The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its influence on the State-Building Process in Azerbaijan

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Introduction

Contemporary state-building process is inexorably linked to conflicts in most of the countries, which experience serious hardships in ensuring stability and smooth functioning of state authorities. Today's reality is that conflicts pose real threats to the modern state-building process. Regardless of the nature of conflict, be it territorial, ethnic or religious, countries suffering from this problem encounter instability and a fragile security situation that pose a threat to smooth state-building initiatives. Although a bulk number of academic sources deal with conflict and state-building issues, we see that some states have not received proper attention in academic research. Azerbaijan is one of those countries. It is an undeniable fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had heavily influenced the political, social, economic life of Azerbaijan. Taking into account this fact, this article will focus on discussing the impacts of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem on the state-building process in Azerbaijan. The article starts with a brief overview of the conflict, its roots, and the current stance of the problem. Then it tries to find the mutual links between the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and state-building processes in Azerbaijan. The article identifies that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the major source of threat to security and stability in Azerbaijan. In addition, it is concluded that state-building efforts in Azerbaijan have been considerably influenced by the violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – source of instability in Azerbaijan in the initial days of its independence

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political landscapes of regions stretching from central Asia to Eastern Europe have considerably changed. New independent states emerged as a result of disintegration of the Soviet Empire. However, the collapse of the Soviet Empire did not only result in the emergence of independent states, but also fuelled the ethnic and territorial conflicts in most of

these countries. The South Caucasus was the "best" example of this bitter reality. Located in this region, Azerbaijan, which gained its independence in 1991, was also deeply involved in protracted conflict with its neighbor country, Armenia, over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh. Our intention here is not to touch every detail of this conflict. However, a brief overview of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is of vital importance for identifying the impact of this conflict on the state-building process in Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within Azerbaijan in the Soviet Union. On the brink of collapse of the Soviet Empire, situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region considerable worsened due to seccesionist claims of Armenians living in this region with the support of high rank of officials of USSR and Armenia SSR. Increasing tensions in the Nagorno-Karabakh region escalated the already fragile situation and resulted in mass exodus of Azerbaijanis living in and around this area. After Azerbaijan and Armenia gained their independence, this conflict turned into the inter-state war, deepening the roots of the problems. Thus, the 1992-1994 conflict created close to one million refugees and internally displaced people in Azerbaijan (International Crisis Group, 2011). Azerbaijan encountered serious challenges at the very beginning of its independence. As a result of war, Azerbaijan lost control not only on Karabakh, but also of seven adjacent districts around Karabakh. The fact of the violation of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was recognized by most international and regional organizations. When Azerbaijan became a member of the United Nations, the Nagorno-Karabakh region was also recognized as an integral part of Azerbaijan. For instance, according to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (1993) 822, 853, 874, and 884, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan were once more recognized and the immediate withdrawal of occupying forces from the occupied lands of Azerbaijan was demanded. The same position was reiterated by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 2008. The resolution clearly states that "the armed conflict in and around the Nagorny-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan continued to endanger international peace and security, the General Assembly today reaffirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, expressing support for that country's internationally recognized borders and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories there" (United Nations, 2008). The recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem within the context of the principles of international law were also expressed in documents adopted by the European Union and European Council. For instance, in the resolution adopted by the European Parliament in 2010, it is mentioned that "the EU does not recognise the constitutional and legal framework in which the elections in the breakaway territories take place and defends the political rights of displaced persons"

(European Parliament, 2010). As a counter-argument from the Armenian side, the right to self-determination of people is often voiced, as well as the claim that this principle of international law prevails over the principle of territorial integrity. However, as mentioned above, the international community does not recognize the "Nagorno Karabakh Republic" as an independent state and supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. In other words, Armenians' claims about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are not buttressed by any international documents. As mentioned in the Statement by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, "Nagorno-Karabakh is not recognized as an independent and sovereign state by any of their three countries, nor by any other country, including Armenia" (OSCE, 2010).

Currently, the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is the major mediator in peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which are co-chaired by the United States, the Russian Federation and France (United Nations, 2008; Council of Europe, 2003). Although ceasefire has been agreed between the two countries in 1994, peace talks as yet have not resulted in any progress toward a solution to the conflict. The major reason for the deadlock in conflict solution is deconstructive position of Armenia.

 Azerbaijan suggests autonomy to Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh region within the boundaries of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As mentioned by the President of Azerbaijan, "The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is not and will never be the topic of negotiations… Azerbaijan will not retreat from this position in any single step. This means that in the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan … there will be no compromise" (Aliyev, 2013). In light of this divergence of positions, unfortunately, the horizons of long-term peace and stability look to be too far from today's reality.

Sometimes, these kinds of conflicts in post Soviet countries are seen as part of the state-building process. For instance, according to Hughes and Sasse (2011, p.2) "many of the Soviet successor states have fought ethnic and regional wars with each other or within themselves as part of their nation and state-building projects". However, this approach may be challenged in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The reality is that this conflict cannot be seen as part of state-building in Azerbaijan. This conflict has had a considerably negative impact on the state-building process in Azerbaijan in terms of being the source of instability and violence.

