



Diminishing Justice and Third-Party Intervention: Explaining Russia's Impartial Stance During the 2020 Karabakh War

Kavus Abushov & Azar Babayev

To cite this article: Kavus Abushov & Azar Babayev (2025) Diminishing Justice and Third-Party Intervention: Explaining Russia's Impartial Stance During the 2020 Karabakh War, Problems of Post-Communism, 72:2, 177-187, DOI: [10.1080/10758216.2024.2329881](https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2024.2329881)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2024.2329881>



Published online: 10 Apr 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 409



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Diminishing Justice and Third-Party Intervention: Explaining Russia's Impartial Stance During the 2020 Karabakh War

Kavus Abushov^a and Azar Babayev^b

^aSPIA, ADA University, Baku, Azerbaijan; ^bPolitical Science, ADA University, Baku, Azerbaijan

ABSTRACT

This article examines Russia's impartiality during the second Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020, despite its close military-strategic alliance with the latter. Russia's behavior represents a twofold deviation: a weakening of its security commitments to Armenia, and a more balanced policy in a frozen conflict in the post-Soviet space. Four factors are examined that could account for explaining this puzzle, namely increasing bandwagoning of Azerbaijan with Russia, rising opportunity costs of intervention due to Turkey's support to Azerbaijan, Russia's potential discontent with Armenia after the 2018 Velvet Revolution, and the role of a justice motive in Russian policy toward the conflict.

Introduction

Russia's engagement with the ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space has been the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny. Much attention has been paid to its exploitation of these conflicts for strategic purposes and its tacit support of secessionist movements as well as its nuanced policies toward them (e.g., Coyle 2017, 2021; MacFarlane 2009). Russia's engagement with breakaway regions and its preparedness to protect and legitimize them has also displayed some level of continuity in Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet period. However, the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) and the surrounding territories has demonstrated deviation in Russia's foreign policy. During the war, Russia surprisingly refrained from providing open and direct support to Armenia, its close ally, nor did it exert significant pressure on Azerbaijan to cease military operations.

This article primarily aims to address the research question of *why Russia, despite its significant geopolitical interests and its military alliance with Armenia, with a long-standing commitment to protect Armenia, maintained a mostly impartial stance during the second Karabakh war*. In fact, despite widespread pro-Armenian sentiment in Russian society, Moscow from the outset of the fighting refrained from actively supporting its closest ally in the region or exerting direct pressure on Baku, and publicly signaled its intention to maintain a neutral position. Moreover, in numerous interviews and statements, President Vladimir Putin and his foreign minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized that Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven regions were an undisputed part of Azerbaijan and that it had been wronged by Armenia's decades-long occupation of these regions (see, for example, Interfax 2020a; President of Russia. 2020a; Russian Foreign Ministry 2020). This was in stark contrast to previous statements by numerous Russian officials and bilateral agreements outlining Russia's unwavering commitment to Armenia's defense and security,

including in scenarios involving active military operations in the NK conflict (BBC News 2016). The current article therefore sets out to examine the factors that led Russia to adopt a more or less impartial stance during the 2020 Karabakh War.

To do so, we examine a number of factors. The first is whether Azerbaijan's continued policy of engagement with Russia had shifted the balance in its favor. Second, did Russia want to "punish" the new Armenian government (perceived as pro-Western) following the 2018 Velvet Revolution? Third, the paper examines whether Turkey's strong commitment to Azerbaijan's security had increased the opportunity cost of Russia's active support to Armenia, which in turn deterred Moscow from intervening. Finally, did a Russian understanding for Azerbaijan's "just cause" play a role? The fourth variable is new and previously has been absent from the literature on Russia's engagement with secessionist conflicts. The article seeks to answer the question whether the fact that seven Azerbaijani regions surrounding NK had been kept under occupation for decades, partly resettled and partly demolished, making hundreds of thousands of people internally displaced within Azerbaijan, had created a certain sense of injustice in the Russian leadership that would account for Moscow's relative neutrality during the war. The article argues here that the justice motive in Russia's policy toward the NK conflict is borne out of the discourse within the Russian leadership, and there is ample evidence to claim that the reference to some form of justice in Russia's foreign policy is not just rhetorical, but actual. And as such, the last explanation does not contradict the first ones, but acts as a powerful complement.

In this sense, it should also be noted that with respect to foreign policy goals and their underlying motivations, it is generally recognized that in practice there are usually *mixed motives* at work, often involving a complex interplay of different motives, with a particular motive being only one among several (e.g., Pattison 2010, 159). Nevertheless, it remains

crucial to determine which motive matters more or most, as the assumption holds that a specific goal may be mainly or directly driven by one motive, while another motive plays a rather minor role.

Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative research design, and as such relies upon primary sources such as public statements made by Russia's high-level officials and secondary sources such as journal articles, books, news articles, and more. It is crucial to acknowledge the challenges associated with determining the (more or most) important motivations of state leaders, particularly the limitations of relying mainly on official statements as evidence. We therefore approach drawing conclusions with caution, recognizing these complexities and maintaining a circumspect stance in our analysis.

The Role of Justice in Foreign Policy: Taking Stock

Foreign policy primarily invokes a concept that is very prominent in international relations (IR) scholarship, namely (national) interest. This generally assumes that a state's international conduct is predominantly driven by its self-interest, typically oriented toward material gains.¹ In this view, states (seek to) benefit from their external interactions. Yet, there is a growing recognition of normative considerations, including the notion of justice, as a significant motivation in these interactions. For instance, states engage in justifications for their actions, raising the question of why they would bother to do so if they did not perceive the rule they are allegedly violating as morally right? Thus, states' behavior is also influenced by their perception of what is just or legitimate, and they therefore feel a "compliance pull" toward actions that align, at the very least, with a justice concern or motive.² That said, normative justifications for state behavior can at times be more instrumental than genuine, and states may just use justificatory rhetoric as a disguise for their actual beliefs and interests.

First and foremost, justice-related norms and practices are manifestations of the main principle of "sum cuique," which is that justice prevails when actors get what they are entitled to (e.g., what is rightfully theirs). What that might be is, of course, highly contested across time and space, but a speech act that asserts an *entitlement* already fulfills a formal requirement for a justice claim, regardless of how it is supported (Müller 2010, 9).³

Interestingly, previous IR scholarship has not been particularly concerned with the idea of justice in political contexts (Welch 2014, 411). Although, in political theory and philosophy there have been lively debates on justice-related issues, empirical research, with very few exceptions, is commonly characterized by a neglect of the role of justice in politics. Furthermore, early discussions focused on whether justice could play an important role in politics at all, and many were rather skeptical, convinced by the realist argument of the limited applicability of justice to the foreign policy behavior of states or interstate relations (Albin and Druckman 2014, 428; see also Gauthier 1986).⁴ Instead, "interest-based utility" has been cited as the primary explanation for states' international behavior (Müller and Druckman 2014, 400). For example, the constant pursuit of maximizing power or self-interest and the exploitation of any (material) advantage have been

considered primary drivers in politics, including international negotiations (Snyder and Diesing 1977; Habeeb 1988).⁵

The fact that the role of justice has not received as much attention in IR and foreign policy analysis (FPA) scholarship is indeed surprising because, as a social/cultural phenomenon, the sense of justice is ubiquitous in all kinds of human affairs (Welch 2017; see also M. Lerner 1975; M. Lerner and Lerner 1981; Reis 1987). According to the theory of basic human needs, human beings not only strive for material goods in their lives, but they also have equally important social needs, and "justice" (or "fairness") is one of these basic goods (Burton 1990). Overall, it can be said that the justice motive plays an important role in all kinds of conflicts (Deutsch 2000) and decision-making processes (Zartman 2008, 68).

