
CONFLICT RESOLUTION

DOI: 10.19266/1829-4286-2016-01-65-80

**The Role of Beliefs in Armenia-Azerbaijan Confrontation: A
Glance into Presidents' Discourse**

ARAM TERZYAN

Yerevan State University, Armenia

The long-standing logjam over Armenia-Azerbaijan troubled relations has prompted a focus on a wide array of regional-level (geo) political and (geo) economic constraints. Whereas little to no attention has been devoted to social constructivist perspective of key policy-makers' core beliefs and their role in perpetually confrontational behaviors. This article seeks to elucidate Nagorno-Karabakh conflict-related beliefs of Azerbaijan's and Armenia's Presidents, and account for their practical applications. The article deliberately departs from the mainstream geopolitical explanations of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict perpetuation and argues that Presidents' beliefs (particularly those of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev) alongside their situational constraints induce to adopt confrontational policies. The marked consistency between beliefs and behaviors vividly demonstrates the imperative for incorporating the variable of beliefs into broader analysis of conflict settlement-related challenges and red-lines.

Keywords

Armenia-Azerbaijan confrontation, Armenophobia, central and instrumental beliefs, extraversion, situational constraints

The Notion and Political Relevance of Beliefs

Since the end of the cold war, the necessity of studying beliefs as causal mechanisms in the post-cold war landscape of international relations has gained steady relevance. Essentially, there is a propensity in existing studies to approach beliefs as “subjective representations of

reality” which considerably matter in the explanation of post-cold war world politics in several ways¹.

Evidently, there has been a tendency for structural theories to neglect the importance of beliefs in foreign policy making. Neorealist, neoliberal and constructivist perspectives chiefly argue that leaders’ beliefs simply mirror the external and domestic realities rather than shape them. It follows that rational leaders and their foreign policy strategies are subjected to underlying constraints of international relations, be whether neorealist-driven balance of power or neoliberal-style multilateral institutions. Nevertheless, post-cold war fluctuations of international political landscape and its mounting complexity have prompted a rethink of structural theoretical approaches and the assumptions of overriding rationalism. Clearly, the intensification of globalization and multiplication of asymmetric threats, smoothly lead researchers to move beyond traditional constraints, inducing to devote greater attention to beliefs as causal mechanisms. Some scholars contend that beliefs are bound to grow in importance as causal mechanisms with steering effects in today’s complex and interdependent world².

According to a widely adopted definition “the individual’s belief set represents all the hypotheses and theories that he is convinced are valid at a given moment”³. In politics as in other spheres of life, beliefs help us define the nature of the situation we are facing (diagnosis), as well as the kind of options or solutions we find appropriate (prognosis). From a cognitive psychological perspective, beliefs can be viewed as a kind of a “short cut”; individuals develop beliefs in order to help them make sense of the world. Existing studies also distinguish between *normative* beliefs (beliefs about what ought to be) and *positive* beliefs (beliefs about what is), *central* and *peripheral* beliefs (beliefs which are unshakeable and beliefs which are less central), and *open* and *closed* belief systems (belief systems which are or are not open to change in general). Much attention has been devoted to *philosophical* and

¹ **Schafer M. and Walker G. S.** ed., *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 4.

² *Ibid*, p. 7.

³ **Houghton D. P.**, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases*, Routledge 2009, p. 106.

instrumental beliefs, with a focus on overall perception of the reality (philosophical beliefs) as well as the conception of the methods and instruments to attain policy goals within the constraints of the perceived reality (*instrumental beliefs*)⁴.

Political beliefs have been broadly studied within the “operational code” framework. Distinguishing philosophical and instrumental beliefs as its fundamental building blocks, Alexander George has posited that operational code provides a set of general beliefs about fundamental issues of social and political life⁵.

The existing literature suggests that personalities of political actors and their beliefs are especially important under four conditions: when a political actor occupies a strategic location; when the situation is ambiguous, unstable, or complex; when the situation is laden with symbolic and emotional significance; and when spontaneous or especially effortful behavior is required. Moreover, personalities become especially important when power is concentrated, and external volatile conditions (especially foreign policy crises involving “enemy” nations) serve as a pretext to consolidate presidential power⁶.

This seems to perfectly fit to enemy nations Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are both characterized by power concentration and strong presidential power. Moreover, both countries are subjected to acute challenges and fluctuations in turbulent South Caucasus region. Clearly, regional-level fluctuations and exigencies require effortful behaviors, thus bringing core policy-makers – Presidents to the foreground.

