

MENUA SOGHOMONYAN\*

## AGENDA FOR STUDYING THE CAUSES OF THE 44-DAY NAGORNO-KARABAKH WAR WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF NEOCLASSICAL REALISM: A METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION\*\*

**Abstract:** *This article aims to contribute to the agenda of the study of the causes of the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war based on theses of theories of International Relations and their conceptions. The article is part of a planned comprehensive study, and it tries to prove that when exploring the roots of the 44-day war within the framework of political Realism of International Relations theory, the most relevant approach is Neoclassical Realism. The study of the causes of the 44-day war through the lenses of theories of International Relations is a more systemic approach to the object of inquiry, which directs the thinking of a scholar to a framework of more comprehensive and logically interrelated variables. It is worth mentioning that this article does not concentrate on the reasons for the 44-day war per se. The article argues that though Structural Realism (among IR realist theories) is very important to focus on the structure and dynamics of the international system (both global and South-Caucasian regional levels), it does not overwhelmingly address the reasons for the 44-day war. Those reasons should be looked for in the foreign policy strategies of the actors in the South Caucasus, as well as in the perception of the regional structure and dynamics by the Armenian elites and their ability to mobilize resources according to those perceptions. The variables are part of the ontology of neoclassical realism.*

**Keywords:** *Theories of International Relations; Neoclassical Realism; 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war; distribution of capabilities; balance of power; mobilization of resources.*

### Introduction

After the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war, the vision of the security-political preferences of the Republic of Armenia has become a focal point in public and political discourse: Where is the country heading now, and/or where should it go? Since this question has become actual following the 44-day war, it shows that we are dealing with evident and fateful mistakes. Therefore, it is imperative to study the causes of the war with academic depth and a scientific basis to identify the mistakes made and better clarify the vision for the security-political preferences of Armenia. This introductory article aims to contribute to forming a research agenda for studying the causes of the 44-day war. Specifically, forming

---

\* Ph.D., Independent Researcher, email: menuasoghomonian@gmail.com

\*\* Received 15 November 2024

Reviewed 3 December 2024

Accepted 20 December 2024

The research was supported by the Higher Education and Science Committee of MESCS RA (Research project N 21T-5F218)

the research agenda is supposed to identify and discuss the variables (and justify their relevance) that would enable practical researchers to examine the causes of the 44-day war's outbreak scientifically and comprehensively. Identifying these variables will provide a conceptual basis for studying the causes of the war. By examining the explanatory capacities of the Realist theory of International Relations, we indirectly develop the thesis that a systematic and substantiated study of the causes of the 44-day war requires reliance on the academic tools of International Relations research, which include theories and conceptual frameworks in the field of International Relations.

The hypothesis and central idea of the article is that if the study of the causes of the 44-day war is conducted within Realist theory, Neoclassical Realism's ontology as a branch of Realist theory is the most appropriate theoretical framework to be chosen. To substantiate this line of reasoning, the article first argues that Structural Realism, as a direction within the Realist School, is insufficient on its own to address the causes of the 44-day war fully. This is because the war's outbreak cannot solely be attributed to changes in the distribution of power (balance of power) in the South Caucasus. Second, the article argues that the shift in the distribution of power led to a critical tipping point for the outbreak of war due to either a failure to adequately perceive the change or a lack of resource mobilization in response to it. These latter factors, which are variables within the ontology of Neoclassical Realism, are essential to understanding the causes of war.

The local academic publications related to the topic of this article focus on the dynamics of the geopolitical architecture of the South Caucasus through the lens of various theories, directions, and concepts in International Relations. Some publications explore the theoretical interpretation of factors influencing different directions of Armenia's foreign policy. For instance, Narek Sukiasyan has extensively studied the Russian orientation of Armenia's foreign policy, interpreting it based on the principles of various theories of International Relations (Sukiasyan 2020, 61–72; Sukiasyan, 2022). Other works address the theoretical understanding of the regional policies of external actors in the region. For example, Anna Gevorgyan reflects on the concept of "Prudent Realism" in the context of Iran's South Caucasus policy, attempting to uncover the underlying framework of Iran's interests in the region (Gevorgyan 2023, 7–32). Levon Hovsepian employs the principles of positivist Liberalism and Constructivism to study the causes of Turkey's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, particularly focusing on the internal motivations for changes in Turkey's South Caucasus policies (Hovsepian 2018, 33–48). These and other publications undoubtedly touch upon factors and variables that have influenced the outbreak of the 44-day war.