Among the exceptional studies of empirical scholarship, David Welch's pioneering work (1993) on justice stands out. For the first time, Welch theorized comprehensively about the justice motive in foreign policy. In his view, state leaders apparently seek justice even when rationalist IR scholars, especially realists, would least expect it. Defined as the *drive to repair a discrepancy between reality and a perceived entitlement*,⁶ the "justice motive" is, therefore, part of their foreign policy goals. However, even if leaders generally care about justice and act accordingly, they do not always do so, and when they do care about justice, they do not always do so with the same commitment (Welch 1993, see also 2014).

In general, it is now a widely accepted view in IR literature that *justice matters* in terms of policy choices. Research in recent decades has indeed accumulated evidence for a justice theory of foreign policy ("justice motives influence foreign policy"). For Zartman, Druckman, and Jensen et al. (1996), Zartman (1997) concludes that, for peace negotiations to be successful, the parties to the conflict need first to find a common justice formula for resolution.

Building on this empirically observed tendency, IR scholarship is now making initial attempts to examine not only *whether* justice matters, but also *how, when, and where* it matters (most or least) in foreign policy. More recent scholarship has significantly advanced the justice debate by empirically examining those conditions under which justice matters in international affairs. For example, research on how justice can affect the effectiveness of international negotiations suggests positive relationships in the areas of peace and trade (Albin and Druckman 2012, 2014).⁷

In foreign policy decision-making, justice concerns and self-interests can not only operate as two different motives, but they can also collide. And even if states recognize the justice claims of others as reasonable in principle or accept them as justified, this does not necessarily mean that they will then also respond accordingly (Müller 2010, 4). Overall, states' concerns for justice and for their self-interest sometimes point in the same direction, making it difficult to assess the exact contribution of each; but at other times they point in opposite directions, making it relatively easy to gauge the impact of each on decision-making (Welch 2014, 412). Looking at the 2020 Karabakh war, Russia's case can arguably be linked to the latter, which allows for a plausible assessment of the role of the justice motive in its response as the single most important third party in this conflict.

But again, when considering the role of justice concerns in foreign policy, it is important to clarify how the relationship between justice and interests is conceptualized. The problem here centers on the issue of self-interest versus justice in the international behavior of states. We argue that this should not be viewed as a dichotomy. Although states are selfish in the sense that they put their own concerns *above* those of others, they do not do so to the extent that they do not consider the concerns of others at all. For example, a state, as a primarily egoistic actor, can “put aside” its own interests in favor of others *if* the loss to itself is relatively small and the gain to others is not only large but also serves justice in its perception.

Generally, the positive relationship between justice concerns and human behavior is well established, so that research now focuses on the conditions that cause variations. And the basic condition is structural in nature, meaning that at a fundamental level, people’s disposition for justice appears to be asymmetric or partial. First, they understand what is just in a biased, selfish way (Babcock, George Loewenstein, and Camerer 1995), and thus react most strongly when it comes to their *own* claims of justice. Then, people get seriously involved when it comes to members of their in-group (with their close relatives at the top). Finally, they have the capacity, but clearly much weaker than the former two, to consider the justice claims of strangers, including out-groups (Müller 2016, 13; see also Boehm 2001, 2012).

We refer to this tendency as *diminishing justice concerns*, which in turn parallels what sociologists call “social distance discounting”: the tendency of people to discount the welfare (including justice concerns) of others to the extent that the latter are “socially distanced” from them (i.e., their remoteness from oneself in social relations including time, space, or culture). In this view, people usually consider the welfare of other people, but do not give it as much weight as their own: “The weight may be very high when the other person is a member of one’s family, but diminishes with respect to others less close, and may become very small when one is considering the welfare of persons who belong to very different cultures” (Gordon 1991, 118).

Given the fact that states do not always, but sometimes, behave according to their justice concerns in foreign policy, we can thus postulate three stages of diminishing justice concerns, drawing on the above-mentioned asymmetries in people’s dispositions to justice.⁸ (1) States internationally respond most strongly as far as their own justice claims are concerned (self-related justice concerns). (2) States are considerably engaged when those of close partners (their allies for example) are involved (other-related primary justice concerns). (3) States may develop empathy with the justice claims of other states (other-related secondary justice concerns). In the case of Russia, Azerbaijan is somewhere between the second and third group of states – not an ally but still a partner. We argue here that Russia considered Azerbaijan’s “just cause” in the 2020 Karabakh war, though in a diminished form, so the Kremlin gave it moderate to low weight.

Russia’s Ambiguous Involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Of all the secessionist conflicts in the post-Soviet space, Nagorno-Karabakh is one where Russia’s involvement has been largely indirect and ambiguous. It has at times used the conflict as a source of leverage over the conflict parties as well as an incentive to push Armenia into a strategic and dependent relationship. Although Armenia is the smallest country in the South Caucasus, it has great strategic importance for Moscow. It serves as an important geopolitical foothold for Russia there, a role not shared by the other two countries in the region, Azerbaijan and Georgia. It is not surprising that the Kremlin considers Armenia its “closest ally” in the South Caucasus: “that is how it has been historically, that is how it is, and that is how it will remain” (President of Russia 2018).

The Kremlin established a complex military-strategic relationship with Armenia by concluding bilateral treaties of cooperation and mutual military assistance and delivering key weapons such as Iskander short-range ballistic missiles, S-300 anti-missile systems, and SU-30 warplanes on credit terms (Wezeman 2021). Numerous bilateral treaties have provided the legal basis for the presence of Russian troops and establishment of military bases on Armenian territory, whose main task is to ensure Armenia’s security, guard its borders, and provide military support in the case of an armed attack.⁹

Consequently, Russia’s military support to Armenia in the last 30 years became a major source of Armenia’s complacency and intransigence in the peace process (especially on withdrawing from the occupied regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh). Back in the 1990s, when Armenia and Azerbaijan were similarly strong economically, Russian arms deliveries to Armenia led to a significant military imbalance between the two countries. Moreover, throughout the 1990s, Azerbaijan along with Georgia and Ukraine did its best to balance Russia by engaging the United States in the region. Although Azerbaijan’s foreign policy orientation moderately tilted toward accommodating Russia’s interests under Ilham Aliyev’s tenure since 2003, there has been no major shift in Azerbaijan’s foreign and security policy in the last 30 years. Meanwhile, the Kremlin has often reiterated the strategic nature of its relations with Armenia and Russia’s commitment to that country’s security (President of Russia 2022). Moreover, on various occasions, officials from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) speculated on Russia’s commitment to defend Armenia in the case of a military confrontation with Azerbaijan, reminding one of the tacit support Armenia had received during the first Karabakh war (BBC News 2016). Thus, although Russia’s military alliance with Armenia did not extend to Nagorno-Karabakh directly, it had created the expectation in Armenia that in the case of war with Azerbaijan, the country would get support from its great ally. Specifically, various Russian officials in the last 30 years had indirectly sent a political message to Azerbaijan (especially whenever Baku had undertaken uncooperative steps) that it would not tolerate any large-scale military operations against NK. This in turn resonated well with the international dictum of a military solution to the conflict being inadmissible, a stance frequently underscored by international mediators,

notably the OSCE Minsk Group cochairs (France, Russia, and the United States). For example, during the four-day military escalation in early April 2016, the Russian president undertook steps to pressure Azerbaijan to “urgently” halt the operation (President of Russia 2016). Moreover, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were administratively and economically very closely integrated, with their unification being seen in Armenia as only a matter of time (Kucera 2019); Armenia’s political elite had repeatedly stated that in the case of Azerbaijani military attack against the breakaway region, Armenia would be directly involved. In Russian politics, however, the implicit rhetoric on the inadmissibility of a military solution to the conflict had changed in the last few years as Azerbaijan had intensified its efforts to bandwagon with Russia.

