issue, the process of globalization in different socioeconomic, cultural and political fields has enumerated the condition that the interdependencies are increasing in the region and the world and also influence the approaches of national governments (Ghavam, 2011: 45).

Therefore, attempts to diplomatically resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have proven to be an art that can transform the future of the region and prevent the Caucasus region from turning into a crisis-ridden zone and finally, resulting in a stable and secure area.

The management of regional crisis depends on the performance of the regional and trans-regional players, but the interests of these players move in the opposite direction leading them to a zero-sum game.

The natural, geographical, economic and geopolitical situation of the Caucasus region and its fruitful and rich culture have given a strategic condition to the region for the economic and cultural cooperation. Therefore, the

identification of interdependent regional and trans-regional players and investigation of the crisis have a significant importance (Ahmadian, 2010).

This article tries to investigate the roles and stance of the international cooperation in Karabakh crisis. The main question of the present study is as follows: “How regional and international cooperation is effective in reducing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?”

The hypothesis of the study indicates that the interdependence of security threat in the international system and the Caucasus region, causes convergence among neighboring countries to reduce the Karabakh crisis.

This study, using descriptive-analytic methods and benefiting from reliable resources tries to answer this question.

Authors are to first present the theoretical framework of the research and then investigate the situation of Nagorno-Karabakh region. Finally, they will put emphasize upon the necessity of cooperation to resolve the problem in Karabakh region.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Interdependence theory is rooted in the realistic international school of thought according to which world affairs are moving towards globalization. This process refers to the intergovernmental cooperation and has a positive trend on the global peace and welfare (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 47).

The previous intellectual roots of this theory stems from regional convergence. Theorists developed the regional convergence theory to a wide spectrum of issues related to the economic interdependent in 1970s (Kegley, 1989: 25-26).

Basic concepts of interdependence theory include interdependence, sensitivity, vulnerability and cost which will be discussed below.

2.1 Interdependence

Interdependence by definition means a direct and positive link between the interests of governments so that every change in the situation of a government would change the status of others in the same direction. “Interdependence” can also be defined as a system in which governments move up and down altogether according to their international situation (economic balance, power, welfare, access to information and/or technology. (Rosecrance, 1977: 425).

Keohane & Nye define “interdependence” as follows: dependence means a situation that is determined by external forces. “Interdependence” in world politics refers to the situation in which the states and players are inextricably tied together.”

2.2 Sensitivity and Vulnerability

To understand the role of power in interdependence, Keohane & Nye place special emphasis on the distinction between two concepts of “sensitivity” and “vulnerability”.

“Sensitivity” implies the degree of reaction in a policymaking framework, i.e. how quickly do changes in a country bring changes in another country. “Vulnerability” is defined as follows: “A player’s ability to offset these costly effects by making policy changes”. “Vulnerability” can be measured based on “Costly adaptation with the environment changed in the course of time” (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 50).

2.3 Power

“Power” is another concept which has a direct relationship with interdependence. Keohane & Nye (1977) define “power” as follows: “The ability of an actor to get others to do something they otherwise would not do.”

In this definition, “power” is a causal relationship. In other words, “power” is caused by asymmetric interdependence (Wagner, 1988: 461).

2.4 Costs

Converting interconnectedness as a common concept in relationship between communities to interconnectedness can be clarified through the concept of costs. Karl Deutsch juxtaposes cost against benefit. (Deutsch, 1988: 289 - 90)

Keohane & Nye have merely referred to the concept of costly activities and have made their utmost effort to clarify this concept operationally (Keohane & Nye 1977: 9).

3. Regional Conditions of Karabakh

From a political point of view, Karabakh region has had an important and specific status in different historical periods. Karabakh is a geographic region in present-day eastern Armenia and southwestern Azerbaijan, extending from the highlands of the Lesser Caucasus down to the lowlands between the rivers Kura and Aras. Although the Caucasus region, including Karabakh was isolated from Iranian land and territory on Feb. 21, 1828 according to Turkmenchay Treaty, this region has maintained its specific status in the fields of politics, economy and social conditions from ancient periods to the contemporary history.

Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict is a crisis which was formed and took place in the late 1980s in the political ambience of USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). After the collapse of the USSR, this conflict broke out between two newly independent states of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Consequently, this conflict caused an outbreak of military clashes between the two governments (Sharifnejad, 2005).

4. Geographical Location of Nagorno – Karabakh Region

Nagorno- Karabakh region is located on a land area as large as 4,388 square kilometers. This region is located in southeast mountain ranges of Caucasian between Aras and Kuara rivers. In Russian language, “Karabakh” is called “Nagorno – Karabakh” region. Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked region in the South Caucasus, lying between Lower Karabakh and Zangezur and covering the southeastern range of the Lesser Caucasus mountains. The region is mostly mountainous and forested.

Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but most of the region is governed by the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, a de facto independent nation established on the basis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Azerbaijan has not exercised political authority over the region since the advent of the Karabakh movement in 1988. Since the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1994, representatives of the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been holding peace talks mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group on the region's disputed status.

Residents of this region include people from Azerbaijan and Armenia. Nagorno – Karabakh is composed of two plain and mountainous areas. The plain area is called Karabakh Sofla or historic Karabakh with Ganjeh which is its capital. The mountainous part of Nagorno – Karabakh is called “Karabakh Oliya” (Bayat, 2011: 29).

5. Population of Nagorno – Karabakh

After isolation of the Caucasus region from Iran, maximum number of population in Nagorno – Karabakh were of Turks and Armenians in a way that the Turk population exceeded the Armenians. (Ahmadian, 2004: 359) According to a census made by Tsar statistics officials in 1810, of the total 12,000 families living in Nagorno – Karabakh region, 9,500 and 2,500 of them were Azeri and Armenian people respectively. According to a statistic conducted in 1823, more Azeri people were living in this region than the Armenians. But in 1823, the Armenians migrated to this region according to Tsar Policies. Russians were considering Armenians as most loyal ethnic groups in their governance. Outbreak of war between Iran and Russia and also clashes broke out between Ottomans and Russia were solid evidence for the said claim. Thus, when more Armenians settled in this area, the population in this region changed in favor of Armenians (Bayat, 2011: 44 – 45).

Russia's tsarist Governance threw its heavy weight on Armenians in this region and settled more Armenians in this land and territory i.e. Nagorno – Karabakh region. Until before 1979, Armenians accounted for 76 percent of the population in Nagorno – Karabakh region while Azeri people consisted 23 percent (Sheikh Attar, 1994: 36).

Population statistics for Nagorno-Karabakh are available from the 18th century. Archimandrite Minas Tigranian, after completing his secret mission to Persian Armenia ordered by the Russian Tsar Peter the Great stated in a report dated 14 March 1717 that the patriarch of the Gandzasar Monastery, in Nagorno-Karabakh, had under his authority 900 Armenian villages.

6. Ethnic Nationalism in South Caucasus

Ethnic clashes and conflicts across the world have been considered as one of the important factors, threatening regional and international peace and security. Of approx. 800 ethnic groups and important minorities in the world, 285 of which have been politically active since 1950s. Over 70 groups have been involved in aggressive, armed and violent policies and activities across the world. These armed groups have resisted establishing peace and security stubbornly. Only six groups resorted to civil and non- violent conflict (Karimi Melleh, 2011: 69).

Caucasus region is of paramount importance in terms of ethnicities due to the existence of approx. 50 ethnic – sectarian groups with different distinctions and various religions. Ethnic disputes and divisions are one of the main reasons behind the outbreak of crises and conflicts in the Caucasus after the collapse of the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics (USSR). Many intellectual and thinkers are of the opinion that 21st century, like the previous centuries, will be the scene of ethnical divisions and conflicts and these ethnical crises and conflicts will likely expand in future. In general, the international community will face more ethnic and sectarian divisions in future. (Vaezi, 2003: 42)

With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the world witnessed a new round of growth and formation of ethnic and national discourse. Although, after the Westphalia Treaty and stabilization of the government – nation system, various nations- buildings had been made in many countries of the world, especially after World War I, new national governments had been emerged with the collapse of imperials. With the transition of power and geography of the tsarist empire to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), this trend was not disintegrated in the geographical areas of the Russian Empire virtually.