The topic of the causes of the 44-day war has begun to gain scientific interpretation by local researchers. For instance, Erik Davtyan has examined the decision-making process behind launching a war against Nagorno-Karabakh, focusing on Azerbaijan's perceptions of the international community's

response (Davtyan 2024, 26–36). Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev direct the research focus on uncovering the causes of the war toward the narrative strategies of Armenian and Azerbaijani political and intellectual elites, as well as the processes of narrative and myth formation within Armenian and Azerbaijani societies (Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev 2021, 320–336). Arman Grigoryan addresses the causes of the war from the perspective of the impact of revolutionary laws on conflict management, specifically in the context of leadership that came to power through revolutionary means (Grigoryan 2024, 372–406).

The scientific novelty of this article lies in the fact that, for the first time, albeit not in-depth, it addresses the question of the relevance and capacity of competing International Relations theories to comprehensively address the causes of the 44-day war. At this stage, the focus is on comparing the ontologies of theories within the domain of Political Realism, specifically Structural Realism and Neoclassical Realism, as one of the most popular and easily comprehensible theoretical approaches.

#### **The necessity of application and conceptualization of theories and conceptions in studying the 44-day war**

The outbreak of war, the conditions leading to it, and its prevention are foundational issues in the discipline of International Relations. While International Relations theory primarily focuses on the conditions and causes of major wars (Gleditsch 1995, 584; Sagan & Waltz 2002, 4; Mandelbaum 1998, 20),<sup>1</sup> many approaches and concepts developed over decades for understanding the dynamics of large-scale conflicts are also applicable to studying wars between smaller states, such as the 44-day war. These approaches and concepts are relevant to analyzing the causes of the 44-day war, at the very least because there is broad agreement among both the Armenian and international academic and analytical communities that the war's outbreak was an organic part of not only regional but also global geopolitical developments (Jovic'-Lazić 2021, 227–231; Avdaliani 2022, 1–17; Grigoryan, 2021).<sup>2</sup> This alignment

---

<sup>1</sup> Although there is no unequivocal or universally accepted definition of "major wars" (or "general wars") within the academic community, the concept has been widely debated. For instance, Nils Petter Gleditsch, a researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo, discusses this issue by referencing a statement made by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in a 1992 speech. Carter claimed that "at present, 35 major wars are taking place worldwide," defining "major war" as a conflict with at least 1,000 casualties. Despite the lack of consensus on a precise definition, there is a general understanding that "major wars" are those involving two or more key actors in international politics. Kenneth Waltz, one of the most prominent theorists in International Relations, approaches the issue from the opposite perspective, defining peace as the absence of war among the world's most powerful states. Meanwhile, Michael Mandelbaum, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, describes major wars as conflicts initiated by the most powerful states, characterized by the deployment of significant resources and arsenals.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Ana Jović-Lazić, a senior researcher at the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, develops the argument in her study on the causes of the 44-day war that, although ensuring its presence in the South Caucasus is of critical importance for Russia, the country chose not to counter Turkey's expanding influence in the region. This decision was made in exchange for cooperation or non-competition with Turkey in addressing its priorities on other fronts. For more on the impact of global balance shifts on the geopolitical

highlights the value of employing International Relations theories to contextualize and understand the war's dynamics.

### **The important but insufficient ability of Structural Realism to explain the causes of the 44-day war**

As a dominant direction in the theoretical framework of International Relations, Realism argues that wars emerge because of changes in the balance of power (Sheehan, 1996). This change can occur either due to a significant increase (or decrease) in the military capacity of one (or more) of the system's key actors or as a consequence of the failure of diplomacy (when the balance of interests between actors cannot be maintained through diplomatic means). However, while Structural Realism provides a useful lens for understanding these shifts, it solely is not enough to fully explain the specific dynamics and causes of the 44-day war.