Also a key mediator in the OSCE Minsk Group–led peace process, Russia insisted that its role as such should be separated from its military alliance with Armenia (Abushov 2019). Moscow also made it clear that any peace deal should involve Russia or get its approval, so it is no coincidence that both the 1994 ceasefire and the 2020 ceasefire were brokered by Russia. In the past, Russia’s leadership has also often openly pointed out that the South Caucasus is an area of high sensitivity to Russia’s security and strategic interests, and therefore any political or military processes in the region should be coordinated with it.¹⁰

In particular, Moscow played the role of an external veto power in the region in two ways. On the one hand, Russia was the only external actor that could contain and even prevent a new war between the conflict parties, as was demonstrated during the clashes in April 2016, when Moscow forced them to agree to a ceasefire. On the other hand, an amicable settlement of the conflict against Moscow’s will was unimaginable. This does not mean, however, that Russia could have unilaterally brought about a peaceful resolution of the conflict if it had wanted to do so.

That said, unlike in the 1990s, in the last decade or so, Russia was supportive of an interim settlement of the conflict, especially a withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories around Nagorno-Karabakh. Whereas at times in the 1990s, when the South Caucasus was polarized with Azerbaijan and Georgia trying actively to balance Russia, the latter did not favor any change to the status quo, Moscow’s stance has evolved in recent years; at various times Russia made some efforts to demilitarize the conflict by getting Armenia to partially withdraw from the occupied regions of Azerbaijan (Sherr 2020). However, the Kremlin had a vested interest in not ending the conflict once and for all, but rather in maintaining a grip on long-term conflict management (President of Russia 2020a; Russian Foreign Ministry 2020). Thus, any peace initiative, such as the negotiation of a peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia or the delimitation of the border, was more likely to gain traction if brokered by Russia, and the Kremlin did not seem to be interested in accelerating the process.

It can be concluded that, in the NK conflict, unlike in other ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space, Russia had clearly played a more constructive role over the past decade. On the one hand, it had fully supported initiatives for an interim solution, as was very much reflected in the Madrid Principles

of the OSCE Minsk Group, and from time to time came up with its own initiatives (e.g., the 2011 Kazan summit or the 2016 Lavrov plan) to end the occupation of the surrounding territories (Abushov 2019). On the other hand, however, Moscow had delivered weapons to both sides in a conflict situation where the arms did less to deter and more to perpetuate a permanent state of potential war.

The Kremlin’s main strategic interest was thus controlling the military and political situation surrounding the conflict in order to bind the two adversaries to Russia and ensure its regional dominance.¹¹ The big neighbor to the north had thus pursued a minimalist approach; being largely satisfied with the status quo, it wanted to prevent a new escalation of the conflict. Hence, the Russian leadership was more concerned with managing the conflict than resolving it, the more so as having a positive image as a mediator was more important than getting real results (Abushov 2019). Consequently, any possible interim conflict settlement was supposed to be fragile enough to be manipulated by Russia in the case of “misbehavior” by the conflict parties in their international alignment. For one side to unilaterally instigate an all-out war was never in Russia’s interest, but that is exactly what happened with the 2020 dramatic conflict escalation on Moscow’s watch.

Russia’s Reluctance to Take Sides in the 2020 War and Its Insufficient Explanations

The 44-day Second Karabakh War erupted in late September 2020, marked by Azerbaijani forces launching a military operation across a wide front to reclaim the occupied territories. Most of the fighting took place outside Nagorno-Karabakh, as the Armenian side resisted giving those territories up, and the fighting was halted by Russia’s pressure on Azerbaijan as it began to advance rapidly into the breakaway region itself. Although there were two attempts by the Minsk Group cochair countries to initiate a ceasefire, it was obvious that Russia had not wholeheartedly committed itself to ending the fighting.¹² Based on President Putin’s statements, it could be seen that Russia had tacitly given its consent to Azerbaijan’s recapture of the occupied territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh; therefore, significant pressure was put on Azerbaijan to stop the operation only when its forces entered Nagorno-Karabakh itself and its major city of Shusha in particular.

Russia’s behavior during the war was reminiscent of a patient actor waiting for the end of a certain process, which essentially came with Azerbaijan’s downing of a military helicopter from the Russian military base stationed in Armenia near the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan. The Kremlin’s patient stance also came at a time when different members of the Russian media sympathized with Armenia and urged intervention to stop Azerbaijan. On November 9, 2020, Azerbaijan and Armenia finally agreed to a ceasefire deal brokered by Russia that stipulated immediate deployment of Russian peacekeepers into Nagorno-Karabakh for five years, subsequent withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied Aghdam, Kelbajar, and Lachin regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh, and demilitarization of the region itself (President of Russia 2020b). As a result, Russia acquired

a military presence in Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan regained territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh as well as two towns within the breakaway region – Hadrut and, more importantly, Shusha (which was a predominantly Azerbaijani-populated city in Nagorno-Karabakh and an important place of Azerbaijani culture). Russia had also demonstrated to Armenia that, without its protection, the latter might not survive in the neighborhood of Azerbaijan and Turkey. Meanwhile, the sentiment that Russia had “ceded” Karabakh to Azerbaijan prevailed in Armenia in the postwar period, as was openly expressed, for example, by Alen Simonyan, the speaker of the Armenian parliament (Armenia 2023).

Overall, however, the 2020 war obviously ran counter to Russia’s great-power interests, as it directly threatened the regional balance of power in the South Caucasus to its disadvantage, especially by leading to a strengthening of Turkey as a regional power and bringing it as a geopolitical competitor into the zone of Russian “privileged interests.”¹³ The war and Russia’s refusal to take sides with Armenia also significantly weakened their alliance and dealt a serious blow to Russia’s standing in Armenian society. Given the unpredictability of the war and its potential for regional spillover effects, we can also argue that it did not serve Russia’s strategic interests as a great power. Indeed, this became apparent relatively soon in the postwar period, as Baku’s further special operations in the conflict zone to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Armenia, and Turkey’s continued support of Azerbaijan, highlighted a relative weakening of Russia in the region. So why did Moscow not intervene to prevent such a dangerous escalation of the conflict in the first place, as it did in Georgia back in 2008?

