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**NAGORNO-KARABAKH:
THE PARADOXES OF STRENGTH
AND WEAKNESS IN AN
ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT**

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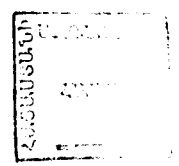
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This third CI Research Paper analyzes the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh from the standpoint of the concept and phenomenon of asymmetric conflict. The asymmetry of the conflict is rooted in the non-identical statuses of the principal parties to the conflict, and in the military and security aspects of the confrontation in the Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh-Armenia triangle. The asymmetry of the players' potential figured importantly during the military phase of the conflict in the first half of the 1990s and continues to be obvious in the current stage. By applying the concept of asymmetric conflict and analyzing the phenomenon of asymmetric conflict, the authors take a fresh look at the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and propose possible symmetric and asymmetric scenarios for its development. The paper is targeted to reach a broad range of readers as well as political scientists.

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INTRODUCTION

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is one in a series of ethno-political confrontations triggered by the demise of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR. In terms of formal logic, this conflict can be analyzed by applying the asymmetry concept, alongside conflicts in Kosovo, Transdnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The conflict's asymmetry is manifested through the unequal statuses of the principal parties in conflict, whereby Azerbaijan is an internationally recognized sovereign state, while Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) is an unrecognized state entity which in the past was a part of Soviet Azerbaijan. In other words, we observe the phenomenon of an *asymmetric conflict* between unequal-status parties.

The asymmetry of the conflict is also related to the military strength of the actors in the Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh-Armenia triangle. The asymmetry of their potential figured prominently during the military phase of the conflict in the early 1990s, when, in full accordance with the theory of asymmetric conflict, the formally "weak side" (Nagorno-Karabakh), directly assisted by Armenia, defeated the numerically dominant side – Azerbaijan – whose army was several times larger than those of Karabakh and Armenia combined. This asymmetry of potential is again evident in the current stage of the unresolved conflict. The "no war, no peace" situation survives against the backdrop of a continuing arms race and the inability of the parties to change the existing *status quo* in the region.

The findings of several investigations and empirical observations demonstrate that at this moment in history, clashes between opponents of unequal status are considerably more frequent than "classical" interstate conflicts. Analyses of data on different armed conflicts further prove that in more than 80 percent of armed conflicts that have occurred since World War II, one of the parties was represented by a non-state actor or by an entity whose international legal status was not identical to the status of

its opponent. Incidentally, more than 75 percent of all armed conflicts were either internal conflicts or started as internal conflicts.¹ More and more often, the results of asymmetric collision interfere with the habitual expectation of a victory by the “strong,” or by the state that, in addition to all other factors, can rely on the legitimacy of resorting to force. The American political scientist Ivan Arreguin-Toft, for example, calculated that between 1800 and 2003, the stronger parties were victorious in 71.5 percent of asymmetric wars. However, comparing 50-years spans, he found a significant decrease, from 88.2 percent in the first half-century to 48.4 percent in the last.² Moreover, the trend was on the rise after the WWII.

An interdisciplinary scientific journal, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, has been published in the US since 2008. The editors defined the subject matter of their journal as seeking “to contribute to understanding and ameliorating conflict between states and non-state challengers,” which is the “predominant form of conflict in the world today, and will be the predominant source of violent conflict in the twenty-first century.”³ The concept of asymmetric conflict is actively used for the purposes of military-strategic analysis in the US, Israel, UK, Australia, and Canada. Politicians attempt to take into account the logic of the struggle between asymmetric adversaries when making decisions in response

1. See Deriglazova, Larisa V. *Asymmetric Conflicts: Equation with Many Unknowns*, Tomsk, 2009, pp.71-72 (in Russian). Calculations have been performed using two databases: the database on armed conflicts compiled by the University of Uppsala, Sweden, in collaboration with the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Norway (Uppsala Conflict Data Program – http://www.pcr.uu.se/publications/UCDP_pub/Conflict_List_1946-2006.pdf); and the database of national and international conflicts created within the COSIMO project at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, led by Professor Frank Pfetich (COSIMO 1. Database on National and International Conflicts from 1945 to 1999 – http://www.hiik.de/en/kosimo/data/codemanual_kosimo1b.pdf).
2. Arreguin-Toft, Ivan. *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Cambridge; NY.: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.18, 3–4.
3. “Editors’ Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict (DAC).” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Vol.1, # 1, March 2008, p.1.

to international and domestic conflicts, in terms of the forms, scale, control and legitimization of the use of force, while experts in the field of conflict resolution pay special attention to the specifics of resolving contradictions between asymmetric opponents. For their part, military theorists work on integrating the tools of asymmetric conflict into the classical science of military strategy.