The analysis of their beliefs helps account for complexities and prospects in regards to the possibility of breaking the logjam over troubled relations and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The article focuses on those speeches of Aliyev and Sargsyan, which feature considerable mentions of Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively, aiming to reveal the commonalities and differences of their behaviors.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 106-107.

⁵ Ibid, p. 108.

⁶ **Winter G. D.**, *Personality and Political Behavior. Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. by Sears O. D., Huddy L., Jervis R., Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 111-112.

Ilham Aliyev's Central and Instrumental Beliefs towards Armenia

A scan of Ilham Aliyev's speeches and statements markedly exposes his belligerent-sounding and ironic conception of Armenia. The latter is invariably associated with negative connotations such as a "fascist state", "barbarian", "vandal" and "aggressor" country. "Armenia is a fascist state. Their national ideology is fascism, discrimination and nationalism"⁷. Furthermore, Aliyev contends that 'With respect to Armenia, it is very difficult to use the expression "independent state...Armenia is not even a colony, it is not even worthy of being a servant"⁸. Interestingly, the line between state and society is often blurry and overstepped. Aliyev's harsh criticism of Armenian authorities has extended to Armenians in general, which is vividly manifested in his following assertion: "*Armenians all over the world are the "Number 1 enemy" of Azerbaijan*"⁹.

A close scrutiny of his discourse reveals very high level extraversion characterized by uncompromising stances and the tendency to put the entire blame for 'freezing' the conflict on Armenia. He has invariably contended that Armenian regime is directly responsible for the consequences of delaying the conflict settlement. Moreover, "The main threat to regional security is posed by the aggressive policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan"¹⁰. Aliyev has repeatedly condemned co-chairs of OSCE for inaction and inability to resolve the impasse. Whereas Azerbaijan has no share of guilt, it is a "stabilizing country and

⁷ Ilham Aliyev: Azerbaijan will restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty. 19 March 2014. Available at: http://en.apa.az/xeber_azerbaijan_will_restore_its_territorial__208894.html (Accessed: 4 March 2016).

⁸ Aliyev I., *Armenia is not even a colony, it is not even worthy of being a servant.* @presidentaz. 29 January . 2015. Available at: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/560718307515318272> (Accessed: 8 April 2016).

⁹ Ilham Aliyev, "naughty son" of the "national leader"?. 16 May 2012. Available from: <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/details/107602> (Accessed: 5 May 2016).

¹⁰ Aliyev I., *The main threat to regional security is posed by the aggressive policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan.* @presidentaz, 1 October 2014. Available from: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/517274762351898625> (Accessed: 20 March 2016).

the stability in the region is provided only thanks to the policy of the Azerbaijani state”¹¹.

It is noteworthy, that his pronounced anti-Armenian stances apply to nearly all aspects of the country and its history. For instance, Armenian Genocide is referred to as “a myth, which must be dispelled by Turkey and Azerbaijan in a coordinated manner”¹².

Furthermore, Aliyev questions the history and national identity of Armenia, asserting that “Not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also a significant part of present-day Armenia is ancient Azerbaijani lands”, expressing confidence that “Azerbaijanis will return to Nagorno-Karabakh, to other occupied lands and to all the historical Azerbaijani lands”¹³.

Essentially, there seems to be strict consistency between Aliyev’s anti-Armenian beliefs and deeds, say, beliefs shape behavior. “Safarov’s case” is illustrative. Ironically, Azerbaijani Army Lieutenant Ramil Safarov, who had axe murdered Gurgun Margaryan, an officer in the Armenian army who was asleep, was greeted as a hero in Azerbaijan and received special treatment by President Aliyev. He wished the axe-murderer “future success in his military career”^{*}.

Clearly, Aliyev’s *instrumental and closed beliefs* are inextricably linked to and stem from his broader philosophical beliefs about Armenia and Armenians. The critical aspect here is to account for

¹¹ *President Aliyev says Azerbaijan ready for any scenario*. 7 August 2014. Available from: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/69476.html> (Accessed: 11 May 2016).

¹² Aliyev I., *Turkey and Azerbaijan work in a coordinated manner to dispel the myth of the "Armenian genocide" in the world*. @presidentaz [Twitter]. 4 September 2014. Available from: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/507430784710361088> (Accessed: 12 April 2016).

