

## Modeling Azerbaijan's action process concerning Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied territories

**Gokhan Sari**, Department of Strategy Search Center, Hacettepe University, Ankara, 06100, Turkey.

**Hakan Soner Aplak\***, Department of Endustry Engineering, Baskent University, Ankara, 06100, Turkey.

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### Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was caused by the warring sides' claims of land possession or their struggle to maintain possession of their land. Despite the historical reasons for the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the primary factor for Karabakh's occupation by Armenia was the collapse of the Soviet Union. A limited ceasefire was achieved in 1994; however, lasting peace could not be sustained. During the tentative ceasefire, rising tensions at the Azerbaijan-Armenian border bring the countries back to the brink of war. Lack of a permanent solution to the conflict via diplomatic means has resulted in an increase in tensions since 2014. This study aimed to provide a systematic analysis of Azerbaijan's perspective concerning the conflict, in terms of the political, economic, geographic, and military factors, as well as the other elements of national power. Using decisional analysis techniques of the factors mentioned above, the action process of Azerbaijan is modelled.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, influence diagram, decision analysis.

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\*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Hakan Soner Aplak**, Department of Endustry Engineering, Baskent University, Ankara, 06100, Turkey

E-mail address: [hsoneraplak@baskent.edu.tr](mailto:hsoneraplak@baskent.edu.tr) / Tel: 0312 2466666

## 1. Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was caused by the warring sides' claims of land possession or their struggle to maintain possession of their land. The governing policy of the Soviet regime, its process of the disintegration and the occupation of Azerbaijan territories by Armenia were among the most significant factors that caused the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although Armenia's occupation of Azeri territories is generally referred to as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the occupied territory included 7 of the region's raions and, in total, accounted for 20% of all Azeri territory.

The war leading to the occupation of Karabakh commenced as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the historical conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Although regional and global actors intervened, only a limited ceasefire was achieved in 1994; however, lasting peace could not be sustained. Furthermore, although the cease-fire was established in 1994, lack of a permanent solution to the conflict via diplomatic means has resulted in an increase in tensions since 2014.

One of the most important reasons the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved, other than the ongoing tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia, is disagreement between other countries with political interests in the region. Among these countries, Russia, Turkey, and Iran are the most important actors. Whereas Turkey's historical, cultural, and ethnic links with Azerbaijan foster a close relationship, Russia maintains close ties with Armenia in an effort to re-establish its influence in the region.

On the other hand, considering its interests related to the Caspian Sea and an Azeri population sensitive to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the occupied territories, Iran's relevant policies are inconsistent. Moreover, Georgia, which monitors the situation closely but has no direct effect in the region, has an interest due to the Armenian population in Georgia's Javakheti Region. Furthermore, the US, the EU, NATO, OSCE (Minsk Group) and the Collective Security Treaty and its member countries (the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia) struggle to produce policies to effectively deal with Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Currently, Baku continues to defend its territorial integrity, Yerevan is committed to the self-determination of nations (Sapmaz & Sari, 2012). That the warring parties still have not given up their territorial claims in the conflict, Azerbaijan continues to militarize, regional and global powers have yet to devise an solution acceptable to all parties, and developments that occurred in 2016, indicate that the problem will continue.

The aim of this study is to analyze the Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied territories conflict from multiple perspectives and to construct a decisional frame concerning Azerbaijan's relevant actions. The primary focus of the study is to evaluate Azerbaijan's decision alternatives concerning the conflict and occupied territories. It is hypothesized that the findings might prove useful to Azerbaijan's strategic planning. This paper begins with an historical and current overview of the conflict. Next, the method used for decision analysis is described, and then a model of the conflict is provided, based on multiple perspectives. Lastly, the significance of the findings and their implications for additional research are explored.

## 2. Nagorno-Karabakh Problem from Past to Day

Karabakh located in the east of the southern Caucasus Mountains, is the region between the Kura and the Aras rivers and Lake Sevan in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Because the upper part of country is a mountainous region, it is called Nagorno-Karabakh or Upper-Karabakh (Taskiran, 1997). Nagorno-Karabakh problem is not exclusively the Nagorno- Karabakh region (Askeran, Hadrut, Mardakert, Martuni, Shushi and Stepanakert), but it also involve the other occupied seven raions (Laçin, Kalbajar, Agdam, Jabrail, Fizuli, Kubadli and Zengilan) in the region.