By applying *the concept of asymmetric conflict* and studying the *phenomenon of asymmetric conflict*, we can better understand the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and make more accurate predictions concerning the future of this ethno-political conflict along the lines of a symmetric or asymmetric scenario. Another factor making this conflict particularly interesting for researchers is that it is superimposed by another phenomenon that occurs in international political and legal practice and that has been actively discussed in political science in recent decades: the phenomenon of unrecognized but *de facto* existing states, which is also related to the relationship between status and sovereignty in the post-bipolar and post-Westphalian world.

CHAPTER 1

A BIT OF THEORY: THE CONCEPTS OF ASYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

1.1. THE CONCEPT OF ASYMMETRY

The concepts of symmetry and asymmetry are fairly common in science but not in the humanities and social sciences, where the need for them has only arisen in recent decades. Asymmetry is defined as “lack of symmetry, balance, equality, harmony,” or a “relationship between two entities that have no common measure (measure for comparison).” In logic, “asymmetry” describes “a non-interchangeable relationship between two entities in which the former relates to the latter in a way in which the latter cannot relate to the former” (e.g. father and son).

For centuries, symmetry was seen as a manifestation of harmony, balance, order and norms in the outside world and in scientific knowledge; asymmetry, on the other hand, was regarded as a manifestation of disorder and anomaly. In the 19th century, French scientist Louis Pasteur, a physicist, chemist and microbiologist, proved that asymmetry was in fact the norm, constituting one of the main features of nature. Now seen as a special way in which organic and inorganic worlds are organized, the principles of asymmetry gradually became elements of arts and humanities.

In social science, the concept of asymmetry is most often applied to various levels of conflict, from confrontation between small groups to global collision. Christopher Mitchell, a leading expert in conflict management, emphasized that “the concept of asymmetry embraces far more than the customary conception of a ‘power imbalance’ between parties of a conflict.” He defined asymmetry as a “dynamic as well as multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of a differential distribution

of relevant resources and salient characteristics between adversaries in a conflict system.”⁴

Political scientists, lawyers and sociologists use the concepts of symmetry and asymmetry to analyze relations between subjects in a particular system, whether social, political or legal. This approach assumes that asymmetry is an essential characteristic of the relations between the interactive participants; these relations can be equal vs. subordinate, horizontal vs. vertical, pluralistic vs. hierarchical, etc. Typically, struggle is initiated by the subordinate party, aimed at changing the situation and achieving symmetry/equality, while the actions of the dominant party are aimed at restoring “order” and maintaining the status of asymmetry/hierarchy.

Analysts use the concept of asymmetry to characterize individual elements of a conflict⁵ or to treat a phenomenon as a combination of asymmetric characteristics within a holistic approach. The abovementioned journal, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, emphasizes the statuses and resources of the adversaries as determinants of the phenomenon, and analyzes the opponents’ behavior from a psychological perspective. Political and military analysis gives priority to tactical and strategic aspects of asymmetry.⁶

We can identify and emphasize the consistent use and application of *the concept of asymmetry* within conflict analysis in several ways, including:

4. *Cooperative Security: Reducing Third World Wars*. Eds. William Zartman and Victor A. Kremenyuk. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.26.
5. Conflict theory singles out the structural (stable) and dynamic (changeable) characteristics of those conflict situations which affect the results of the struggle. The structural elements include participants, their spheres of interaction, the causes of conflict, nature of the interaction and consequences of conflict. Characteristics regarded as dynamic are the duration and intensity of conflict interaction between the parties, as well as strategies and tactics.
6. See, e.g. the web portal of the Center for Asymmetric Warfare (CAW), Naval Postgraduate School, CA, (<http://www.cawnps.org>).

Analyzing confrontation between adversaries having unequal status within one legal system – the politico-legalistic approach;

Characterizing the inequality of the opponents' power and resources – the traditional approach;

Explaining the political defeat of the dominant opponent in armed conflict – the paradoxical approach;

Elaborating the tactics and strategies which compensate for inequality between the opponents' power and resources – the tactical and strategic approach;

Identifying the parties' non-identical interests and attitudes to conflict – the subjectivist approach;

Assessing the parties' motivation to maintain confrontation – the mobilization approach, or psychological approach.

The common aspect of conflicts that are analyzed in terms of the *concept of asymmetry* is found in terms of the *incommensurate strengths and statuses of the opponents*, and the "system" can be understood as a state or a system of international relations within the existing hierarchies of power and capabilities of different countries.