With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), its 15-group nationalities, which had been specified according to the Constitution, face with the borders as determined by the USSR which was in accordance with the population policies of this government. Moreover, numerous ethnic groups were living in regions like Caucasus. These regions had not clear-cut borders.

The issue of the identity and ethno – cultural nationalism conflicts in this region are the main factors determining the political destiny of countries in the Caucasus region especially in the southern part. In this region, the most important ethnic conflicts between Azeris and Armenians were occurred in the south of Caucasus, while Abkhazian and Georgian conflicts and also Chechens and Russian strife were occurred in the north of the Caucasus (Smolnik, 2012).

These disputes follow the model of ethnic nationalism, the issue of which has turned this discourse into one of the most controversial and challenging political discourses in recent decade, ranging from East Central Asian to west Caucasus and its influx consequences to the former USSR's neighboring states can be observed.

Despite the formation of the government in regions of the conflicted geography such as the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, a formal reading of nationalism has not yet been stated according to the blood loyalties and ethnic nationalism (non-citizenship). The governments based in the region, especially in Muslim-dwelling areas in the north of the Aras, relying upon ethnicity-centered approach to the state-nation building, try to keep the spirit of the ethnic conflict concept “alive” in the region. Therefore, ethnicity discourse and ethnic – cultural nationalism were raised as a stressful factor in the international system which endangers the international peace and security (Simao, 2012).

Of course, it should be kept in mind that this peace threat, caused by modernistic approach, lie within the framework of national governments. Whatever threats the main player of international system, being the government itself, experiences does not mean the elimination of peace (Hatami and Roshan Cheshm, 2011).

Azerbaijani – Armenian ethnic conflict occurred after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was deep rooted historically in similar conflicts in early 20th century. Religious interests, the political discourse of young Turks and perplexity and bewilderment of identity after the Russia- Iranian wars are the main reasons that can be referred to the formation of ethnic mobilization. These violent clashes, which date back to at least one hundred years ago, culminated in ending years of the USSR and continued in the form of Nagorno – Karabakh conflict after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Azeri – Armenian ethnic clashes in this region are currently considered as one of the potential clashes in the south Caucasus, which is deep rooted in state – nation building process.

7. Historical Backgrounds

Ethnic conflicts in Nagorno – Karabakh, as one of enclaves in the Republic of Armenia, started in Azerbaijan land and territory and Nakhichevan. Although a wide range of factors involved in this affair, among which can be referred to the history, cultural differences and economic deprivations, a risk which havened an ethnic group in specific land and territory was the most important conflict factor caused by lack of abundant advantage of the population. Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict was broke out due to the mutually irreconcilable concepts that the two involved parties were imaging on their national land and territory. Given the above issue, the armed conflict was broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Thereupon, all Azeri people were expelled from Armenia and also many Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan. In early 1990, the situation was so deteriorated that the Azeri government was forced to expel remaining part of Armenians even from the large cities of this country.

The Armenians had been distributed in three republics: Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, Nagorno – Karabakh region in Azerbaijan and southern Georgia.

Considerable reduction of population of Armenians and unprecedented increase of Azeri people posed a risk to them that was considered as a minority in their land and territory. A request to establish unity and amity in Armenian lands was crystallized as a single country gradually. On the other hand, Azeri people consider Nagorno – Karabakh region as their land and territory, because, this area is considered as the inner part of Baku despite population realities and due to its geographical location.

8. Formation and Stages of Nagorno – Karabakh Crisis

The history of disputes and conflicts in this region dates back to many years ago i.e. several hundred years ago. With the end of World War I and the surrender of the Ottoman Empire and also collapse of the Russian Empire and the rule of this country by the Bolsheviks, the disputes took more serious and comprehensive dimensions. At this juncture, the two countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence. But there were disputes and conflicts on three buffer zones of the two emerging states, including Syunik Province, Nakhichevan and Karabakh. With the intensification and escalation of conflict, Armenia did an unsuccessful attempt to possess these regions. With the arrival of Army of Great Britain to southern Caucasus following victory attained in World War I in 1919, these regions were transferred to the Republic of Azerbaijan implicitly. Two months later, with the arrival of USSR Army Brigade 11 to Caucasus region and formation of Socialist Republic of the Union of Caucasus, including Armenia and present Azerbaijan, Karabakh was transferred to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia but opponents of Zari Community Party under the Nyrman Nyrmanov could take advantage of a cold relationship between Armenia and Russia some years later in 1921 and joined this region to the Republic of Azerbaijan once again. After this event, Armenia tried for some decades to retake the region non-militarily. However, Armenia did not succeed in this respect (Arfa'ei, 1992).