Figure 1. Nagorno-Karabakh and Occupied Territories

Changing in population structure historically, conflicts in sharing resources triggered the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict. Especially after the Bolshevik revolution the size of violence against Azeri population has increased (Sarinay et al., 2009). Increasing violence forced Azerbaijanis migration on the other hand due to the increase in Armenian population brought/come to the region, the ratio of the Armenian population in the region reached 90% (Baykara, 1969). Despite the alteration in the population balance, during the Soviet Regime, Nagorno-Karabakh remained as an autonomous republic in Azerbaijan.

Armenians, in August 1987, applied to Moscow with the claim that the Armenian population constitutes the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh region which should be under the rule of Armenia. Since they couldn't get what they wished for, on 12 July, 1988, Armenians officially declared Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous region in Armenia. Then, Armenian Parliament decided to merge with the Nagorno-Karabakh region which is under the rule of Azerbaijan on 1 December, 1989.

The steps taken by Armenians created reactions in Azerbaijan and the situation began to transform into conflicts between Azerbaijani Turks and Armenians, including in other regions of Azerbaijan (Aslanli, 2001). USSR Soviet army beginning to lose control of Azerbaijan entered Baku (Baslamis, 1990) and events had brought about Azerbaijan to the process of separation from the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic separated from the USSR and Azerbaijan by declaring independence.

The attacks by Armenians supported by the Russian army constituted a reaction against Soviet rule in Azerbaijan (Gasimov, 2002). Iran's efforts to end the conflict remained inconclusive due to the continuation of the Armenian military operation. In accordance with the decision for ensuring peace in Helsinki meeting on March 24, 1992 by European Security and Cooperation Organization (OSCE), the USA, as co-chairmen of Russia and France, the OSCE Minsk Group which includes Turkey, was created (European Security and Cooperation Organization, 2017).

Occupied regions by Armenia, Agder, Goranboy, Gebedey Raions and although some villages of Lachin and Jabrail cleared out, the inner turmoil (Surat Huseynov revolt, Lezgin and Talysh Uprisings) affected Azerbaijan in the front and 20% of Azerbaijani territory has been occupied during the war until 1994. On May 9, 1994, a ceasefire was signed between Defense Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the representatives of the Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh. The consequences of war badly affected Azerbaijan and created a trauma for Azerbaijan society as well as domestic politics.

### 2.1. The key actors in the region

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, apart from Azerbaijan and Armenia international actors are also intensively involved and interested in this issue from time to time. *Azerbaijan's* elements of national power and increasingly allocating more on armament, strengthens the possibility of seeking solutions with the war in the event of a conviction that Azerbaijan could not find a solution through diplomacy.

Armenians argue that of Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to them basing their claim on the ancient text written by Strabo and II. Pliny. Furthermore, they claim the relocation of 1915 as genocide, and they think that Turkey and Azerbaijan are threats for them (Adalian,2005). The oppressed and victimized community approach keeps Armenian communities together and creates closeness, and helps them to impose the international community as it is their right to claim Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. War option seems risky for Armenia. Turkey is supposed to choose another option but act together with Azerbaijan due to historical and cultural tie.

One of the most important parties in the settlement of the Nagorno -Karabakh conflict is the *Russian Federation*. With its base in Armenia and as a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) it has been involved indirectly in the process. Russia might use new approaches, according to the impacts of a possible conflict in interests of it.

Iran is concerned about the situation due to the intensity of Azeri population in the country. As soon as Azerbaijan solve domestic problems, including the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, it is perceived as a threat by Iran that Azerbaijan will have the opportunity to deal with the problems of Azeri people in Iran. Considering the efforts related to the issuance of an Islamic state and the regime, approaching to Armenia directly is thought to be able to reduce the prestige and credibility of Iran in the region. Therefore, It is hypothesized that Iran is obliged to follow a balanced policy.

Georgia, due to the Armenians living in the region Cevahit, is in a sensitive relationship with Armenia. The probability of a similar formation in Cevaheti as in the Nagorno-Karabakh causes disturbance in the Georgian Government (Kodaman & Iren, 2013).

Other actors in the region as UN, OSCE Minsk Group, US, EU, CSTO are seen as a more acceptable option to be part of a diplomatic solution. Due to the fact that the above mentioned countries do not have a borderline with Azerbaijan and Armenia, it is not a preferable option to deploy or transport armies. Given that countries in the region involved in the problem, the efforts of actors outside the region might be considering political solution. It is highly probable that the policy that will be followed will be a balanced policy.

## 2.2. Current developments

Since the date of the announcement of the ceasefire, there had been countless violations. Any ceasefire violation when not controlled has potential of transformation into a large-scale war. The lack of effective control of the military forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia has prevented a war to break out (Caspian Information Center, 2011).