1.2. PHENOMENON/THEORY OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

It is important to distinguish between the *phenomenon of asymmetric conflict* and the application of the *concept of asymmetry* while analyzing the clash between opponents of unequal power and status, especially given the fact that in this paper we apply both concepts. The concept of *asymmetry* was used for analyzing *relations* between parties of unequal international legal and political status (Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan). The phenomenon of *asymmetric conflict* helps to reveal the *causes of victory and defeat* in the military phase of the conflict, and to understand the regularities of the continuing power and military confrontation of parties with unequal power and resources (Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia). At the same time, both the *concept of asymmetry*

1.2. Phenomenon/theory of asymmetric conflict

and the *phenomenon of asymmetric conflict* reflect the commonly shared features of confrontations between opponents with significantly unequal status and power.

An integrated model of *asymmetric conflict* was suggested in the mid-1970s in order to identify the causes of political defeat suffered by developed countries in Third World wars in general, and the war fought by the US in Vietnam in particular.⁷ Political scientist Andrew Mack defined asymmetric conflict as the "political but not military defeat of great powers against weaker opponents," when "conventional military superiority is not merely useless, but may actually be counter-productive."⁸ Mack proposed a theory of asymmetric conflict based on a set of asymmetries which dictate the course and completion of wars of this sort. The main asymmetry is the resources-and-power asymmetry which often accompanies the status asymmetry. These basic asymmetries stimulate the nonlinear development of events through asymmetric forms of struggle (e.g. protracted guerrilla wars employing terrorist actions). Nonlinear development of events helps to intensify the asymmetry in the relationship between the warring parties (mobilization capabilities) and in the attitudes towards the conflict (the will to fight and win the war), all of which lead to the political – and not necessarily military – defeat of the stronger adversary and the victory of the weaker side (the paradoxical manifestation of asymmetry).

Andrew Mack, stressing the holistic approach, applied Aristotle's axiom in his argument that "the asymmetries described in this paper – in the interests perceived to be at stake, in mobilization, in intervention capabilities, in 'resource power' and so forth – are abstracted from their context for the sake of analytical clarity. But the whole remains greater than the sum of its parts, and it is the conflict *as a whole* which must

7. The US in Vietnam, France in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Indochina, the United Kingdom in Cyprus and Aden, the Netherlands in Indonesia.

8. Mack, Andrew. "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict." *World Politics*, Vol.27, # 2, 1975, p. 175-179.

be studied in order to understand its evolution and outcome.”⁹ *The phenomenon of asymmetric conflict*, as originally defined by Mack, stands for the political defeat of a strong opponent, something which becomes a certainty only after the end of the confrontation. However, policy and strategy analysts use the *concept of asymmetric conflict* to assume the possibility of illogical developments, which run contrary to existing military, resource and numerical strength, or status-related dominance of one of the parties. In the latter case, the theory of asymmetric conflict loses some of its obvious paradoxical sharpness because in reality, any conflict inevitably includes elements of inequality of the adversaries and can be characterized as asymmetric.

In view of the paradoxical results of asymmetric conflicts, however, the concept of asymmetric conflict is used as a set of asymmetric characteristics of the conflict next in importance to the basic ones – the resources-and-power and status asymmetries. The weaker opponent will always strive to upset the balance of power and relations within the system in favor of increasing its own power and resources, of enhancing status and, most importantly, of using its adversary’s weakness and vulnerabilities, of which, by definition, the stronger opponent has more. It is this fact that needs to be taken into account when analyzing specific examples of armed conflicts between asymmetric antagonists in order to understand the logic of the confrontation and to predict its results.

1.3. FACTORS LEADING TO VICTORY OR DEFEAT IN AN ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

Contemporary military theorist Martin Van Creveld, discussing the expansion of the perimeters of asymmetrical or, in his terminology, “subconventional” wars, insisted that “from Peru to Azerbaijan, and from Philippines to the territories occupied by Israel, subconventional

war – often waged by a handful of ragged men and women – is steadily marching from one triumph to the next.”¹⁰

In his analysis of the evolution and conclusion of the Vietnam War, Andrew Mack proposed several hypotheses about the causes of victory or defeat in asymmetric wars:

1. A weak opponent wins because of an unbending will to win, and the loss of such will by the more powerful opponent. Reflecting the dichotomy of the “small war” waged by the more powerful opponent vs. the “total war” waged by the weaker side, this hypothesis draws attention to the differences between states and political elites in their ability to mobilize society’s resources (human, material and intangible) for achieving victory, in proportion to the importance placed by society on the war.
2. The victory is the result of fatigue of a strong opponent and unwillingness to continue to expend resources and suffer loss of lives in the name of victory. Such a victory is not a pure military victory but a result of exhaustion of the stronger player, or, to quote Prussian general and theorist Carl von Clausewitz, a strategy aimed at achieving a “negative political aim.”
3. Victory by a weak opponent comes from predominant use of asymmetric strategies and tactics: a) guerrilla war, b) acts of terrorism, and c) protracted war.
4. Victory results from non-military factors; an important place among these is held by anti-war public opinion in the more powerful country, and by broadcast media that cover and discuss the course of the war.
5. The defeat of the stronger opponent is a consequence of sharp discords among the political elite and the strengthening stance of anti-war groups, which play an especially prominent role during political elections.