¹³ Ilham Aliyev wants Nagorno-Karabakh, to other occupied lands and “historical Azerbaijani lands”. 20 March 2014. Available from: <http://massispost.com/2014/03/ilham-aliyev-wants-nagorno-karabakh-and-historical-azerbaijani-lands-back/> (Accessed: 12 April 2016).

^{*} Safarov was promoted from the military rank of lieutenant to major. The Defense Ministry also awarded Safarov over eight years in back pay in addition to giving him a free apartment. *Released Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov given rank of major*. 1 September 2012. Available from: <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2060861.html> (Accessed: 14 April 2016).

his take on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution through negotiations. It comes as no surprise that the term ‘compromise’ is largely non-existent in Aliyev’s discourse. One could argue that Aliyev has called for a compromise agreement. Yet, a close scrutiny of his conception of ‘compromise’ illustrates that the latter does not prescribe a basic agreement on two core principles of conflict settlement – territorial integrity and self-determination. Evidently, they refer to the obligations of the UN member states and are not subject to any discussion. Whereas, numerous conflict-related statements made by Aliyev suggest that the president of the UN member state is not aware of the obligations and commitments the country assumed by joining the UN. He has repeatedly asserted that “The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be resolved within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh will never be granted independence. Azerbaijan will never accept and the world will never recognize it”¹⁴. Aliyev does not probably know that under international law the metropolis can not dictate a particular political status to the people claiming for self-determination. Rather, it is the exclusive right of those people. It is not the metropolis who grants independence to those people, but the UN member states through recognition. The international community has never granted Aliyev the right to speak on its behalf. A strong faith in military solution to the conflict is omnipresent in Aliyev’s discourse: “The military budget and combat capability will play a major role in the settlement of ... Nagorno-Karabakh conflict”¹⁵. He has tended to deem military build-up pivotal to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution: “We will continue to build up our military capabilities. The weaponry and ammunition we have acquired in recent

¹⁴ Aliyev I., *The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be resolved within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh will never be granted independence. Azerbaijan will never accept and the world will never recognize it.* @presidentaz [Twitter]. 30 May 2015. Available from: http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1smelca (Accessed: 24 February 2016).

¹⁵ Azerbaijan's President Threatens War with Armenia via Twitter. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/azerbaijan-president-threatens-war-armenia-twitter> (Accessed: 28 April 2016).

years suggest that we can accomplish any task”¹⁶. Furthermore, he tends to assert that “If the Armenian fascist state does not give up its dirty deeds, the very existence of the Armenian state can be called into question”¹⁷.

A question arises of how a political psychologist would assess Aliyev’s belligerent rhetoric? Perhaps, some researchers would attribute his extreme stances to “low integrative complexity”.

Integrative complexity is one of the most widely studied structural or stylistic features of personality. Do leaders process information in simplistic ways, focusing only on a single perspective or black-and-white alternatives, or do they recognize different points of view, perhaps even integrating them into broader complex perspectives?

Put simply, existing studies note that leaders with black-and-white perspectives and extreme positions are characterized by low integrative complexity. More specifically, Herman has identified correlation between integrative complexity and belligerence, noting that “aggressive leaders are high in need for power, low in conceptual complexity, distrustful of others, nationalistic, and likely to believe that they have some control over the events in which they are involved”¹⁸.

Yet, one should not neglect situational constraints that may determine beliefs and rhetoric. Put simply, seemingly belief-based discourse can be influenced by tight social constraints rather than cognitive dispositions.

A bunch of studies tend to attribute Aliyev’s bellicose rhetoric and Armenophobic attitudes to the basic philosophy of authoritarian regimes. The latter are persistently searching for “external enemies” to divert the focus from domestic shortcomings to external threats facing the entire nation. Furthermore, the necessity of standing up to the external enemy serves as a perfect pretext to suppress dissent and pluralism in the country. The recipe is simple: every opposition politician may be easily labeled by authorities as a “spy”, “traitor” who

¹⁶ *President Aliyev says Azerbaijan ready for any scenario*. 7 August 2014. Available from: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbajjan/69476.html>.

¹⁷ *Azerbaijani President: "The enemy has received an adequate response"*. 7 August 2014. Available from: <http://en.apa.az/print/214863> (Accessed: 20 April 2016).

¹⁸ **Houghton D. P.**, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases*, Routledge 2009, p. 103.

serves the enemy's interests and disrupts stability. This leads to monopolization of power by the authoritarian regime led by patriotic and charismatic president. Unsurprisingly, the referendum held in Azerbaijan in 2009 resulted in abolishing of presidential term limits. The massive crackdown on civil society should be put in this context.