The uniqueness of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is that it cannot be considered to be merely an internal conflict of Azerbaijan. Of course, this problem erupted within the boundaries of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, subsequently,

Armenia joined this conflict as a "supporter" of Armenians living in this region. Therefore, when this conflict is analyzed in terms of its influence on the state-building process in Azerbaijan, external factors also need to be taken into account. As mentioned in the DFID Practice Paper (2010), state-building and peace-building are mainly influenced by internal processes. However, they can also be influenced by regional and global factors. Such statement is very true in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. It is an undeniable fact that this conflict poses a threat to the security and stability of Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the same threat does not only source from the disputed area – Nagorno-Karabakh – but also from Armenia because of the latter country's involvement in the conflict.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – a challenge to the security of Azerbaijan

Nowadays, a lack of security and unstability are considered to be major challenges to contemporary state-building (OECD, 2008; Shah, 2009). As Wolf (2011) points out, ensuring the security is an important factor in achieving a smooth state-building process. As heretofore mentioned, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become the major source of threat to security and stability in Azerbaijan. Since the start of the state-building process, Azerbaijan has encountered serious challenges in terms of ensuring peace and stability in the country. Thus, Azerbaijan became embroiled in a problem which endangered its security and stability and created obstacles to a smooth state-building process. In a majority of international documents related to this issue, concern over peace and security was clearly expressed. For example, in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (1993) on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is mentioned that the situation poses a threat to peace and security not only in Azerbaijan, but also in the whole region. Given the fact that security and stability are considered integral parts of current state-building, it is significant to analyze the impact of this conflict on security and stability in Azerbaijan.

In the initial years of independence of Azerbaijan, when military operations continued in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the political situation in Azerbaijan was uncontrollable. Various political factions struggled for power using the fragile situation around Nagorno Karabakh (De Waal, 2003). Thus, political unrest springing from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a major source of instability in the country. This situation created a major obstacle to realizing the state-building process on the basis of political consolidation, which is considered by Kamrava (2001) to be an intertwined process in state-building initiatives. Political stabilization of the country was only achieved under the leadership of the National

Leader Haydar Aliyev after his return to power in 1993. Nowadays, the political landscape of Azerbaijan is stable; however, the reignition of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict can again pose a threat to stability in the country.

The main reason to claim that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the real danger to stability and peace is the fact that this conflict has not yet been resolved and this problem cannot be assumed as a frozen conflict. As German points out (2012b, p.1), "the fighting may have come to an end, but fundamental issues remain unresolved and the threat of renewed hostilities remains very real". The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, the major mediators between Azerbaijan and Armenia, have also expressed their concerns over the high probability of ignition of the conflict again (OSCE, 2010). As also mentioned in the International Crisis Group (2005) report, the probability of outbreak of armed conflict remains considerably high.

The danger of restoration of armed conflict also urges the government of Azerbaijan to regularly increase its military expenditures. For instance, the 2010 military expenditure increased by 45 percent in 2011 – "...$3.1 billion out of a total $15.9 billion state budget" (International Crisis Group, 2011, p.1). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2013), Azerbaijan has increased its military spending more than eleven times during 2000-2009. The government's concern over the security around the Nagorno-Karabakh region is the major reason for the increase in military spending.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan

Weber's definition of state "as a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" is also widely accepted nowadays (1948, p.78). The core concept of this approach is that the state has an opportunity to realize its functions within the boundaries of its territory on a legitimate basis. In Azerbaijan's case, the reality is that, nowadays, Azerbaijan is not able to ensure its sovereignty and control over its internationally recognized borders due to the aggression of Armenia. As mentioned above, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan is recognized by the international community (United Nations, 1993, 2008; European Parliament, 2010). However, negligent attitude of the world community in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, attempts to use this conflict as a tool of political pressure made it impossible to restore sovereignty and territorial intergrity of Azerbaijan up until now.

The Nagorno-Karabakh problem as a source of the socio-demographic burden of Azerbaijan.

People living in and around the Nagorn-Karabakh region bear the brunt of this protracted conflict. Due to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, over more than five hundred thousand refugees forcibly fled Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding districts. Their living conditions are also deplorable (UN Refugee Agency, 2009, International Crisis Group, 2005, German, 2012). In the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (1993), huge concern is expressed on the displacement of a bulk number of citizens of Azerbaijan. According to the UN Refugee Agency (2009, p.6), 7 percent of the whole population of Azerbaijan consists of internally displaced persons. This also creates serious challenges for the country to meet these peoples' needs, such as providing education, health benefits, and social welfare. In recent years, important progress has been made by the government in terms of meeting social expectations of the refugees and internally displaced persons. Successful implemention of state programs on improving housing and living conditions are an important part of state care support for these people. However, the reality is that, until solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and return of internally displaced persons to their homeland, social support and protection of these people will be a challenging burden for the country.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned factors prove once again that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has had a considerable impact on state-building processes in Azerbaijan. The country still faces security challenges and it has become impossible to ensure territorial integrity and sovereignty over the whole territory of Azerbaijan.

Given the fact that a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not yet been achieved today, it is possible to say that this conflict will keep having a negative impact on the smooth state-building process in Azerbaijan in the future. Thus, the more the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exists, the more this conflict will pose a threat to smooth and sustainable state-building initiatives in Azerbaijan. Even after the solution of this problem, it seems that Azerbaijan will encounter tough challenges in "reconstituting legitimacy", "re-establishing security" and "rebuilding effectiveness", which are considered to be integral parts of governance reconstruction by Brinkerhoff (2005).

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SUMMARY

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The article deals with the impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the state-building process of Azerbaijan and its influence on the security of the country and the whole region. It identifies that this conflict was the major obstacle in ensuring smooth functioning of state authorities in the initial period of the independence of Azerbaijan. It is mentioned that, nowadays, the state-building process are successfully carried out in Azerbaijan. However, deadlock in the solution of the conflict are the major source of threat and instability not only for Azerbaijan but also for the whole region. From this point of view, unless the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it seems that this problem will keep its negative impact on the smooth state-building process in Azerbaijan.

Key words: Nagorno-Karabakh, state-building, stability, conflict, security.