9. Mack, Andrew. “Why Big Nations Lose ...,” p.188.

10. Van Creveld, Martin. “Technology and War II: Postmodern War?” *The Oxford History of Modern War*. Edited by Charles Townsend. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.359.

6. How the struggle unfolds is largely determined by the actions of external forces, rather than by the participants themselves. This may include interference by other countries, or the provision of military, technical and/or economic assistance to one party.
7. The defeat of the stronger side is caused by the cumulative effect of pressure and condemnation by a significant portion of the international community.

In each of the above hypotheses, the outcome can assume one of two opposite values: defeat of the stronger party or political victory of the weaker party in the armed conflict. The very fact of defeat or victory is not always easy to identify but, in most cases, one can achieve this by comparing the goals pursued by the opponents and the situation in which they find themselves when the conflict ends.

The following can be mentioned as factors leading to the defeat of the strong adversary:

1. Absence/loss of will to fight and win.
2. Protracted war without end or clearly definable success.
3. Great complexity in organizing resistance to guerrilla or terrorist forces, or classical warfare in mountainous, jungle or forest-covered terrain against well-armed mobile units of the regular army (including personnel continually recruited by universal conscription) of the weaker side, which possesses attributes of statehood.
4. Negative public opinion and elite attitudes towards the war (public opinion polls, deserters, role played by the media, etc.).
5. Discord within the political elite coming to the surface during elections.
6. Other strong opponents deciding to support the weaker opponent.
7. Negative attitude of the international community toward the war, disapproval of the stronger opponent, condemnation of the purposes and means of warfare.¹¹

11. A graphic representation of the model is given in *Appendix 1*.

Carl von Clausewitz identified indicators of victory/defeat in his famous book "On War" written in the first quarter of the 19th century.¹² He was convinced that the goal of any war is to achieve *political ends and that the use of force is but a means to achieving these ends. Indicators of victory/defeat in a war include the following three elements:*

1. The greater loss of the enemy in physical power.
2. In moral power.
3. His open avowal of this by the relinquishment of his intentions."

Clausewitz *emphasized that "the only real evidence of the victory" is the "the giving up the contest" because the data "on losses were never exact, seldom truthful, and in most cases, full of intentional misrepresentations" while "of the loss in moral forces there is no reliable measure."*¹³

*Consequently, the defeat in the war can be defined as the inability to achieve the formulated goals and unilateral cessation of hostilities. The ongoing war fought by the US in Iraq in many ways proves that the theory of asymmetric conflict is correct.*¹⁴ *The continuing war waged by the international coalition in Afghanistan, just as a similar war initiated by the Soviet Union two decades earlier or the United States' Vietnam war, are examples in the same category.*

Clausewitz wrote about "the *positive and negative* character of the political end." He pointed out that victory in a war was a product of "two factors which cannot be separated, namely, the sum of available means and the strength of the will." The failure to achieve a decisive victory – a *positive political action* – can be compensated for by the drive to undermine the will to win through "the wearying out of the enemy" – a *negative political action*. Clausewitz listed the following "*peculiar means of influencing the probability of the result without destroying the enemy's*

12. The book was written in the 1820s but first published after von Clausewitz's death in 1832.

13. Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War (Book VI, Defence)*. The Complete Translation by Colonel J.J. Graham, published by N.Trubner. London, 1873.

14. Deriglazova, L.V. "Perfect Failure: the U.S. War in Iraq Through the Prism of the Theory of Asymmetric Conflict." *Svobodnaya Mysl'*, # 3, 2010, pp.5–16 (in Russian).

army," namely, "expeditions which have a direct connection with political views": "the complete subjugation of the enemy is not essential in every case, ... the destruction of the enemy's military force, the conquest of enemy's provinces, the mere occupation of them, the mere invasion of them—enterprises which are aimed directly at political objects—lastly a passive expectation of the enemy's blow, are all means which, each in itself, may be used to force the enemy's will just according as the peculiar circumstances of the case lead us to expect more from the one or the other."¹⁵

The model of asymmetric conflict introduces a matrix of factors which undermine the will and fighting spirit of the stronger opponent and make him give up the fight, against his own interests. The weaker party may be represented by various actors: an unrecognized state or a state institution, a political group or movement, a dependent territory or terrorist group. The common element of all these categories is that they confront regular armed forces of the state and pursue a specific political goal; the goal, as a rule, is to create an independent political entity – a state or autonomy within the existing state.