Azerbaijan’s Bandwagoning: Baku’s Patient Alignment with Russia

One explanation to answer the above research question is Azerbaijan’s increasing bandwagoning with Russia since the early 2000s.¹⁴ After independence, Baku initially sought to balance Russia with the West, especially the United States during the 1990s, but this policy did not produce tangible results for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moreover, the 2008 war in Georgia and Russia’s comeback as a major power led the Azerbaijani leadership to think that balancing might not be a good option. Both the 2008 war and the 2014 annexation of Crimea showed that balancing Russia in the post-Soviet space, either by forming an alliance with other post-Soviet states such as GUAM¹⁵ or by engaging the United States and the European Union, would be doomed, because in the first case, the power asymmetry was too large, and in the second case, commitment from the US and the EU was lacking (Abushov 2023).

Therefore, starting from the early 2000s, the Azerbaijani leadership increasingly tried to accommodate Russia’s interests in order to obtain its support in resolving the conflict with Armenia. More specifically, this attempt included important steps at the level of both high and low politics. In terms of high politics engagement, Baku leased the radar station in Gabala to the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces in 2002,¹⁶ refrained from seeking closer relations with NATO or the EU including

from the geopolitically highly important Nabucco gas pipeline, and sought a more active role within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition, Azerbaijan also favored Russia in its multi-billion-dollar arms deals (SIPRI 2020). All of this happened at a time when its former GUAM allies, Georgia and Ukraine, were consistently balancing Russia with no tangible benefit. The Azerbaijani government also briefly contemplated becoming a member of the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), although neither of them became a reality (Markedonov 2018). Last but not least, over the past 20 years, the Azerbaijani political elite developed a close political dialogue with the Russian political elite and enjoyed some form of cordial relations.

At the level of low politics, Azerbaijan’s engagement, economically, included investments into the North Caucasus, and culturally, supporting Russian schools in Azerbaijan, opening up Russian centers, ever closer relations with the Russian society, holding Russian festivals and other public events in Baku, contributing to the restoration of churches and other public buildings in Moscow, and so forth.

Consequently, Azerbaijan’s increasing bandwagoning with Russia (especially since the beginning of Ilham Aliyev’s term in office in 2003) significantly influenced Russia’s behavior in the conflict. First, this manifested itself in Russia’s support for a resolution based upon a compromise formula: it advocated withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh, and at times went ahead with its own initiatives such as at the Kazan Summit in 2011 and the Lavrov plan in 2016 (Hopmann 2015). It also applied some form of soft pressure on Armenia to agree to the Madrid Principles. Thus, unlike in the other frozen conflicts, in the NK conflict, Russia did try to persuade the conflict parties to agree to an interim peace deal based upon a compromise solution.

While the bandwagoning explanation holds a certain degree of plausibility, it remains an incomplete lens through which to fully comprehend Russia’s relative neutrality during the war, as the situation involving Russia’s behavior in the Armenia–Azerbaijan war was considerably more multifaceted. Azerbaijan’s bandwagoning with Russia, although an important factor, represents just one facet of the complex calculus at play. To provide a more comprehensive analysis, we thus must consider a myriad of factors such as regional geopolitics, dynamics in Russian–Armenian bilateral relations, as well as normative considerations in Russia’s policy toward the conflict. These factors collectively contributed to shaping Russia’s neutrality during the conflict. Therefore, a thorough examination should encompass a broader spectrum of elements to gain a more nuanced understanding of Russia’s stance in the 2020 Armenia–Azerbaijan war.

Turkey’s Potential Deterrence: Ankara’s Strong Support to Azerbaijan

Another explanation of Russia’s impartiality is Turkey’s direct support to Azerbaijan, which appears to have increased the opportunity cost of Russia’s intervention in the conflict on Armenia’s side. Azerbaijan and Turkey have historically enjoyed a close relationship, based upon

common language, culture, religion, and history. In both Azerbaijan and Turkey, the two countries are perceived as closest allies. Back in the 1990s, during the first Karabakh war, there was anxiety and sympathy toward Azerbaijan in Turkey, but it refrained from supporting its “brother nation.” Turkey nevertheless joined Azerbaijan in embargoing Armenia by closing its border on it and avoiding direct trade. The Turkish–Azerbaijani relationship has structurally strong foundations, but the recent level of allied relations between the two has been unprecedented in the last 100 years. This has been so primarily due to the personal efforts of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Ilham Aliyev to attach a special meaning to the cordial relations between the two countries under a pan-Turkic “one nation, two states” slogan.

Putting aside the structural factors, the key turning point in the bilateral relations can be traced back to 2010, the Zurich protocols, when the Turkish government seemed to have decided to open the border with Armenia, while Azerbaijan applied leverage at different levels, using its persuasive power especially. In particular, the Azerbaijani political elite and society mobilized forces to remind their counterparts of their brotherhood and special relationship, and of the fact that Turkey had failed to support Azerbaijan in the first Karabakh war. Turkey’s efforts to normalize relations with Armenia led to a discourse initiated by Azerbaijan, highlighting Ankara’s perceived “misstep” and an accompanying sense of remorse if such normalization were to proceed “unilaterally.”

Turkey’s support to Azerbaijan during the second Karabakh war was highly visible and unequivocal. Azerbaijan purchased a large number of unmanned aircraft from Turkey, the Turkish military likely helped its Azerbaijani counterparts with planning, and, more importantly, Ankara supported Baku politically at the international level. In the recent years, Turkey lobbied Moscow hard for a resolution of the conflict based upon the Madrid Principles,¹⁷ and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became a constant topic of bilateral talks between the Turkish and Russian presidents both before and during the war (President of Russia 2020c).

When it comes to the question of whether Russia’s impartiality during the war was conditioned by Turkey’s commitment to defend Azerbaijan in case of Russia’s military intervention on Armenia’s side, the answer is not unequivocal. Turkish president Erdogan made it clear that any third-party intervention into the conflict would have devastating effects, as Turkey would have to intervene if a third party was actively involved (President of Turkey 2020). Also, the deployment of F16 fighter jets in Azerbaijan partly served the purpose of deterrence in that regard (President of Azerbaijan 2020). However, considering that the Caucasus is an area of utmost strategic importance and responsibility (as the Russian government has defined it) for Russia, where a geopolitical power struggle and third-party presence are never tolerated by the Kremlin, Russia would have intervened in the war to support Armenia had it considered it necessary to do so. As the 2008 war in Georgia and the political discourse around it showed, the Caucasus has been viewed as an important part of Russia’s security architecture and maintaining its hegemony there has been highly securitized in Russia.

While Turkey’s commitment to defend Azerbaijan in the event of third-party intervention significantly raised the cost of possible Russian intervention, Moscow would have intervened regardless of the cost if the Kremlin had deemed it strategically necessary. Therefore, it would not be correct to claim that Russia’s reluctance to support Armenia during the war was mainly due to Turkey’s deterrence. On the contrary, the good relations between the Turkish and Russian presidents, and prioritization of the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh in the bilateral discourse, had generated some form of persuasive power for Turkey vis-à-vis Russia.