Beyond the two conditions mentioned earlier, the factors of miscalculation and/or misperception are highly emphasized in literature as crucial in the outbreak of war. Abshire (former head of the Center for Strategic and International Studies) and Dickson criticized the tendency of defense planners and intelligence analysts to overlook the role of miscalculation and misperception in predicting wars (Abshire & Dickson 1983, 114). At the same time, the importance of considering these factors in the broader, more objective, and systematic context of the factors influencing the outbreak of war is highlighted. For example, Jack Levy, analyzing the literature on misperception, concludes that conceptualizing the factor of misperception is crucial for completing the theory of war. However, he also acknowledges that the claim that miscalculation or misperception could independently and autonomously trigger the outbreak of war requires substantial justification (Levy 1983, 99).

Nevertheless, considering that miscalculations or misperceptions, as causes of war, are not systematic but rather accidental phenomena, it is more pertinent to focus on the systematic causes of war - specifically, the changes in the balance of power. The concept of the balance of power (and the dynamics of its formation and disruption) is, at first glance, most comprehensible within the framework of Structural Realism. This orthodox approach fundamentally posits that Structural Realism identifies the structure of the international system—particularly the distribution of power among its units, their alignments, and the content of the power balance itself—as the primary determinant of war or peace (Waltz 1979, 102–129).<sup>1</sup> If we consider that the 44-day war was a consequence of disruptions in the

---

architecture of the South Caucasus, see, for example, Avdaliani (2022, 1–17). For studies by domestic analysts see Grigoryan Tigran (2021, *The Multilayered Causes of the War*).

<sup>1</sup> In his foundational work, Kenneth Waltz, the founder of the Structural Realism school, argues that among the three characteristics defining the international system—organizing principle, the functional nature of units, and the distribution of capabilities—it is the third that dictates state behavior, as the first two are stable and immutable.

balance of power, not only in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations but also at a macro-regional level (primarily due to Turkey's significant rise and Russia's relative decline), as well as at a global level, given the ongoing reshaping of the world order, it becomes evident that the ontology of Structural Realism is crucial for understanding the causes of the 44-day war. Reiterating once more, Structural Realism views state behavior as a response to the power configurations (balance of power) within the international system and their changes (Waltz 1979, 79-101).

When examining Azerbaijan's initiation of the 44-day war through this lens, the following observations can be made:

- Azerbaijan initiated the war because it had achieved military superiority over Armenia. This shift in bilateral power balance made Azerbaijan confident in its ability to prevail militarily (Iskandaryan et al., 2024, 189-197).
- Azerbaijan initiated the war because of the increased influence of its strategic ally, Turkey, in the South Caucasus, which coincided with the relative decline of Armenia's strategic ally, Russia. This was manifested in Turkey's substantial military support to Azerbaijan (Hovsepyan & Tonoyan 2024, 622-655).
- The weakening of Russian influence or the rise of Turkish influence (a shift in the regional balance) was a consequence of broader systemic changes at the global level.

These changes can be summarized as follows: The unipolarity of the international system, which characterized the early 2000s, began to be challenged by key actors in global politics, particularly China and Russia. China's challenge materialized through significant expansion in military power, alongside increasing economic and cultural influence in various regions globally. Russia's challenge occurred primarily within its neighboring regions (post-Soviet space), where it sought to expand its military influence (Mearsheimer, 2024). The attempt to expand Russia's military influence, often in the absence of equivalent economic and cultural foundations, frequently led to adverse effects, effectively weakening its position in certain regions, including the South Caucasus. This dynamic created an opening for Azerbaijan to launch the 44-day war. It is important to substantiate the argument that the weakening of Russia's influence (a shift in the regional power balance) played a crucial role in the initiation of the 44-day war. Within some political and analytical circles in Armenia, the thesis that the war was a result of a Russo-Turkish or Russo-Turkish-Azerbaijani agreement is frequently discussed. Without delving into the validity of this perspective due to a lack of conclusive evidence, it is important to highlight the