Therefore, the main factors that make it possible for the weaker to defeat the stronger include:

- unflinching will to win which manifests itself in the capacity for the mass mobilization of resources for a long-duration fight;
- protracted war as a manifestation of "non-defeat" in the struggle against the dominant opponent;
- predominant use of guerrilla and terrorist strategies and tactics, or warfare in mountainous, jungle or forest-covered terrain by highly mobile units of regular or semi-regular troops of the weaker opponent which has the status, attributes and the capabilities of a state actor;
- support by the population (active support of guerrilla and terrorist groups, participation in the armed struggle);

15. Clausewitz, C. *On War*.

- consolidation of the political elite and society around the struggle, cessation of domestic disputes for the unified effort to fight the enemy;
- material, military, technical or other assistance from external forces, first of all from great powers;
- appeals to the international community to support one's just cause and to condemn the enemy's immoral aims and methods of warfare.¹⁶

On the whole, the military phase of the 1992-1994 conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh complies with the theory and logic of asymmetric conflicts; there were, however, specific factors that contributed to victory. One of these can be defined as inverse asymmetry in the quality of the military training of personnel. In 2010, the Rand Corporation published a monograph "Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency"¹⁷ plus an additional volume with detailed results of the study, including a brief characterization of thirty anti-insurgent operations.¹⁸ Using case studies and comparative and qualitative methods, US experts examined the most significant asymmetric conflicts from 1978 to 2008. The analysts expressed the opinion that the Karabakh conflict had its own quite specific attributes and features.

Unlike many other local conflicts of recent time, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) – the formally "weak party" in the Karabakh

16. A graphic representation of the model is given in *Appendix 2*.

17. Currently, the term "COunterINsurgency operations" (COIN) is often used as a synonym of asymmetric warfare. Along with this term one also encounters the terms "guerrilla," "small war," "irregular warfare," "unconventional wars" etc. Units of regular army do take part in anti-insurgent operations, in non-direct forms of warfare against non-state adversaries. For details see: Deriglazova, Larisa V. "On the Evolution of the Phenomenon of Guerrilla Warfare." *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*. # 4, April 2009, pp.95–103 (in Russian).

18. Paul, Christopher, Colin P. Clarke and Beth Grill. *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers. Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2010; Paul, Christopher, Colin P. Clarke and Beth Grill. *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers. Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2010.

conflict (numerical strength- and status-wise) – has demonstrated during combat clashes its superiority over the “strong party” (Azerbaijan) in the preparation and operational capability of its troops. Experts from the US RAND Corporation pointed out that, “the case of Nagorno-Karabakh is interesting because the insurgents were the more professional, better-trained and better-equipped force while the COIN forces were more of a rag-tag group of fighters.” The authors also remarked that one possible explanation of this situation may lie in the fact that “in terms of skills, the scales were tipped from the beginning. Because of discrimination against Muslims in the Soviet army, Azerbaijanis were likely to have held positions as builders or cooks. Conversely, there were thousands of Armenians in the officer corps and with frontline training.”¹⁹

Another explanation is that this situation stemmed from specific features of the process of state-building and formation of military institutions in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite the presence of incomplete attributes of statehood during the Soviet period, Azerbaijan had no significant institutional military power resources, not any experience of repelling the Karabakh forces at the beginning of the active military phase of the conflict. On the other hand, by the time the regular Azerbaijani army was formed (approximately in the summer of 1992), Nagorno-Karabakh had already formed a semi-regular army and had extensive experience of opposition to Soviet troops which, from the moment they were brought to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in 1988 and roughly until the fall of 1991, mainly supported by the Azerbaijani side and its communist authorities.

19. Opt. cit., *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers. Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies*. p.224–225.