Armenia’s “Deviant” Behavior: Russia’s Punishing Yerevan for Its Increasing Pro-Western Stance

Russia’s impartial stance during the war can also be explained by a desire to “punish” the Nikol Pashinyan government because Moscow was “unhappy” with Armenia due to the changes that followed the 2018 regime change: in particular, the new Armenian government cracked down on certain pro-Russian forces and sought to forge closer ties with the West. Although logically this explanation may sound convincing, the evidence suggests otherwise. Thus, upon taking office, Pashinyan advocated “further deepening of relations with Russia,” in contrast to his past record of voting against Armenia’s membership in the Russian-led EEU and blaming Moscow for the April 2016 war (Nikoghosyan and Ter-Matevosyan 2022, 9). As the change of power in 2018 had “no geopolitical context” for Pashinyan, it did not require changes in Armenia’s foreign and security policy, unlike the popular movements in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004–2005, 2013–2014), which quickly had pro-Western (aka anti-Russian) geopolitical ramifications (Nikoghosyan and Ter-Matevosyan 2022, 8); accordingly, special relations with Russia would continue as usual (Miarka and Lapaj-Kucharska 2022). In practice, too, the changes that the new government undertook were mainly related to domestic politics. In the two years following the regime change in Armenia, there was hardly even a glimpse of change in Yerevan’s foreign policy; a significant shift only became notably apparent following the 2020 war, particularly in the wake of a brief postwar escalation along the Armenian–Azerbaijani border in September 2021.

Therefore, regime change in Armenia (unlike in other post-Soviet cases) did not trigger such a negative reaction within Russia that the latter would have to “punish” the country by leaving it unprotected. For example, Russia refrained from likening the 2018 events in Armenia to the 2014 Ukrainian scenario, deeming the Armenian crisis as “distinctly different” (TASS 2018). The Kremlin underlined the need for scrutiny, but asserted that comparing the Armenian events to those in Ukraine was “inappropriate” at the time (TASS 2018). Consequently, also in practice, the Kremlin remained remarkably uninvolved during the 2018 political crisis in Armenia.

The argument that Russia wanted to weaken the Pashinyan government by letting it fail in the war is also rather ill-founded. At a time when Pashinyan and his government were under fire in Armenia during and after the war,

President Putin offered backing in all of his statements and interviews (for example, President of Russia 2020a). This was partly because the Russian leadership needed a pragmatic leader in Yerevan to implement the November 2020 tripartite agreement that ended the war, and partly because the Russian president rejected Pashinyan's culpability in the outbreak of the war.

Thus, to conclude, Russia's need to "punish" Armenia is not well-founded (a) because there was no significant deviation in Armenia's foreign and security policy at the time, and (b) Russia's discontent with the changes in Armenia after the 2018 revolution was only trivial.

"For My Friends, Justice": The Role of the Justice Motive in Russia's Relative Impartiality

A final explanation, which we argue is more convincing, particularly in combination with the bandwagoning account, relates to the justice motive – in a diminishing form as introduced above – in the context of foreign policy. A justice-driven approach in Russian policy toward the NK conflict, particularly pushing the Armenian leadership to make concessions, started to unfold in the last ten to fifteen years (President of Russia 2023), in the rhetorical discourse as well as concrete policy initiatives. The two prominent ones included the Medvedev plan during the Kazan summit in 2011 and the more recent Lavrov plan for a resolution of the conflict by reaching a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi*. The Kazan summit in 2011 envisaged a peace plan that would allow for the return of five plus two regions to Azerbaijan's control, give an interim status to NK, and finally determine its status in a referendum. Accordingly, Azerbaijan would undertake the obligation not to use force against NK, and Russian peacekeepers would be deployed to the region.

Another peace initiative was the 2016 Lavrov plan. In comparison to the Kazan document, the Russian government tried to support and push this plan with more determination; the proposal seemed to be more elaborate than the one suggested by President Dmitry Medvedev and it was more reflective of Russia's approach to the conflict. The proposal envisaged three stages of resolution of the conflict, initially including return of five regions to Azerbaijan's control, followed by normalization of relations and the opening of communication between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as NK, followed by the release of two more regions, repatriation of all internally displaced persons (IDPs), provision of a land corridor between Armenia and NK, and finally determining the status in a referendum at an indefinite future date.

Another key feature of the Lavrov plan is that it was unilaterally endorsed, whether at the presidential level or at the level of the foreign minister. The Kremlin had been emphasizing the need to withdraw from the occupied regions at least since 2015, and intensified its diplomatic pressure on Armenia throughout 2020. For example, Foreign Minister Lavrov called for withdrawal from the occupied territories around Nagorno-Karabakh during an official visit to Armenia in April 2020, and met resistance from his Armenian counterpart (Russian Foreign Ministry 2020). The urgency to disengage Armenia from the seven territories adjacent to the breakaway region was

reiterated by the Russian president and his foreign minister on several occasions before and after the war; also during and after the 2020 war, President Putin unequivocally put blame on Armenia's refusal to withdraw from the occupied surrounding territories. Reference to justice in Russia's position has also been echoed in the postwar period and even more recently. For example, in an interview on February 2, 2023, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated quite openly:

Armenia occupied seven regions around [Nagorno-Karabakh] for many years. Russia offered numerous solutions. Even the former Armenian leadership did not take them very positively, wanting to hold on to the territories it had never claimed. Having no longer hope to solve the issue politically, Azerbaijan returned the territories that belonged to it [by force]. (Russian Foreign Ministry 2023)

Lavrov's statement indeed reflects the fundamental justice principle of "suum cuique" – that is, you may reclaim what is yours. However, the mention of the occupied territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh only shows that Russia's concern for justice was "limited" to the return of the surrounding territories (but not of Nagorno-Karabakh itself) to Azerbaijan, in the sense that Baku deserved to take them back by any means necessary.

Overall, it should be noted that over the past decade, the Russian government developed a more nuanced and balanced view of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, recognizing that Azerbaijan suffered profound injustice in the conflict, losing a large part of its territory and hosting a large number of IDPs. In this view, a distinction was also made between Nagorno-Karabakh, the surrounding territories outside, and the predominantly Azerbaijani populated city of Shusha inside the breakaway region itself.

Clearly, such a stance of the Russian government based upon a sense of justice and fairness was favored by Baku's bandwagoning strategy – Azerbaijan's justice concerns as a friendly country had to carry more weight for Russia than those of non-friends. This is not an entirely novel development, since Russia in the early 1990s, during the short-lived period of Atlanticism in its foreign policy, also sought to find a solution to the conflict based upon justice to the conflict parties. At times of Russia's weakness in the 1990s, and when Azerbaijan actively balanced against it, fairness lost its salience, but since Vladimir Putin came to power, this issue has regained momentum in Russian foreign policy discourse on the conflict. Indeed, Russia's firm commitment to the return of the remaining three regions to Azerbaijani control after the 2020 tripartite agreement was signed bolsters the argument that the country's political elite had genuinely favored the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied regions around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thus, from the beginning of the war, the Russian government had adopted a nuanced and reserved position, as if waiting for a specific moment. The fact that a number of statements made by President Putin during and after the war clearly indicated that the cause of failure to achieve a ceasefire during the war lay in Armenia, rather than Azerbaijan, also shows that the Russian leadership was considering Azerbaijan's course of action to be more right and just. This rightness attached to Azerbaijan's position, especially as

formed out of the intransigence that had formed in Armenia's position not to withdraw from the occupied regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh (as entailed in the Madrid Principles and the Lavrov Plan) as well as resistance to agreeing to a ceasefire that provided for troop withdrawal from the adjacent regions and repatriation of Azerbaijani IDPs to Shusha (a predominantly Azerbaijani city within Nagorno-Karabakh).