The conflicts in April 2016, has been named as the 4-day war that was slightly more effective than previous violations. As a result of the conflicts in Ağdere, Terter, Ağdam, Hocavend and Fuzuli regions, Seysulan settlements, Taliş Village and Fuzuli regions were seized by Azerbaijan troops (En Son Haber, 2016). This reflected the superiority of Azerbaijan's military and psychological warfare. Azerbaijan's likely to have more achievements makes Armenia and Russia more concerned. It is considered that Azerbaijan's further progress is prevented by Russia.

## 3. Decision Analysis

Decision making process is complex and full of uncertainty. The high important point for effective decisions is to estimate future. The more accuracy and certainty about future, the more efficiency in decision analysis is provided. The main reason for studying decision analysis is that applying its techniques can lead to better decisions. Modeling is critical in decision analysis, as it is in most quantitative or analytical approaches to problems. Influence diagrams (figure 2) or decision trees (figure 3) can be used to create a model of decision problem.

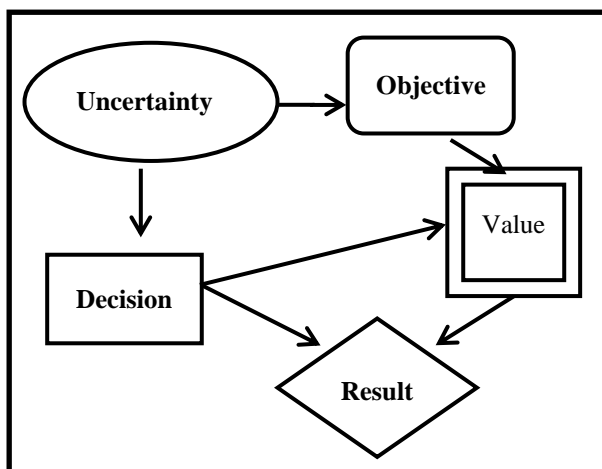


Figure 2. Influence Diagram

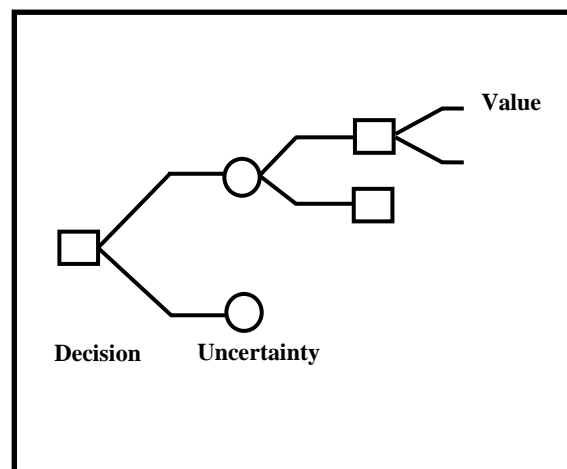


Figure 3. Decision Tree

Probability is a tool to build models of the uncertainty inherent in the problem. Key advantage from a decision-making perspective is that the mathematical representation of a decision can be subjected to analysis, which can help us understand key drivers in the problem (Clemen & Reilly, 2014).

## 4. Modelling the Decision Problem

Problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia is a complex and full of uncertainty. Analyzing the situation requires an overview of actors, prospective strategies and environmental factors. Both, current developments should be examined and future should be estimated by scenarios. Because of this, the problem needs decisional analysis that will provide to recognize all the possible events, course of actions and their consequences. Although, in decision analysis, the most difficult phase is to define problem, it seems more apparent than finding solution for this issue. But, it is inevitable fact that finding solution depends on identification of problem and draw all possibilities.

It is clear that this problem is related to international security and there are many actors to be involved naturally. So, it can't be considered only as a border or territory problem between two countries. It has a history background which may give a sign about case and causes. In addition, balance in the region and future of two countries depends on the developments and action plan of international actors.

After analysis and bringing out evidences, the supposed decision problem is figured with influence diagram which is depicting the picture from Azerbaijan side and explains the situation roughly (figure 4). Influence Diagram shows that Azerbaijan has some different kind of options. Consequences of this course of actions depend on not only Azerbaijan, but also international actors and their reactions. Main course of actions of Azerbaijan can be summarized as;

- Fighting its own,
- To proceed with its allied countries,
- Intensive diplomacy
- Doing nothing