---

Regarding the organizing principle, Waltz asserts that international systems have always been, are, and will remain anarchic. Under conditions of anarchy, states become functionally similar actors, as their primary concern becomes survival. The principle guiding their behavior to ensure survival is self-help and self-interest. This fundamental feature of the international system creates an environment where the distribution of capabilities among states becomes the key factor influencing their actions and interactions.

following arguments. Even if we accept that the war was initiated with Russia's acquiescence, it must also be acknowledged that this acquiescence was likely achieved under Turkish and Azerbaijani pressures. Years earlier, Russia might have been able to resist such pressures, but by the eve of the war, this was no longer possible. This aspect is noteworthy because no power willingly shares its sphere of influence with another. From the perspective of Political Realism, this is an axiomatic truth. The South Caucasus is a region that Russia considers part of its vital interest zone. Any weakening of its influence there could lead to unpredictable and dangerous developments for Moscow. If we consider the thesis that Russia's acquiescence to the 44-day war was a deliberate strategic trade-off rather than a demonstration of incapacity, this interpretation will fall beyond the explanatory reach of Structural Realism. Addressing this possibility would require further analytical frameworks, which we will explore in subsequent analyses.

The ontology of Structural Realism plays a crucial role in explaining shifts in the balance of power. Therefore, the comprehensive and detailed study of the global reconfiguration of the international system and the dynamics of the regional system is indispensable for understanding both the causes of the 44-day war and the ongoing dangerous developments. Structural Realism provides essential insights into how power dynamics at multiple levels—global, regional, and bilateral—interact to shape state behavior, illustrating its significant explanatory capacity while highlighting areas that may necessitate complementary theoretical tools.

### **The necessary but insufficient explanatory power of Structural Realism: the need to examine war causes from the perspective of Neoclassical Realism**

Despite the aforementioned, the following critical question remains open: what role did internal factors play in the disruption of the Armenian-Azerbaijani balance of power, and how significant were they? This question can be reframed as follows:

1. Would Azerbaijan have initiated the war even under favorable transformations in international and regional systems if it had understood that breaking through the Armenian side's defense (the defense concept) was impossible or that it would face a devastating counterstrike from the Armenian side (the deterrence concept)?
2. To what extent did the Armenian (Republic of Armenia and Artsakh) authorities, military-political leadership, and foreign policy officials accurately comprehend the dynamics of international and macro-regional systems, changes in the balance of power, and the capabilities of their military, political, economic, and social potential?

These questions, in our view, are of critical importance, as the answers to them determine why the 44-day war was initiated specifically during that period (autumn of 2020) and unfolded on such a scale, or whether the war could have been avoided altogether<sup>1</sup>.

The discussion of these practical questions can be framed within the following broader theoretical inquiries:

1. What is the significance of internal factors in shaping a state's foreign policy behavior?
2. What determines the differences in a state's foreign policy behavior, given the consistent constraints and pressures imposed by the international system?

These theoretical inquiries fall outside the research domain of Structural Realism. This is precisely where the need arises to draw on the ontology of Neoclassical Realism. Followers of this direction of Realism, while accepting the Structural Realist premise that state behavior is a response to the dictates of the international system, also argue that the nature of this response depends on the internal factors of the state (Rose 1998, 144-172). According to the prominent representative of this direction, Gideon Rose, the nature of the state's response to the international system's demands and whether this response aligns with the state's interests depends on two key factors: first, the way the system's demands are perceived by the leader and elite; and second, the degree of ability to mobilize resources to respond to these demands (Rose 1998, 158-165). Notably, in this sense, Structural Realism and Neoclassical Realism do not contradict each other. According to Brian Rathbun, Neoclassical Realism is the organic continuation of Structural Realism. While Structural Realism is a theory of international politics, Neoclassical Realism is a theory of foreign policy (Rathbun 2008, 294-321). We find it necessary to emphasize once again that foreign policy is, indeed, a response to the signals of the international system. In this regard, one cannot disagree with the claims made by Structural Realist theorists Kenneth Waltz and John