Moreover, throughout the war, the Russian president and other officials made it clear that the strategic importance of Azerbaijan and Armenia to Russia is more or less equal; and now that Azerbaijan has been a friendly state toward Russia for quite a while, and in addition, has a just cause, Russia would not take action against it. For President Putin, for example, all the occupied territories are an integral part of Azerbaijan, and under international law, "Nagorno-Karabakh itself is also Azerbaijan" (President of Russia 2020d).

Therefore, all attempts by the government of Armenia and other international actors to get Russia to pressure Azerbaijan to stop failed. Indeed, the legal documents available between Russia and Armenia stipulated some form of responsibility to protect Armenia itself, and it would have taken much effort for Russia to halt the 2020 offensive. Although the Russian government did call for a ceasefire in the first days and weeks of the war, it took no real steps to pressure Azerbaijan to end the war until the latter entered Nagorno-Karabakh itself. Attempts to invoke the CSTO or the UN Security Council also failed, despite the fact that Armenia was involved in most of the fighting and some Azerbaijani rockets hit military targets in Armenian territory (Interfax 2020b).

We thus argue that Russia chose to tolerate Azerbaijan's takeback of the surrounding regions outside Nagorno-Karabakh from the very beginning. It was when Azerbaijan continued the military operation to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh itself, especially after retaking the city of Shusha, that the Russian government applied pressure to halt the offensive. This was conditioned by a number of factors, including Russia's justice concerns with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. First, the Kremlin viewed the conflict not only as a territorial dispute, but also as a deeply ethnic conflict. For example, after the end of the offensive, the Russian leader openly commented on this issue from the point of view of justice:

The situation, in my opinion, is more complicated than just simple normative postulates, including those of international law. The roots are in the ethnic conflict, which began back in Sumgait, and then spilled over into Nagorno-Karabakh. Here, each side has its own truth. And the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh at one time took up arms to protect their lives and dignity. And the situation was created, as it was when the conflict escalated this year. (President of Russia 2020d)

Also, Russia supported the demilitarization of the conflict, but not its once-and-for-all settlement; it therefore very much supported the Madrid Principles, because they would leave the status unresolved for an indefinite period, giving Russia ongoing leverage over the conflict parties. In that regard, Russia also acquired some of what it had aspired to in this conflict through the tripartite agreement, notably a military presence in the region. The de-occupation of the regions

outside Nagorno-Karabakh also somehow restored justice and demonstrated Russia's fair attitude toward a friendly state.

To make a counterfactual point, had Azerbaijan been a "stranger" or an unfriendly state to Russia, it would have probably reacted aggressively in this war in much the same way as it did in 2008 to the (pro-Western) Georgian government's military offensive in South Ossetia. But again, on the other hand, Moscow did not give high weight enough to the "just cause" of Azerbaijan (being not a close or strategic ally to Russia) to allow it to fully restore its sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, which it was entitled to under current international law. This, in turn, meant a deviation of the Russian sense of justice from international legal norms, showcasing a rather specific perspective here. In fact, on this matter, diminishing justice concerns took effect in Russia-Azerbaijan relations, with Moscow giving Azerbaijan's justice claims in the conflict moderate to low weight and thus "tolerating" its offensive to mainly recapture the occupied territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the logic of diminishing justice, Moscow could even have supported Azerbaijan if it had been a close ally to Russia (in terms of other-related primary justice concerns) – as Turkey did.

Overall, while the foreign policies of states do not always include elements of justice and rarely combine both strategic interests and justice, Russia's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrated a unique yet nuanced position of justice, namely that of diminishing justice, the observable salience of which in Moscow's recent relations with a *bandwagoning* Azerbaijan had a significant impact on Russia's Karabakh policy during the war. This needs to be distinguished from Russia's pure strategic interests in the region; the current study puts more emphasis on justice, which is well documented in the Russian foreign policy discourse on the conflict. Indeed, from an interests perspective, Moscow's neutral behavior during the recent war in the Caucasus – Russia's geopolitical "backyard," traditionally considered its sphere of influence – seems analytically puzzling, as a full-scale war involving a defeat of Armenia, its close ally, by Turkey-backed Azerbaijan, arguably would not serve Russia's strategic interests.

The post-2020 developments, too, demonstrated how Russia's tolerance of a major war in its "near abroad" was not in its best interests as a great power, particularly when viewed through interest-based explanations. Specifically, Azerbaijan's rapid military operation to seize full control of the breakaway region within two days and the subsequent removal of NK's de facto authorities in September 2023, triggering a mass exodus of local Armenians to Armenia, were unforeseen scenarios even during the signing of the 2020 tripartite ceasefire agreement. Being too preoccupied in Ukraine, a weakened Russia found itself rather unable to respond, despite this operation conflicting with its sense of justice regarding the conflict. Baku's restoration of full authority over of Nagorno-Karabakh and ending the 35 year-long conflict once and for all also shattered the Kremlin's anticipation of securing better leverage over Azerbaijan and Armenia as the sole mediator and peacekeeper in the conflict, and raised significant questions about Russia's future role in the South Caucasus. In fact,

Azerbaijan's swift action in September 2023 effectively nullified that leverage, rendering the (military) presence of Russian peacekeepers in Azerbaijan irrelevant. It also pushed Armenia further away from Russia, creating a scenario where the significance of Russian influence in the region appears to be notably diminished.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the question of why Russia remained relatively neutral during the second Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, contrary to its geopolitical interests and despite having commitments to Armenia for military support. The fact that Russia had aggressively halted Georgia's intervention in South Ossetia in 2008 and the nature of its allied relationship with Armenia had generated the expectation that Russia would intervene to stop any war in the conflict region, as it had done during the 2016 April war. Although the 2020 tripartite agreement partly met Russia's strategic interests of a military presence in the region as the sole peacekeeper and gave it leverage over Azerbaijan, it significantly weakened its long-standing alliance with Armenia and strengthened Turkey's influence in the region. If the current state of affairs is added to the picture (Armenia's slow but steady drifting from Russia's orbit, Azerbaijan's full control over NK, and Turkey's even greater influence in the region), then one could claim that Russia's behavior during the war was even more puzzling. Thus, Russia's impartial and reserved stance was intriguing for two reasons: First, it had built a military alliance with Armenia for years, supplying it with key weapons and strengthening its military capabilities. Second, Russia, as the most important third party, generally exploited the ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space for its own strategic goals, often hindering their resolution. So what has changed in this particular case that would explain Russia's "unexpected" behavior?

The article has examined the role of four factors as potential explanations for the shift in Russia's foreign policy, accounting for its relative neutrality in the war, namely, Azerbaijan's shift toward a bandwagoning policy to accommodate Russia's interests in recent years; Turkey's strong support to Azerbaijan increasing the opportunity cost for Russia's expected intervention; Armenia's deviant behavior after the 2018 revolution; and the role of the justice motive in a diminishing way. While all of the above are relevant to varying degrees in explaining Russia's behavior during the war, the article emphasizes that though the justice motive was not the sole or main factor driving Russia's stance here, its acknowledging of injustice against a country seeking to bandwagon with it has played a significant role. It is crucial to recognize that the set of explanations presented in this article is not exhaustive. Additional multi-causal factors, including shifts in the balance of power within the region, political regime affinities, or economic considerations, might also have influenced Russian foreign policy in this scenario. While acknowledging the value of these alternative accounts, this article primarily seeks to offer a new, counterintuitive perspective on Russia's "unexpected" behavior during the 2020 war by highlighting the particular role of justice concerns.