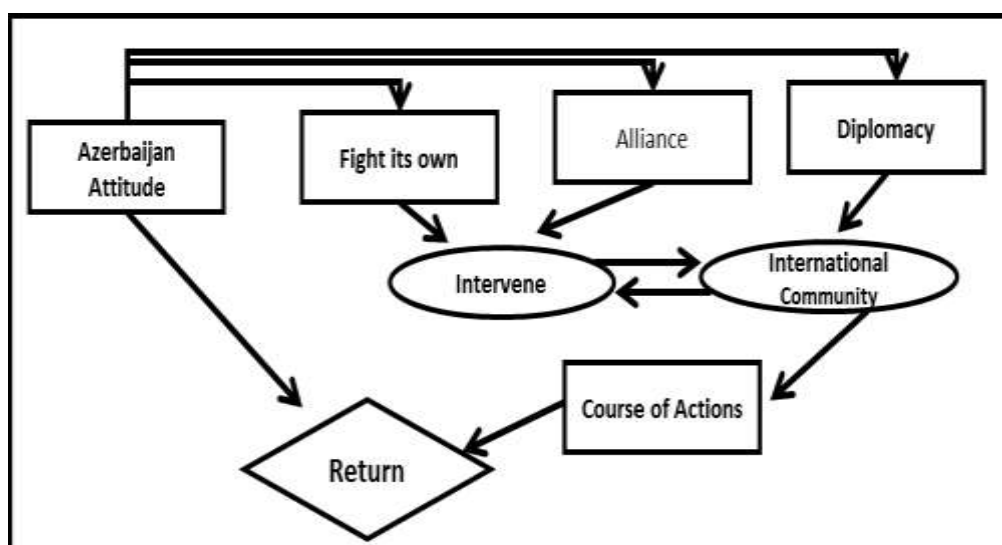


Figure 4. Decision Problem Influence Diagram for Nagorno-Karabakh and Occupied Territories Conflict

In this process, Azerbaijan and its strategies will be exposed to many environmental factors. International actors will intervene by using different kind of instruments. International pressure negatively or support may play key role in the process. So, by overviewing multiple factors, Azerbaijan should follow a proactive line to have optimal benefit from its decision.

Framing the problem with multiple aspects, a decision tree is drawn for Azerbaijan expected and possible attitudes (figure 5). This tree provides an overall perspective with strategies, reactions, consequences and uncertainties.

In fact, drawing a decision tree requires the identification main objective or aim. In this complicated international problem, although many actors are involved and have different goals, Azerbaijan's intention is to gain its unfair loses. This can be summarized as getting occupied territories back and to bring its rights to legitimacy in the international community.

The decision tree (figure 5) which is related to dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia is depicting Azerbaijan decision process by evaluating uncertainties with some probabilities;

- **A<sub>1</sub>** is Azerbaijan's one of strategy which is fighting by its own capabilities.
- **B<sub>1</sub>** (seize), **B<sub>2</sub>** (partly occupation) and **B<sub>3</sub>** (failure) are the prospective uncertainty points which may occur as a consequence of this course of action.
- If **B<sub>1</sub>** happens, then **C<sub>1</sub>** (intervene) or **C<sub>2</sub>** (silence) are the conditional possibilities.
- If the condition **C<sub>1</sub>** becomes real, then four conditional situations **D<sub>1</sub>**, **D<sub>2</sub>**, **D<sub>3</sub>**, **D<sub>4</sub>** may happen.

- At the end of this decision que, Azerbaijan may choose one of five strategy which are  $E_1$  (Capture),  $E_2$  (Partly Capture),  $E_3$  (Neutral zone),  $E_4$  (Separate to three regions) and  $E_5$  (Land swap).

Decision trees have many track combinations which are illustrating decision, uncertainty and final points. Each track will provide another perspective to the problem and provide clear approach to recognize the result and outcome. Decision points require selection from best outcome but uncertainty points requires calculation with possibilities and aggregation.

Action analysis tree for Azerbaijan Karabakh and Occupied Territories has also many tracks to clarify the situation and see the traces of each condition.

As an example Track 1 depicts the sequence of events given below;

Track 1;  $T(1) \{A_1 \ B_1 \ C_1 \ D_2 \ E_3\}$ ; [Fight its own, Seize, Intervene, Iran; Neutral Zone]

According to this track;

- ✓ Azerbaijan will choose to fight with its own power,
- ✓ Its operation will be successful and will seize the land,
- ✓ There will be intervention from Iran to process,
- ✓ The territory will be preserved as a neutral zone.

It can be seen explicitly, there are many combinations of tracks which are dealing with different possibilities. Actually, analysis with decision tree will be meaningful if and only if outcomes and possibilities are estimated in accuracy. On the other hand, as can be seen Azerbaijan Karabakh and Occupied Territories problem, decision tree provides overall picture for all strategy combinations.