1.4. INTERSTATE CONFLICT: TAKING ASYMMETRY INTO ACCOUNT

An incentive to take into account the specificity of asymmetric conflict was evident in international politics throughout the second half of the 20th century. To begin with, states attempted to modify the strategy of military operations, taking into account the prospects of confronting a relatively weak opponent. There was a tendency towards a more cautious and incremental use of military power, avoiding direct military interventions in the internal conflicts of foreign countries, and towards a more vigorous use of non-military pressure.²⁰

Approaches to negotiations also had to be adjusted. Attitudes to the status aspect of negotiations had to become more flexible: it is easier for parties to sit down at the negotiation table on the basis of formal equality.²¹ More attention was now devoted to the interests of the weaker party and to seeking a “balance of interests” of the parties in conflict. On one hand, these changes reflected the experience of failed negotiations conducted “from the standpoint of dominance,” and on the other hand, they resulted from using methods of mathematical simulation. One of the fundamental ideas of the game theory approach was that “resolution of the conflict is possible *if and only if* its participants are in symmetrical relationship to each other.”²²

Leading American expert William Zartman holds that “studies of asymmetric negotiations without exception have focused on various

20. See e.g.: Kremenjuk, V.A. “Modern-times International Conflicts: Problems of Management.” *Mezhdunarodnye Protsessy*, # 1, 2003 (in Russian); Deriglazova L.V. “Asymmetry Paradox in an International Conflict.” *Mezhdunarodnye Protsessy*, # 3, 2005, c.89 (in Russian).

21. See Lebedeva, M.M. *Political Settlement of Conflicts. Approaches, Solutions and Technologies*. MOSCOW: Aspekt Press. 1997 (in Russian); Fisher, Roger and William L. Ury. *Getting to Yes. Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. NY, London: Penguin Books. 1991.

22. Svetlov, V.A. *Analyst Conflict. Tutorial*. St. Petersburg: “Rostok” Ltd, 2001, pp.304 (in Russian).

ways in which the weaker party improves its outcomes by reducing the asymmetry." Zartman emphasizes that "negotiations under conditions of asymmetry (asymmetric negotiations) are a paradox, because one of the basic findings about the negotiation process is that it functions best under conditions of equality, and indeed only takes place where parties have some form of a mutual veto over outcomes."²³

One of the factors which influence the outcome of asymmetric conflicts is the strengthening of the conventional and value-based approaches in international politics in the period after World War II. According to Nikolay Kosolapov, such concepts as justice and legitimacy were for a long time associated with a system of norms typical of a closed social organism; however, with time they evolved into basic concepts of international politics.²⁴ The organization of the post-war world was founded on democratic values and principles; their implementation gave rise to contradictions between the norms, principles and values, and the actual conditions in which the international system operated, bringing together diverse actors.²⁵

External forces – individual states and international organizations – play important roles in the outcomes of asymmetric conflicts. These forces may stimulate a "freezing" or suspension of the conflict but they may also favor an enforced solution. Peace enforcement may often (although not always) become a necessary condition for ending a military struggle and settling contradictions in a protracted internal conflict, frequently in favor of the weaker opponent. We see an example of this type during the 1990s

23. Zartman, William. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution, 1995, p.8.

24. Kosolapov, N.A. "Legitimacy in International Relations: the Evolution and Current State of the Problem." *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, # 2, 2005, pp.3-14 (in Russian).

25. A certain role in the spread of terrorist tactics in international conflicts was played by liberal and leftist-minded politicians and movements in developed countries when they declared as "just" the aims of the struggle for "liberation" and "self-determination," leading to the political legitimacy of "freedom fighters." For details, see: Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. Indigo: London, 1999, p.26.

Balkan settlement and especially in the case of the NATO "humanitarian intervention" to protect Kosovo Albanians.

Pavel Smirnov, analyzing the specifics of the "second-generation peacekeeping" in the post-Cold War world, stressed that the new paradigm of international intervention into conflicts, in some cases, results in external management and control by international institutions. This tendency has not materialized on the territory of the former Soviet Union, owing to the position taken by Russia. The coming to power of new political leaders in Moldova and Georgia at the beginning of the 2000s, as well as Ilham Aliiev "inheriting" power in Azerbaijan after his father's death at the end of 2003, outlined a new stage in the evolution of unresolved ethnic conflicts in connection with attempts to "unfreeze" these conflicts and achieve favorable solutions.²⁶

The "unfreezing" of conflicts and changes in the *status quo* are more and more often initiated by leaders of internationally recognized post-Soviet states who had lost the fight in the ethno-political conflicts of the first half of the 1990s, leading to *de facto* secessions of a number of territories and creation of *de facto* independent states. For a number of reasons, all attempts to change the situation failed, and in the case of Georgia, an attempt to resolve the ethno-political conflict by military means in the case of the August 2008 "Five Day War" was disastrous for its initiator.