The above insights about the influence of a justice motive in Russia's stance can be inferred from a variety of high-level statements made by Russia's president and foreign minister in recent years, in which they stressed that the occupied regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh should definitely be returned to Azerbaijani control. This was very much in line with the Lavrov plan and the OSCE Madrid Principles in general that provided for the release of the occupied surrounding regions and return of Azerbaijani IDPs to their home. From the justice perspective, Russia, as the most powerful third party, would likely have intervened (militarily) in 2020 if Azerbaijan had carried out massive ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh at that time, as this would have meant a different kind of injustice in the Russian understanding.

In arguing for a justice motive in Russian foreign policy, however, we do not deny that Russia's conflict intervention to end the war and the signing of the trilateral agreement that deterred Azerbaijan from taking control of all of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the deployment of Russian forces in the breakaway region, were also in line with its long-established strategic interests in the region, which included keeping the conflict unresolved, securing a military presence, and maintaining leverage over both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Finally, what broader implications does this specific foreign policy study have for IR scholarship? The case of Russia underscores a nuanced role of the justice motive by attesting to its structurally "conditioned" salience in influencing decision-making and shows how not only self-related, but also other-related justice concerns (can) have a particular impact on foreign and security policy. More specifically, the importance of the "for my friends, justice" logic in foreign policy becomes clear here when one distinguishes between the justice concerns of *friends* and those of the *rest*.

Notes

1. The current study's reference to self-interest is more material based, rather than ideational, although it is also acknowledged that self-interest may be broader than material only, to include ideational sources such as identity.
2. In general, international norms are often seen as legitimate, and what is right or just is mainly reflected in international law.
3. The understanding of justice as a universal phenomenon is supported, for example, by the findings on commonalities between world religions: Concerns of justice are not only present in all religions, but also its basic principle "suum cuique" applies everywhere, even if the "suum" (the entitlement) for which "cui" (the individual or group concerned) may be different and thus controversial (Küng 1993).
4. The "culmination" was neorealism: "a spare, highly "scientific" paradigm that enshrined the quest for security as measured in the currency of power as *the* motive that explains the dynamics of relations between states" (Welch 2014, 411).
5. Moreover, in the realist view, justice is usually understood in a narrow (i.e., purely materialist) sense, as "mutual advantage," so that, for example, negotiations and agreements are considered just (and/or legitimate) if they produce a net benefit for each party (Gauthier 1986).
6. According to Welch (2017, 75–76), "[t]his perceived discrepancy can arise with respect to substantive questions (i.e., what counts as a just state of affairs) or procedural (i.e., what counts as a just method of reaching substantively just outcomes). [...] The specific grounds people use for asserting

justice claims can vary from person to person and from culture to culture, but the mechanism of regularly monitoring the world for apparent injustices is universal, as are the affective and behavioral responses to perceptions of injustice or threats to justice: outrage, stridency, and an increased willingness to take risks and/or pay costs to secure outcomes perceived as just vis-à-vis similarly valuable outcomes perceived merely as advantageous.”

7. For example, according to Albin and Druckman (2014), there is a strong correlation between procedural justice in bilateral negotiations and their effectiveness.
8. In this context, without anthropomorphizing the state, we refer to human nature being reflected by the state (leaders) in international relations.
9. See, for example, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia, August 29, 1997; the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Russian military base on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, March 16, 1995.
10. For example, following the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Moscow’s foreign policy was officially and/or rhetorically aimed at consolidating a zone of Russian “privileged interests,” a term coined by then-President Dmitry Medvedev to refer primarily to the South Caucasus and other regions of Russia’s “near abroad” (President of Russia 2008).
11. Thus, Russia’s behavior toward the conflict has been shaped by its broader strategic interests in the region, which had included: keeping the military alliance with Armenia, potentially building military presence in Azerbaijan, making sure that developments in the South Caucasus do not spill-over to the North Caucasus, securing military-political presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and preventing any future NATO presence.
12. For example, a humanitarian ceasefire was agreed on October 10, 2020, which lasted for a few hours only.
13. It is important to note that while Russia and Turkey have maintained largely good relations in recent years, this does not mean that Russia was willing to share its regional dominance in the South Caucasus with Turkey (or any other great or regional power). This was also evident in the 2020 tripartite agreement where Russia actively positioned itself as the sole peacekeeper, accommodating Turkey’s involvement mainly through a symbolic monitoring center established outside Nagorno-Karabakh.
14. The reference to bandwagoning in this section follows the definition of the concept by Stephen Walt, as alignment with the source of threat (see Walt 1985).
15. GUAM was an alliance established in 1999 by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan to balance Russia in the post-Soviet space. It was joined by Uzbekistan, but abandoned subsequently. The alliance was supported by the US and EU at the time of Russia’s relative weakness.
16. However, the lease discontinued in 2012 because Azerbaijan and Russia could not agree on the terms of the lease.
17. The Madrid Principles, a peace plan introduced by the OSCE Minsk Group in 2007, outlined several key elements of a compromise solution such as return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh, ensuring its security and self-governance until a final determination of its status through a legally binding referendum, establishment of a corridor linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, affirmation of the right for all IDPs to return to the region, and implementation of a peacekeeping operation to guarantee security (OSCE 2009).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Abushov, K. 2019. “Russian Foreign Policy Towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?” *East European Politics* 35 (1): 72–92.
- Abushov, K. 2023. “Alliance-Building Between Great Power Commitment and Mis-Perceptions: Failed Balancing Despite Alignment Efforts in the Post-Soviet Space.” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 31 (4): 1403–1423.
- Albin, C., and D. Druckman. 2012. “Equality Matters: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56 (2): 155–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002711431798>.
- Albin, C., and D. Druckman. 2014. “Bargaining over Weapons: Justice and Effectiveness in Arms Control Negotiations.” *International Negotiations* 19 (3): 426–458. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341286>.
- Armenia, S. 2023. “Govoril ili net? Press-sluzhba Alena Simonyana otvetila Sergeyu Lavrovu po povodu “sdachi” NK.” September 10, 2023. <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/20230910/govoril-ili-net-press-sluzhba-alena-simonyana-otvetila-sergeyu-lavrovu-po-povodu-sdachi-nk-65580609.html>.
- Babcock, L., S. I. George Loewenstein, and C. Camerer. 1995. “Biased Judgments of Fairness in Bargaining.” *American Economic Review* 85 (5): 1337–1343.
- BBC News. 2016. “Bordyuzha: Obostrenie v Nagornom Karabakhe zarvet ves Kavkaz.” April 16, 2016. https://www.bbc.com/russian/news/2016/04/160426_bordyuzha_karabakh_odkb.
- Boehm, C. 2001. *Hierarchy in the Forest. The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Boehm, C. 2012. *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*. New York: Basic Books.
- Burton, J., ed. 1990. *Conflict. Human Needs Theory (Conflict Series 2)*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Coyle, J. 2017. *Russia’s Border Wards and Frozen Conflicts*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan.
- Coyle, J. 2021. *Russia’s Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Armenia and Azerbaijan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deutsch, M. 2000. “Justice and Conflict.” In *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, edited by M. Deutsch and P. T. Coleman, 43–68. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.
- Gauthier, D. 1986. *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gordon, S. 1991. *The History and Philosophy of Social Science*. London: Routledge.
- Habeeb, W. M. 1988. *Power and Tactics in International Negotiation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hopmann, T. 2015. “Minsk Group Mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Confronting an ‘Intractable Conflict’” In *OSCE Yearbook 2014*, edited by IFSH, 167–179. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Interfax. 2020a. “Putin dopustil peredachu Azerbayjanu semi rayonov zanyatikh Armeniyey.” October 29, 2020. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/734785>.
- Interfax. 2020b. “VS Azerbajdschana unichtozhili 3 OTRK ‘Elbrus’ v Armenii naceleennikh v Azerbaydschanskije goroda.” October 14, 2020. <http://interfax.az/view/816402.ru>.
- Kucera, J. 2019. “Pashinyan calls for unification between Armenia and Karabakh.” eurasianet.org, August 6, 2019. <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh>.
- Küng, H. 1993. *Projekt Weltethos*. München: Beck.
- Lerner, M. J. 1975. “The Justice Motive in Social Behavior: Introduction.” *Journal of Social Issues* 31 (3): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1975.tb00995.x>.
- Lerner, M. J., and S. C. Lerner, ed. 1981. *The Justice Motive in Social Behavior: Adapting to Times of Scarcity and Change*. New York: Plenum Press.
- MacFarlane, S. N. 2009. “Frozen Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union – The Case of Georgia/South Ossetia.” In *OSCE Yearbook*, and IFSH, 23–33. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Markedonov, S. 2018. “Will Azerbaijan Join the ‘Eurasian NATO?’” In *Eurasia in Transition*. Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for Peace. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/77116>.