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1985, he decided to adopt two completely separate policies in order to improve and revamp deteriorating situation of the USSR. The two adopted policies taken by Gorbachev included as follows: “Glasnost” and “Perestroika”. The two mentioned policies caused unpleasant satellite or subsidiary states of USSR think to take a logical step towards independence of their states. Although Gorbachev was considering two concepts of “nationalism,” and “regionalism” as the obstacles towards a united and integrated socialism that can integrate and consolidate all communities, he decided to transfer managers from the central part to the republics and vice versa with the following aims: 1- To strengthen ideal domination and cultural priority of Proletarians to the local cultures, 2- Try to establish a unified Proletarian culture. But the relatively free atmosphere (glasnost) of this period was enlivening the hope of joining the region to Armenia among Armenians living in Karabakh. (Abbasov, 2004)

Given the above issue, people in Karabakh were complaining the discriminatory situation between natives of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Unidirectional dissemination of Azeri culture, employing competent Azeri manpower in government departments and finally optima rescue and relief services done by USSR to the earthquake-stricken Spitak region, which occurred in Dec. 1988 as well as inattention of relief and rescue forces to the injured Armenians have been cited as the main reasons behind the dissatisfaction of the Armenians in this regard.

When the first ethnic conflicts broke out in the region, Azerbaijan, as one of the states of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) made its utmost efforts in order to crack down and suppress this freedom-seeking movement. (Wikipedia internet site)

With the military intervention of Azerbaijan and the killing of several protestors, Armenians felt that another genocide is going to start after the genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks. After that, they (Armenians) started accumulating arms and training special forces to this aim. The preventive measure took by Armenians was accelerated with the collapse of the USSR. Because, they (Armenians) were expecting that Azeri Army will enter the region for conflicting with Armenians. (Foreman, 1992)

Two other more important and fundamental cases intensifying the Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict are as follows:

Request of Armenians residing in Karabakh to participate in peace talks as the third party which is approved by the Armenians and mediators' group. In other words, Armenians residing in Karabakh requested to participate in peace talks as third party, but Azerbaijan harshly opposed to it. Because, the said issue was thought by Azerbaijan that it is tantamount to the official recognition of the movement of Karabakh people.

Organizing “referendum” by the International Community that Azerbaijan rejected the said proposal repeatedly. Republic of Azerbaijan knows well that 86 percent Armenians lived in Karabakh before the outbreak of Nagorno – Karabakh conflict and now, Azeri people do not reside there. Under such circumstances, about 100 percent of the Armenian people are living in Karabakh. Given the above issue, organizing any kind of referendum will be in

favor of Armenians and for this reason, Republic of Azerbaijan turned down the proposal on launching a referendum in this region. Moreover, Azeri people are opposing with Annexation or Reunification Plan basically. In general, Republic of Azerbaijan proposes that a high-level autonomy should be proposed in Nagorno – Karabakh region within the framework of sovereignty of Azerbaijan (Amir Ahmadian, 2006: 52).

9. Karabakh Conflict

Karabakh Conflict is an old conflict affected by the conditions governing the policy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The new stage of the conflict started in 1988 following the request of Armenians living in Karabakh from the officials of USSR to change borders and connecting this region to Armenia. Earlier, Karabakh was considered as a part of Soviet Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan opposed to the change of borders and annexation of Karabakh to Armenia. Given the above issue, Karabakh Autonomous Assembly voted in favor of annexation of this region to Armenia. But Azerbaijan did not accept the rule. According to the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), changing Azerbaijan's borders without their approval was illegal and illegitimate. After the collapse of USSR in Dec. 25, 1991, the conflict between newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan led to the military conflict.