A close correlation with the phenomenon of unrecognized or *de facto* states often becomes an important feature of today's asymmetric conflicts. As the concept of sovereignty erodes, international recognition and effective statehood do not always march hand-in-hand. Thus, Somalia, Afghanistan and some other countries have had no control over parts of their territories for decades but remain recognized by the international community and represented in the UN. At the same time, Kosovo, Taiwan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Northern Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh are

26. Smirnov, P.E. "“Flickering Mode” of Self-determination Conflicts in Eastern Europe." *Mezhdunarodnye Protssesy*, # 2, 2006, pp. 25, 27-28 (in Russian).

partially recognized or unrecognized by the international community while possessing an efficient governance system. The phenomenon of unrecognized or *de facto* states confirms the logic of the theory of asymmetric conflict and provides additional basis for scenarios that may bring closure to the conflicts.

CHAPTER 2 ASYMMETRY IN THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

The Karabakh conflict can be analyzed by using the concepts of *asymmetry* and *asymmetric conflict*. It is necessary to emphasize that these are not identical constructs but partially overlapping sets of hypothetical and actual relations between parties in conflict. To facilitate understanding, we shall clarify that the concept of *asymmetric conflict* shall be used primarily to indicate the totality of the conflict between the parties having non-identical international legal and political statuses (Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh), while the concept of *asymmetry* will be used to analyze the individual characteristics of the conflict, including the military confrontation of the parties (Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia).

According to Christopher Mitchell, we need to consider “clusters of asymmetric attributes” which will help in better understanding and typifying “certain subtypes of regional conflict.” Mitchell defines several important “points of asymmetry as an emergent property of a conflict system: 1) status or legal asymmetry; 2) resource or capabilities asymmetries (containing but not confined to the asymmetry of coercive potential usually known as a ‘power imbalance’); and 3) behavioral asymmetries of tactics.” In addition, he singles out “moral and structural asymmetries and asymmetries of interdependence and commitments.”²⁷ (A detailed analytical diagram of asymmetric relations and strategies composed by Mitchell can be found in *Appendices 3 and 4.*)

We shall separate and analyze the structural and dynamic characteristics of the Karabakh conflict, taking into account the logic of asymmetry:

- statuses of the opponents;

27. Mitchell, Christopher. “Asymmetry and Strategies of Regional Conflict Reduction.” *Cooperative Security: Reducing Third War Wars*, p.26-27.

- consequences of the conflict;
- available resources (tangible and intangible);
- military and political dimension and the balance of power;
- what the opponents are interested in getting;
- forms of conflict interaction and confrontation strategies;
- attitude of the local population and elites to the conflict, and the public discourse about the conflict;
- influence exerted by external forces.

2.1. STATUSES OF THE OPPONENTS

The assessment of statuses of the parties to a conflict is essential for finding the admissible range of compromises between them, the positions of parties dependent on the outcome, and options for the engagement of the international community. The statuses also play a role in determining possible forms of interaction between direct and indirect participants in the conflict. The results of the 1992–1994 military phase provide an example of defeat for the formally “stronger opponent,” namely the internationally recognized state actor – the Republic of Azerbaijan – in its confrontation with the unrecognized entity, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). Factors that brought victory to the NKR and the chances of a subsequent settlement between the conflicting parties can be analyzed in terms of an asymmetric conflict.

The principal participants of the conflict are Azerbaijan, a sovereign state, and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), an unrecognized state entity which overthrew the control of Soviet Azerbaijan as a result of a mass movement of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh in the late 1980s, and proclaimed itself independent at the moment when the Soviet Union was collapsing.²⁸ There is no doubt that Armenia

28. The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh was proclaimed on September 2, 1991 as a result of the session of the executive bodies of the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region (NKAO) and the contiguous Shahumyan region – the area with predominantly Armenian population. In accordance with the Soviet law in force at the moment,

was a direct participant in the conflict, as it assisted Nagorno-Karabakh in all possible ways to gain independence and continues to ensure the physical, economic and political existence of the NKR. The military phase of the conflict ended in May 1994 when the defense ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the commander of the defense forces of Nagorno-Karabakh signed the Bishkek Ceasefire Protocol and Ceasefire Agreement.²⁹

At the same time, in view of the non-recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh, this conflict is often treated internationally as a confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia conducts direct negotiations with Azerbaijan on the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict, and official Yerevan supports this by arguing that in negotiations, it also represents Stepanakert’s interests.

Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991, joined the UN and OSCE in 1992, and the Council of Europe in 2001. Azerbaijan joined the

in particular, the Law of the USSR of April 3, 1990 “On the procedures required in connection with a Soviet republic seceding from the USSR,” national autonomies and regions with compact habitation of ethnic minorities possessed the right (articles 3 and 6) to unilaterally decide what their statehood and legal status would be if the Soviet Republic into which they were incorporated left the USSR. On December 10, 1991, only a few days before the official dissolution of the USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh convened an independence referendum, and then elected a Parliament which formed the first NKR government. In view of this, Nagorno-Karabakh has never been *de facto* part of the independent Azerbaijani state, which only exercised control over NKAO territory in Soviet times. More significantly, the Azerbaijani Republic had no control over the NKR territory at the moment when Azerbaijan acceded the UN in March 1992. In July 1988, a ruling of the USSR President Gorbachev directly subordinated Nagorno-Karabakh to Moscow, establishing a Special Administration Committee (KOU) led by Arkady Volsky. The leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, and later president of independent Azerbaijan Heydar Aliiev acknowledged that this decision *de facto* removed Karabakh from subordination to Baku: “Karabakh was ripped out of Azerbaijan in 1988 ... the creation of KOU was a *de facto* removal of Karabakh from Azerbaijan. The committee headed by Volsky subordinated the NK directly to Moscow though it was *de facto* controlled by Armenia.” Quoted from: Hakopyan, Tatul. *Karabakh Diary. Green and Black, or No War No Peace*. Yerevan: 2010, p.78 (in Russian).

29. For details on the signing of ceasefire agreements with Moscow see: Kazimirov, Vladimir. *Peace to Karabakh*. Moscow, 2009 (in Russian).

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the fall of 1993, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the spring of 1994. However, in 1999 Azerbaijan withdrew from the CSTO and instead, joined the GUUAM grouping, a regional bloc that included Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan (in 1999-2005) and Moldova, and that was widely seen as an attempt to rival the CSTO and the CIS.³⁰

Armenia declared independence on the basis of the September 21, 1991 referendum on independence. It joined the UN and OSCE in 1992, and the Council of Europe in 2001. Armenia has been a member of the CIS since December 21, 1991; it signed the Collective Security Treaty in Tashkent on May 15, 1992, and became a member of the CSTO once that grouping was reorganized to a genuine military and political organization in 2002.

Azerbaijan and Armenia both take part in the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and both coordinated and adopted, within six months of each other, the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) within the NATO framework on May 27 and December 16, 2005, respectively.³¹ Since 2004, Armenia and Azerbaijan have participated in the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and since May 2009, in the Eastern Partnership program, an EU cooperation format with some of the countries of the post-Soviet space.

The NKR is an unrecognized state with a democratic, republican form of government. Despite the presence of all attributes of a sovereign state,³² Nagorno-Karabakh has not received international recognition.³³

30. Bales, Alyson J. K., Vladimir Baranovsky and Pál Dunay. "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area." *SIPRI Yearbook. 2007. Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p.179-183.

31. *Individual Partnership Action Plans, North Atlantic Treaty Organization*: http://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natolive/topics_49290.htm?selectedLocale=ru.

32. Important attributes of a sovereign state include the formation of the government through democratic elections, continuously functioning state institutions and social security system, efficient control over its territory, and regular armed forces formed by conscription and placed under control of civil authorities.

33. Contemporary international law holds no universally acceptable approaches or criteria

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh is the subject of official negotiations mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group.

Since the Karabakh conflict is also associated with contradictions between state actors possessing the same international legal status (Armenia and Azerbaijan), it can be interpreted as *asymmetric* in terms of the status of the conflicting parties in only one of its dimensions: Azerbaijan – Nagorno-Karabakh. The NKR, even though it remains unrecognized, is nevertheless a separate actor of the conflict, with its interests and priorities. The knot of contradictions between Azerbaijan and Armenia is in many ways a consequence of the Karabakh conflict, which makes settlement in the Azerbaijan-NKR-Armenia triangle extremely complex and calls for an integrated/package approach to problem solving.

Consequently, the Karabakh conflict warrants two dissimilar interpretations:

a) as *asymmetric* if its consideration is limited to only one dimension, that is, to the confrontation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the NKR. With this approach, the problem takes on the character of a dilemma under conflicting assumptions in existing international law: the right of nations to self-determination and the rights of states to preserve their territorial integrity. The situation becomes even more complicated because historically the forms of self-determination of Nagorno-

to the nature and international legal implications of the recognition of new states or state-like entities. According to some approaches, international recognition by other states is a necessary condition of its international legal personality. At the same time, the declarative theory of recognition became more widespread recently. It assumes that recognition only declares the emergence of a new subject of international relations, but does not create it. In any case, recognition is an act of goodwill on the part of another state which is guided by its own interests. At the same time, the fact of non-membership of a state in the UN is not an indication of its non-recognition or absence of international legal subjectivity. The UN is neither a state nor a government, hence, it cannot exercise the most important condition for recognition - to establish diplomatic relations. However, it is obvious that the membership of any state in the UN is an important symbol of its international legal subjectivity.