---

<sup>1</sup> The issue holds significant public resonance and sensitivity in Armenia, sparking endless political and analytical debates. For example, the first president of the Republic of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, claims that the war would have occurred regardless of circumstances if territorial concessions were not made (Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Speech at the ANC Congress, March 28, 2017). On the other hand, the third president, Serzh Sargsyan, argues that the war could have been avoided if the negotiation process inherited by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in May 2018 had been preserved and continued. Sargsyan links this to the importance of maintaining the chief negotiator's role. In an interview on February 15, 2021, he specifically stated, "Based on geopolitical realities and the belief that if the chief negotiator changes, the negotiation process will undergo changes that will be fateful for our country... I agreed to be elected Prime Minister for this very reason" (Serzh Sargsyan, February 15, 2021). For a detailed understanding of Nikol Pashinyan's stance on the inevitability of the 44-day war, refer to his article "The Origins of the 44-Day War" (Nikol Pashinyan, The Origins of the 44-Day War). Some public and political figures or analysts assert that the war could have been prevented through proper diplomacy, military policy, and governance in other areas. For instance, Vartan Oskanian, at the scientific-practical conference "The Imperative of International Recognition of the Republic of Artsakh" on February 24, 2023, expressed the view that there was a genuine opportunity to prevent the war (Vartan Oskanian, The Imperative of International Recognition of the Republic of Artsakh). Addressing the cost of preventing the war, which would have entailed territorial concessions, Nikol Pashinyan stated from the National Assembly tribune on April 13, 2022: "Today, people ask, 'Could you have prevented the war?' We could have prevented the war, which would have resulted in the same situation we have now, of course, without victims" (Nikol Pashinyan, We Could Have Prevented the War).

Mearsheimer that even the behavior of the most powerful states is planned, shaped, and manifested based on the constraints of the international system.<sup>1</sup> However, it is impossible to disagree with the idea that a state may respond differently to uniform pressure from the system, a circumstance that is one of the central ideas of Neoclassical Realism (Talliaferro 2000/01, 128-161). Thus, the structure of the international system, the global balance of power, and its dynamics are independent variables, while the state's response is a dependent variable, and the two key factors underlying this response—the state's perception of the structure and dynamics of the system and its ability to mobilize resources—are intermediate variables (Rathbun 2008, 311-318).

Why do we give preference to Neoclassical Realism in investigating the causes of the 44-day war? It is Neoclassical Realism that directs our research focus on a detailed examination of the foreign policy actions of the states involved in the war and the motivations underlying these actions, which is undoubtedly a highly complex and intensive research task. However, we wish to emphasize that one of the important issues of this work is raising this question. We consider it important because we disagree with the circulating notion that the 44-day war would have broken out regardless of everything. We have a strong belief that, with the correct understanding of international and regional realities, proper articulation of national-state interests, and appropriate mobilization of available military, diplomatic, socio-economic, and other resources (without prematurely developing the thesis that the realities were correctly understood but the Armenian military potential was deliberately weakened, or inaction occurred), the war could have been prevented. Proving this belief is not the objective of this article. Our task is to clarify why it is important to direct the research focus on a detailed discussion of the foreign policy actions of the states involved in the war and the motivation behind these actions. Especially since public and political discourse contains numerous statements about the difficulties the current Armenian authorities face in correctly understanding the international situation (Ter-Petrosyan, 2021).