In Jan. 1992, military forces of Armenia embarked on occupying Karabakh region as supported by Russia's Infantry Division. Thus, several conflicts broke out between military forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the region. (Bayat, 2011: 130)

From 1988 – 1994, when Karabakh Conflict was terminated, more than 30,000 innocent people were killed in this region and almost one million people became homeless. However, these conflicts terminated in 1994, peace was restored between military forces of these two countries.

10. Players Affecting and Influencing Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict

As two countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia are involved directly in Nagorno – Karabakh conflict, there are other regional and international players, the most important of which are as follows: Turkey, Russia and Minsk Group of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)¹.

In this study, it is tried to examine some of the most important objectives and programs of the mentioned players.

10.1 Turkey

The close relationship between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey dates back to the time when Turkey in the beginning of Nagorno – Karabakh conflict announced that it will establish its diplomatic relationship with Armenia when Armenia gives back Karabakh occupied regions to Azerbaijan. Therefore, Turkey severed and cut its relationship with Armenia since 1993. Moreover, claims of Armenia on official recognition of this massacre in world level have been cited as another reason behind severance of Turkish ties with Armenia. When a truce was declared between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1994, Yerevan and Ankara refrained from resuming a relationship with each other up to 2008.

The bottlenecks of western investment in Turkey and reduced incomes from western tourists (due to the economic crisis in the world) forced Turkey to resort towards east and surrounding areas. According to the then Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoglu, Turkey shifted its policy towards the Ottoman Empire.

Reopening borders between Armenia and Turkey has currently been turned into a fresh issue in the modern contemporary world, so that Turkey can attain EU entry and Armenia is reducing its claim of massacring Armenians to some extent. In this case, Armenia's communication route towards Europe is shorter than Iran's route. (Crisis Group Internet Site, 2009) It is natural that Armenia will attain a nearer route towards Europe through a shortcut which passes from Turkey. But Republic of Azerbaijan showed a coarse and harsh reaction in this regard.

According to TREND news agency, Oktay Assadov, Head of Azerbaijan Parliament (April 4, 2009), said: "Possible reopening of the Turkish border with Armenia is not in favor of Azerbaijan."

According to Turkish-based Hurriyat Daily, the issues related to the reopening of Turkey – Armenia border and bilateral relationship between U.S. – Turkey were discussed in a trip made by U.S. President, Barack Obama, to Turkey. However, normalization of atmosphere in the Swiss city of Geneva on Oct. 11, 2009 shows the determination of the two countries for normalization of relationship after approx. a half decade.

¹ The OSCE Minsk Group was created in 1992 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, now the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)) to encourage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the conflict with Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh

But, both Armenia and Turkey are worried for the future of this relationship. Turkey declared “Karabakh will inevitably return to Azerbaijan” to soothe Azeris. The new agreement shows that Turkey does not have any expectations on Karabakh (Fraser, 2009).

10.2 Russian Federation

Russian Federation is one of the main and active players of the south Caucasus region. To regain its lost situation in the Caucasus, Russia has a new approach to the developments in this region. After Gorgia events in 2008, Turkey has raised the initiation of Caucasus coalition with strong presence of Russia and removal of Iran. Turkey does not want to encounter with Russia in Caucasus because it does not want to halt its situation in transfer of Russian energy. Therefore, Russia has involved in the Caucasus with stronger will more than before. In the meantime, leverage of the Karabakh conflict is decided by Russia. In other words, Russia has strong power in settling the Nagorno – Karabakh conflict. The said issue will pave suitable way to Russia in order to eliminate rivals such as Iran. Although Russians in its declared policies introduced Islamic Republic of Iran as an important country and key player in the Caucasus, practical policies of Russia are in line with isolating Iran in Caucasus. More importantly, since Iran’s intervention in the outset of Nagorno – Karabakh conflict was not successful; it has been turned into an excuse for Azerbaijan to accuse Iran of helping Armenians in Karabakh. (Rusiran internet site)

10.3 Minsk Group

Since the beginning of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the end of the Cold War, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has initiated widespread activities in Caucasus conflict. Since Europeans consider south Caucasus at the extent of Europe (although this part of the world, i.e. south Caucasus is considered as Asia in geographical, cultural and historical terms), outbreak of any crisis inside this continent is considered as a threat for Europe. For this reason, European reflect a high sensitivity towards crises occurred in Europe and its periphery such as Balkan (Bosnia and Kosovo), Karabakh, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey and Turkish Kurds including Ocalan issue).