- Miarka, A., and J. Lapaj-Kucharska. 2022. "Armenian Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Velvet Revolution." *European Politics and Society* 23 (5): 698–711. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1928844>.
- Müller, H. 2010. "Justice and Peace: Good Things Do Not Always Go Together." *PRIF Working Papers*, No. 6. Frankfurt/M.
- Müller, H. 2016. "Justice in Interdisciplinary Perspective. Findings from Other Disciplines and Their Impact on International Relations." *PRIF Working Papers* No. 30, Frankfurt/M.
- Müller, H., and D. Druckman. 2014. "Introduction: Justice in Security Negotiations." *International Negotiations* 19 (3): 399–409. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341284>.
- Nikoghosyan, H., and V. Ter-Matevosyan. 2022. "From 'Revolution' to War: Deciphering Armenia's Populist Foreign Policy-Making Process." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*. published online August 25, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2111111>.
- OSCE. 2009. "Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries." L'Aquila. July 10, 2009. <https://www.osce.org/mg/51152>.
- Pattison, J. 2010. *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Who Should Intervene?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- President of Azerbaijan. 2020. "Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation." October 26, 2020. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/44435>.
- President of Russia. 2008. "Interv'y u Dmitriya Medvedeva Rossiyskim Telekanalam." August 31, 2008. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/1276>.
- President of Russia. 2016. "Telefonnyye razgovory s Il'khamom Aliyevym i Serzhem Sargsyanom." April 5, 2016. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51644>.
- President of Russia. 2018. "Bol'shaya press-konferentsiya Vladimira Putina." December 20, 2020. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>.
- President of Russia. 2020a. "Otvety na voprosi SMI po situatsii v Nagornom Karabakhe." November 17, 2020. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64431>.
- President of Russia. 2020b. "Zayavlenie prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii." November 10, 2020. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64381>.
- President of Russia. 2020c. "Telefonniy razgovor s Prezidentom Turcii Redschepom Tayipm Erdoganom." October 14, 2020. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64204>.
- President of Russia. 2020d. "Ezhagodnaja press-konferencija Vladimira Putina." December 17, 2020. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64671>.
- President of Russia. 2022. "Sovmestnoe zayavlenie prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putina i Premiera Ministra Respubliki Armeniya N.V. Pashinyana." April 19, 2022. <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5791>.
- President of Russia. 2023. "Plenarnoye zasedaniye vos'mogo Vostochnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma." September 12, 2023. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72259>.
- President of Turkey. 2020. "Türkiye, dünyadaki siyasi ve ekonomik güç dengelerinin yeniden şekillendiği şu kritik süreçte tarihi bir mücadelenin içindedir." October 28, 2020. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/122548/-turkiye-dunyadaki-siyasi-ve-ekonomik-guc-dengelerinin-yeniden-sekillendigi-su-kritik-surecte-tarih-bir-mucade-lenin-icindedir->.
- Reis, H. T. 1987. "The Nature of the Justice Motive: Some Thoughts on Operation, Internalization, and Justification." In *Social Comparison, Social Justice, and Relative Deprivation: Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Perspectives*, edited by J. C. Masters and W. P. Smith, 131–150. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Russian Foreign Ministry. 2020. "Vistuplenie ministra inostrannix del Rossii S.V. Lavrova v khode soveshaniya po resheniyu gumanitarnikh voprosov v rayone Nagornogo Karabakha v rejime videokonferentsii." November 13, 2020. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1446648/.
- Russian Foreign Ministry. 2023. "Interv'ju Ministra inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federatsii S.V.Lavrova telekanalu «Rossija 24» i agentstvu RIA Novosti." February 2, 2023. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1852042/.
- Sherr, J. 2020. "Russia and Karabakh: A diplomatic triumph and dubious victory." International Center for Defence and Security. November 16, 2020. <https://icds.ee/en/russia-and-karabakh-a-diplomatic-triumph-and-dubious-victory/>.
- Snyder, G. H., and P. Diesing. 1977. *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- TASS. 2018. "Kreml' nadeyetsya, chto v Armenii sokhranyatsya poryadok i stabil'nost'." April 24, 2018. <https://tass.ru/politika/5153487>.
- Walt, S. M. 1985. "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power." *International Security* 9 (4): 3–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.
- Welch, D. 1993. *Justice and the Genesis of War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Welch, D. 2014. "The Justice Motive in International Relations: Past, Present and Future." *International Negotiation* 19 (3): 410–425. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341285>.
- Welch, D. 2017. "The Justice Motive in East Asia's Territorial Disputes." *Group Decision and Negotiation* 26 (1): 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10726-016-9500-z>.
- Wezeman, P. D., A. Kuimova, and S. T. Weseman. 2021. *Trends in International Arms Transfers 2020*. Stockholm: SIPRI.
- Zartman, I. W. 1997. "Conflict and Order: Justice in Negotiation." *International Political Science Review* 18 (2): 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251297018002001>.
- Zartman, I. W. 2008. *Negotiation and Conflict Management. Essays on Theory and Practice*. London, NY: Routledge.
- Zartman, I. W., D. Druckman, L. Jensen, G. P. Dean, and H. Peyton Young. 1996. "Negotiation as a Search for Justice." *International Negotiation* 1 (1): 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157180696X00070>.