The research perspective of Neoclassical Realism includes not only the foreign policy actions of the state (economic sanctions, military operations, declarations, etc.) but also foreign policy strategies (long-

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Waltz's famous proposition states that, under the anarchic nature of the international system, the behavior of all states is inevitably reactive, meaning it is a response to external stimuli (literally "consequential," implying that it is the result of anarchy that all states act on the principle of self-help) (Waltz 1979, 79-129). Similarly, John Mearsheimer, in his well-known work on the political relations of states, develops the central thesis that states seek dominance over one another, with the ultimate goal being unilateral hegemony. This argument again anchors in the nature of the international system, citing his well-known five principles: (1) the system is anarchic, (2) states possess substantial military power, (3) states are uncertain about each other's intentions, (4) states are rational actors, and (5) the principal concern and goal of states is survival (Mearsheimer 2001, 29-46). Thus, according to Mearsheimer, the nature of the international system is shaped by the realities these principles represent, meaning even a powerful state bases its behavior on the dictates of the international system. Therefore, both factions of Structural Realism, Defensive Realism of Kenneth Waltz and Offensive Realism of John Mearsheimer, posit that states' behavior is the reaction to the decisive causes of the structure of the international system: the differences between propositions of Offensive and Defensive factions lie in the kinds of those reactions.



term military, economic, and diplomatic preparations for military action, etc.). In this sense, the first task is to uncover the fundamental cause of the 44-day war—the change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus and the strategies of external actors in this change, which requires directing the research focus, among other things, to the following issues:

- What strategy did Turkey adopt to alter the balance of power in the South Caucasus in its favor?
- What strategy did Russia adopt to maintain the balance of power in the South Caucasus in its favor?
- What strategy did the West (the term is conditional) adopt to alter the balance of power in the South Caucasus to the detriment of Russia and Iran?
- What strategy did Iran adopt to prevent the alteration of the balance of power in the South Caucasus to its detriment?
- What strategy did Azerbaijan adopt to alter the Armenian-Azerbaijani balance of power in its favor?
- What strategy did the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh adopt to prevent the alteration of the Armenian-Azerbaijani balance of power in favor of Azerbaijan?

These issues are undoubtedly substantial and multifaceted, each of which is a topic for separate and extensive research. The content of the aforementioned strategies includes arms acquisition, army modernization, economic projects, diplomatic strategies, propaganda, and so on. Therefore, for domestic professional and political thought, there exists a large and broad research agenda, capable of revealing the processes that led to a large-scale war. Secondly, it is necessary to identify the critical point at which the described change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus led directly to the 44-day war. This research question also involves examining and, if possible, confirming or refuting the assumptions circulating in public, political, and journalistic circles, including, among others, the following:<sup>1</sup>

1. It was possible that the change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus, which occurred as a result of the implementation of the strategies of the aforementioned actors, might not have led to war, but instead altered the Armenian-Azerbaijani status quo through diplomatic means. In other words, the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiation process could have reached a new stage, which could have been less favorable to Armenia but still substantially brought the political resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue closer. Public figures or experts supporting this assumption pointed to the high legitimacy of the ruling political force in Armenia since the spring of 2018 (Oskanyan, 2023).
2. It was possible to prevent or delay large-scale military actions by Azerbaijan if the Armenian authorities had made the necessary diplomatic efforts to continue the negotiation process based on the Madrid Principles within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs

---

<sup>1</sup> We prefer to primarily focus on the thesis related to the capabilities of preventing the war. It is well-known that in opposition public and political circles, the thesis is widely circulated that the current Armenian authorities had all the possible means to prevent the war, to end it quickly, or to avoid defeat, but deliberately chose not to use these opportunities (Jamalyan, 2024).

of Armenia, Vartan Oskanian, stated at the "The Imperative of International Recognition of the Republic of Artsakh" scientific-practical conference that any war can be prevented using correct diplomacy. Regarding the outbreak of the 44-day war, he accused the current Armenian leadership of inaction in addressing the rupture in the negotiation process (Oskanyan, 2023).