In this line, Minsk Group came into being by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), comprised of Russia, the U.S. and France, in 1992 in order to settle problem facing Nagorno – Karabakh conflict.

To date, Minsk Group has been considered as one of the most important players of Nagorno – Karabakh development. One of the issues, which was raised in the negotiation of the Minsk Group, was the presentation of a plan, based on which, it was decided that Armenia will first discharge seven Azerbaijan’s occupied provinces around Nagorno – Karabakh (including Fozouli, Zangalian, Jibraeil, Kalabjer, Aghdam, Ghobadeli and Lachin) in order to establish peace and security in Karabakh. In return, it also was envisioned that international peacekeepers will be deployed in this region. A referendum will be held after five years to determine the legal status of Karabakh.

In the beginning, Azerbaijan had agreed with the initiative taken in this respect by Minsk Group, but it protested and rejected the initiative later. For, Armenians consider referendum special of current residents of Karabakh but in contrast, Azerbaijan considers all residents in Karabakh plus Armenians and also Azeri people who have been expelled from the region and lived in other parts of Azerbaijan as eligible to participate in the referendum. Accordingly, this issue along with other unresolved issues intensifies the crisis (Tabatabaei, 2003).

Here, a question may be raised as follows: How discharge of lands and territories are evaluated from the perspective of Armenians? Are they (Armenians) ready to evacuate these lands and territories? If yes, why did they (Armenians) occupy these lands and territories previously? What was the main aim of the Armenians in this respect? “Kalenjer” and “Lachin” were the two strategic provinces in the early periods of conflict. However, Armenians announced that they do not agree to give back “Lachin Gorge”, because, the relationship between Karabakh and Armenia is possible only via this route. (Ibid)

11. Now, Let’s Review the Views of Armenian Analysts in This Respect

Should Armenia give back six lands and territories and keep only “Lachin” land? In this case, whole lines of two governments, i.e. Armenia and Azerbaijan, including Nakhichevan, will exceed from the current 450 km to 1,100 km. Moreover, border lines between Artesakh (Nagorno – Karabakh) and Azerbaijan will hit from 150 to 360 km at large. To show a complete image on the situation of borders of Armenia with its neighbors in settling conflict, it should be noted that Armenia shares border with Turkey as long as 268 km at large which has not suitable situation in defensive terms. If the relation of Armenia and Turkey is improved, will this front be safe? In order to strengthen widespread frontlines effectively, the Armenian side will be forced to mobilize its financial and

human resources inevitably. In this case, two scenarios are possible: firstly, the Armenian side will be forced to increase its military forces inevitably (armed forces of Armenia and Artesakh defensive army). Therefore, the military service term will firstly be increased. Secondly, after withdrawal of military forces, Armenian side will be forced to increase hefty costs for creating new defensive lines inevitably. To apply the aforementioned measures, Armenian side will be forced to increase its military budget inevitably but for doing it, it has to reduce its social spendings to a great extent, the issue of which will have negative repercussions as well.

On the other hand, a negative vote of U.S., Russia and France as the heads of the Minsk Group (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) to the recent resolution of the UN General Assembly on Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict has dissatisfied authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan as well. Araz Azimov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Republic of Azerbaijan on March 17, 2009 in a press briefing said: “It is for years that leaders of Minsk Group i.e. U.S., Russia and France have promised Republic of Azerbaijan to settle down the conflict in this region but unfortunately, all efforts have become futile and useless.”

Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister accused Minsk Group (U.S., Russia and France) of waging political games against Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict. He said: “These countries are pursuing their interests in the Caucasus region” (Amir Ahmadian, 2010).

In contrast to these developments, Republic of Azerbaijan submitted a resolution to the UN General Assembly and requested to return occupied lands. The resolution was approved with 39 yes votes, seven no votes and 100 abstention votes. It should be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran did not participate in the voting procedure. In the same direction, Minsk Group leaders, including U.S., Russia and France disagreed with the request of UN General Assembly on the pullout of Armenian soldiers from the disputed region. Jonathan Henik, Public Relations Officer of U.S. Embassy in Baku, in his reaction to the approval of this resolution, said: “Approval of such resolution will have no effect on the trend of settling the Nagorno – Karabakh Conflict.”