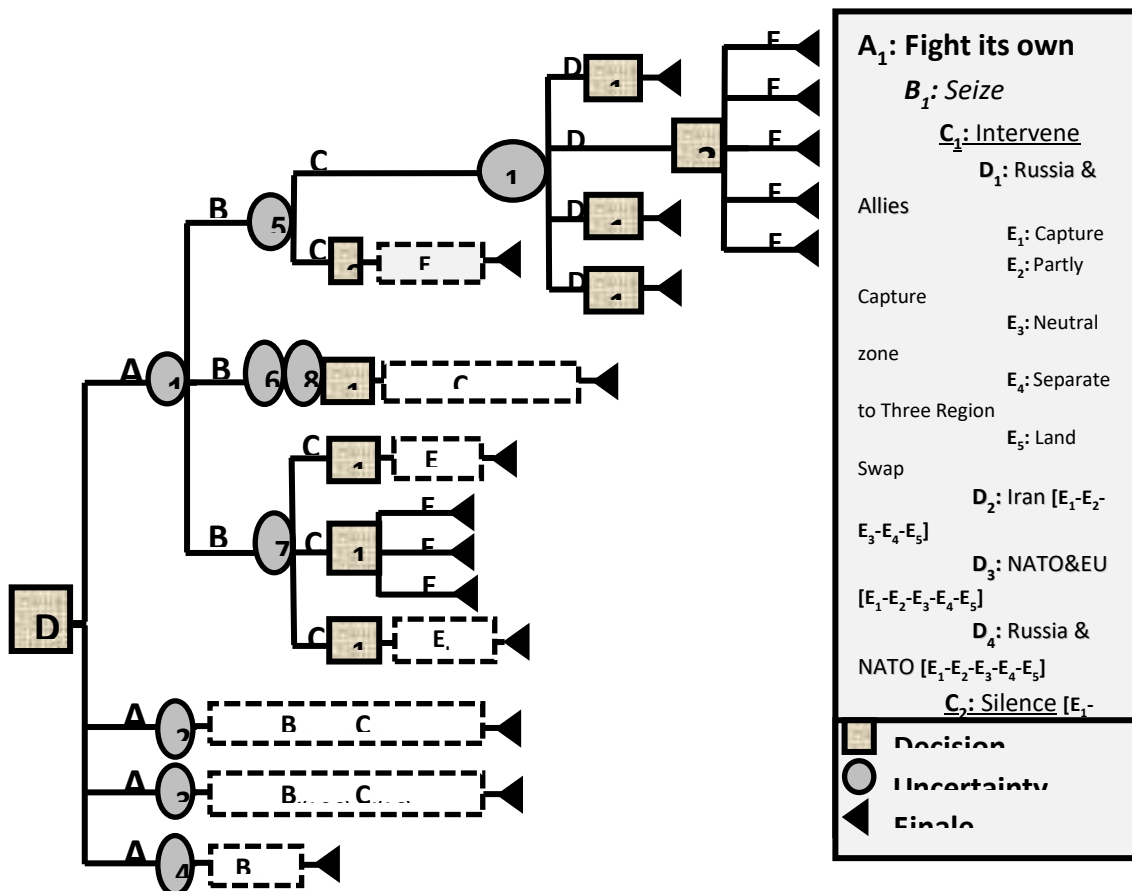


Figure 5. Action Decision Analysis Tree for Azerbaijan Karabakh and Occupied Territories

## 5. Conclusion

According to several analysts, the reason that conflict could not have been resolved so far, is the intention of the related parties to delay deliberately the solution of the problem. Armenia thought that all parties will get used to the status quo throughout time, the Azerbaijan thought that they will be further strengthened over time; consequently, both sides thought that current situation is in their favor (Kazimirov, 2004).

As can be understood from the implication of statement, Azerbaijan Karabakh and Occupied Territories problem is complicated and full of ambiguity. Another side of difficulty for problem is being an international conflict which many has some ideals.

The aim of this study is to provide a systematic analysis of Azerbaijan's perspective concerning the conflict, in terms of the political, economic, geographic, and military factors, as well as the other elements of national power. By evaluating the events past and current developments, and considering multiple possibilities, Azerbaijan action process is modelled.

The model shown by decision tree is reflecting the problem in conceptual way. For further analysis, the model will be converted to mathematical modelling with decisions and uncertainties. To find optimal strategy, it is necessary to manage the uncertainty, construct some utility functions to describe the outcomes and results, to estimate the prospective occurrence possibilities and calculate final value of decision.

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