3. It was possible to prevent or delay the 44-day war if the correct and effective approaches were applied in the organization of military affairs, acquisition of armaments, and development of the defense industry, through which the imbalance in the military strength between Armenia and Azerbaijan would not have become so significant.<sup>1</sup>

4. It was possible to prevent or delay the 44-day war if the Armenian leadership had worked effectively within the framework of allied and partner countries, including by involving Diaspora organizations.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion**

All the questions we have raised, encompassing both strategic and tactical dimensions, align with the ontology of Neoclassical Realism. This framework examines how states perceive and interpret challenges posed by the international system and assesses their capacity to develop and deploy appropriate responses. In other words, for specialists researching the causes of the 44-day war, it is crucial to uncover the impact of changes in the global balance of power on the South Caucasian subsystem, the way this influence was perceived by Armenia's leaders and elites (primarily by Prime Minister Pashinyan and his political team), and the ability to utilize Armenia's military, political, diplomatic, and economic capabilities in preventing the war. Thus, Neoclassical Realism, which examines both the constraints imposed by the international system on a state's behavior and issues

---

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter "Exit on Land, Predetermined Air" of the monograph "Storm in the Caucasus" (authors: Armenian military expert Leonid Nersisyan and British expert Mark Kazalet), the authors point out that the strategic defeat of the Armenian side was linked to granting Azerbaijan the opportunity to achieve air superiority (Nersisyan & Kazalet 2021, 63-73). For example, Vasili Kashin, a researcher at the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences, emphasizes that Azerbaijan's military purchases in the period leading up to the 44-day war were much more targeted and deliberate than those of Armenia. According to him, the Azerbaijanis "...didn't waste money; they carefully considered all the modern trends in military affairs, bought what was needed, and studied the experience of war in the Middle East...". Military affairs theorist and journalist Mikhail Khodaryonok draws attention to the fact that the air defense system of Artsakh was designed to counterattack helicopters and strike aircraft, "whereas in the sky, they were facing relatively small drones" (Aksenov, Why Azerbaijan Won the War in Karabakh?). Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer considers the absence of mobile artillery as a key reason for Armenia's defeat (the enemy's drones suppressed Armenia's slow-moving artillery) (News.am, Russian Military Expert Highlights the Main Cause of Armenia's Defeat in the 44-Day War).

<sup>2</sup> International relations expert Hermine Mkhitarian, for example, argues in certain sections of her monograph that after coming to power in 2018, the government led by Nikol Pashinyan significantly worsened Armenia's relations with Russia, the United States, Europe, Georgia, Iran, and China, which had a negative impact on Armenia's ability to prevent the 44-day war, particularly in terms of receiving support from these actors or exerting influence on Azerbaijan. According to the author, during the period from July to September 2020, when Azerbaijan was intensively preparing for military actions and actively conducting diplomatic and propaganda preparations, Armenian diplomacy was effectively inactive (Mkhitarian 2022, 69-84; 99-103).

related to its perception and ability to respond, is more relevant within the framework of Realist theory in international relations when addressing the causes of the 44-day war. However, while it is relevant, it is not without explanatory shortcomings, and we are hopeful that in subsequent sections, we will discuss the necessity of combining it with other theories.

### **Bibliography**

Abshire, D., & Dickson, B. (1983). War by miscalculation: The forgotten dimension. *The Washington Quarterly*, 6(4), 114–124.

Aksenov, P. (2020, November 11). Why did Azerbaijan win the war in Karabakh? Answer military experts. BBC Russian. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-54900906> (In Russian).

Avdalani, E. (2022). Shifting global balance of power and the South Caucasus: New world order and small regions: The case of South Caucasus. Palgrave Macmillan.

Davtyan, E. (2024). Lessons that lead to war: Foreign policy learning and military escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 71(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2183410>.

Gamaghelyan, P., & Rumyantsev, S. (2021). The road to the second Karabakh war: The role of ethno-centric narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. *Caucasus Survey*, 9(3), 320–336.

Gevorgyan, A. (2023). Red lines and green lights: Iran's balancing policy in the South Caucasus. *Analytical Brief (QMHK)*, 16, 7–32. (In Armenian).

Gleditsch, N. P. (1995). 35 major wars? A brief comment on Mueller. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 39(3), 584–587.

Grigoryan, A. (2024). Revolutionary governments, recklessness, and war: The case of the second Karabakh war. *Security Studies*, 33(3), 372–406.

Grigoryan, T. (2021, October 20). The multilayered causes of the war. EVN Report. <https://evnreport.com/opinion/the-multilayered-causes-of-the-war/>.