In sum, it is for more than 15 years that the ceasefire has been established between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Despite all efforts made in this regard, Republic of Azerbaijan considers Nagorno – Karabakh region as a part of its land and territory. The sessions held by Minsk Group have not thus far produced significant and positive results. (Ibid)

As it is observed, according to the Figure 1, the parties involved in the neighboring of the Karabakh region indicates the strategic and international dimensions of this region.



Figure 1. Karabakh and Nagorno – Karabakh Region (NKR) (Excerpted from Gilamard internet site)

12. Discussion and Conclusion

What was mentioned in this study are the processes which caused world to move towards a kind of increasing integration. This convergence will lead countries and national governments to cooperate with each other to remove obstacles facing state – nation building process. As one of sensitive and strategic regions in the Caucasus, Karabakh region has always been considered as a hub for exertion of excessive policies of powers. Also, after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in late 1990s, nationalist measures and some

measures taken by Russia was led to a crisis in this region in line with forming an independent government. For this purpose, western countries left no stone unturned and pressurized Russia's maneuver in this region and finally, embarked on aggravating the situation in this region. On the other hand, other regional countries, including Turkey and Iran made their utmost efforts to take advantage of the opportunity provided in this region. Events in the world such as the process of globalization and significance of the Karabakh region economic and transit situation between Europe and Asia and especially the strategic region of the Middle East have caused the creation of a type of convergence in line with strengthening cooperation and reducing mutual threats.

The interdependency created in the region in economic, security, political and cultural fields implies the necessity of regionalism to reduce spending of the contracting parties and decrease vulnerability of regional and trans-regional countries. Due to the presence of different ethnicities and favorable economic situation as well as locating in world's crossroad, Karabakh region requires sustainable peace and security. Therefore, it can be concluded that interdependency, caused by economic, security and cultural issues in the South Caucasus region, especially in Karabakh, as well as reduced power of governments and weakness of nationalism have brought about the necessity of regional and international cooperation in settling problem facing Karabakh region. It should be noted that Karabakh neighboring countries and the West (including Europe and U.S.) have associated economic and security interests.

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Notes

The Nagorno-Karabakh War referred to as the Artsakh Liberation War by Armenians, was an ethnic conflict that took place in the late 1980s to May 1994, in the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in southwestern Azerbaijan, between the majority ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh backed by the Republic of Armenia, and the Republic of Azerbaijan. As the war progressed, Armenia and Azerbaijan, both former Soviet Republics, entangled themselves in a protracted, undeclared war in the mountainous heights of Karabakh as Azerbaijan attempted to curb the secessionist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh. The enclave's parliament had voted in favor of uniting itself with Armenia and a referendum, boycotted by the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh, was held, whereby most of the voters voted in favor of independence. The demand to unify with Armenia, which began anew in 1988, began in a relatively peaceful manner; however, in the following months, as the Soviet Union's disintegration neared, it gradually grew into an increasingly violent conflict between ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis, resulting in claims of ethnic cleansing by both sides. Inter-ethnic clashes between the two broke out shortly after the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in Azerbaijan voted to unify the region with Armenia on 20 February 1988. The declaration of secession from Azerbaijan was the final result of a territorial conflict regarding the land. As Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Soviet Union and removed the powers held by the enclave's government, the Armenian majority voted to secede from Azerbaijan and in the process proclaimed the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Full-scale fighting erupted in the late winter of 1992. International mediation by several groups, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) failed to bring an end resolution that both sides could work with. In the spring of 1993, Armenian forces captured regions outside the enclave itself, threatening the involvement of other countries in the region.

By the end of the war in 1994, the Armenians were in full control of most of the enclave and also held and currently control approximately 9% of Azerbaijan's territory outside the enclave. As many as 230,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan and 800,000 Azeris from Armenia and Karabakh have been displaced as a result of the conflict. A Russian-brokered ceasefire was signed in May 1994 and peace talks, mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group, have been held ever since by Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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