Hovsepyan, L. (2018). Transformations in Turkey's foreign and security policy: Reassessing Armenia's security challenges. *Haykakan Banak*, 4, 33–48. (In Armenian).

Hovsepyan, L., & Tonoyan, A. (2024). From alliance to “soft conquest”: The anatomy of the Turkish-Azerbaijani military alliance before and after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 35(4), 622–655. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2312957>.

Iskandaryan, G. et al. (2024). Transformation of the balance of power in the South Caucasus region and the 2020 Artsakh war. *Science: Yerevan*, 409. (In Armenian).

Jamalyan, D. (2024, October 10). It was a conspiratorial war to cede territory by destroying the army. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSa9qYPacNE> (In Armenian).

Jovic'-Lazic, A. (2021). The second armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: Causes and implications. In *Convergence and Confrontation: The Balkans and the Middle East in the 21st century* (pp. 211–240). Institute of International Politics and Economics.

Levy, J. S. (1983). Misperception and the causes of war: Theoretical linkages and analytical problems. *World Politics*, 36(1), 76–99.

Mandelbaum, M. (1998). Is major war obsolete? *Survival. Global Politics and Strategy*, 40 (4), 20–38.

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W.W. Norton & Company.

Mearsheimer, J. (2024, January 13). Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine, China, NATO, and WW3. Lex Fridman Podcast #401. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4wLXNydzeY>.

Mkhitarian, H. (2022). Chosen defeat: The Artsakh conflict: Three years of disaster (2018-2021). "Hayatsk" series, Profil Media.

Nersisyan, L., & Kazalet, M. (2021). The result on land, determined in the air, the storm in the Caucasus. In K. N. Pukhova (Ed.) (pp. 128). Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies.

News.am. (2024, June 18). A Russian military expert points out the main reason for the Armenian side's defeat in the 44-day war. News.am. <https://news.am/arm/news/829860.html?fbclid=> (In Armenian).

Oskanyan, V. (2023, February 24). Scientific and practical conference "The imperative of international recognition of the Republic of Artsakh". Yerkir.am. <https://yerkir.am/hy/article/2023/02/24/8289> (In Armenian).

Pashinyan, N. (2021, January 4). The origins of the 44-day war. Aravot.am. <https://www.aravot.am/2021/01/04/1163203/> (In Armenian).

Pashinyan, N. (2022, April 13). We could have prevented the war, which would have resulted in the same situation, of course without the casualties. News.am. <https://news.am/arm/news/696384.html> (In Armenian).

Rathbun, B. (2008). A rose by any other name: Neoclassical realism as the logical and necessary extension of structural realism. *Security Studies*, 17(2), 294–321.

Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), 144–172.

Sagan, S. D., & Waltz, K. N. (2002). *The spread of nuclear weapons: A debate renewed*. W.W. Norton.

Sargsyan, S. (2021, February 15). Exclusive interview of the third President of the Republic of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, to "ArmNews" TV Company. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR0wkeaAkmY> (In Armenian).

- Sheehan, M. (1996). *Balance of power: Theory and history*. Routledge.
- Sukiasyan, N. (2020). An attempt to theorize the structural factors influencing the Russian direction of Armenia's foreign policy and the evolution of the impact of these factors. *Scientific Artsakh*, 4(7), 61–72. (In Armenian).
- Sukiasyan, N. (2022). The evolution of structural and constructivist dimensions in the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia (on the example of Armenian-Russian relations, 2008-2020). Ph.D. thesis, Candidate of Political Sciences.
- Talliafero, J. W. (2000/01). Security seeking under anarchy: Defensive realism revisited. *International Security*, 25(3), 128–161.
- Ter-Petrosyan, L. (2016, December 17). Speech at the Armenian National Congress convention. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7OuHuYpNfQ> (In Armenian).
- Ter-Petrosyan, L. (2017, March 28). Interview for the "Urvagits" program on "Kentron" TV. (In Armenian).
- Ter-Petrosyan, L. (2021, May 27). Interview on Public Television. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xa5bhGIZHR8> (In Armenian).
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Addison-Wesley.