The reports and resolutions issued by international organisations (Freedom house, European Neighborhood Policy reports, etc.) on human right abuses, suppression of political and civil rights do not seem to alleviate ubiquitous authoritarian tendencies. Azerbaijan was classified as 'not free' in Freedom House's 2014 "Freedom in the World" publication¹⁹. Freedom House described regressive trends in freedom in Azerbaijan in 2013, and that the country was locked in a 'downward spiral' that did not present opportunities for the development of liberties in the near future. Furthermore, Freedom House criticized other democratic governments by arguing that because Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas resources it has escaped the condemnation of democratic governments²⁰.

One of the vivid manifestations of widespread repression is detention and 8.5 year imprisonment of civil activist Leyla Yunus²¹ - the founder and director of the Institute for peace and democracy, which was advocating and striving to prepare ground for dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

One might conclude that any activist who vocally criticizes authoritarian tendencies and human right abuses in the county and resists authorities, risks getting branded as national traitor or end up in jail with a wide range of charges.

¹⁹ Freedom House 2014, *Freedom in the World. The Democratic Leadership Gap* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House), p. 18. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW2014%20Booklet.pdf> (Accessed: 18 February 2016).

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 7.

²¹ Leila Yunus was charged with fraud, tax evasion, document fraud, and illegal entrepreneurship. Case History: Leila Yunus. Available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-leyla-yunus> (Accessed: 17 May 2016).

Another plausible explanation of situational constraints conditioning Aliyev's Armenophobic attitude is the economic structure of oil-rich Azerbaijan. Conventional wisdom posits that oil rich countries tend to suffer the constraints of oil curse and dutch disease.²² The latter stem from country's overdependence on oil resources, the situation when hydrocarbon resources are placed at the core of state power.

A well-informed observer Leyla Aliyeva aptly notes that the rise of international oil prices from \$11 per barrel in 1998 to \$140 in 2008, which further consolidated the indispensable role of oil in Azerbaijan's economy, is negatively correlated with democracy promotion in the country²³. Clearly, the state's ownership of country's oil resources broadened authority's control over Azerbaijani population, considerably impairing civil society's ability to counter unpopular policies and large-scale abuses.

Evidence suggests that in 2013 the State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan alone accounted for 58% of the state budget revenues. Even leading industries in the non-oil economy are indirectly funded by the oil sector, such as construction and transport²⁴.

It is noteworthy that along with above-mentioned constraints, oil-addicted Azerbaijan is highly susceptible to fluctuations of international oil prices. Evidently, the country finds itself in complete disarray after the recent decline of international oil prices which fell below \$30 a barrel.

A recent study conducted after the Four-Day April War exposes the ensuing severe hardships inflicted on country, due to currency collapse and inflation, which generated resentment against authorities and triggered large-scale protests across the country. The author concludes that the persisting turmoil may well prompt the authorities to "play the

²² **Bature B. N.**, The Dutch Disease and the Diversification of an Economy: Some Case Studies. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 2013, **15**, 5 (Sep. - Oct.), 6-14.

²³ **Aliyeva L.**, "Azerbaijan: Power in the Petro-State" in *Plight of Democracy's Plight in the European Neighborhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties*, ed. by Emerson M. and Youngs R., Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2008, p. 115.

²⁴ Economic Development in Azerbaijan: Country Partnership Strategy: Azerbaijan, 2014–2018. Available at: <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-aze-2014-2018-sd-02.pdf> (Accessed: 15 May 2016).

Karabakh card” by stating either large or small operation as a recipe for downplaying the economic hardships and rallying all Azerbaijanis around the flag²⁵.

A wealth of evidence prompts to posit that domestic political and economic shortcomings do significantly influence the Armenophobic rhetoric of Ilham Aliyev. One might argue that situational constraints rather than a belief system or cognitive complexity determine overly anti-Armenian discourse featuring extreme positions.

A Glance into Serzh Sargsyan’s Beliefs Towards “The Other”

A close scrutiny of Armenia’s President Serzh Sargsyan’s discourse illustrates, that unlike his Azerbaijani counterpart, he makes a clear distinction between Azerbaijani state, elite and society: “I do not consider the people of Azerbaijan to be the enemy of the Armenian people. We are capable of respectfully resolving our disagreements and peacefully co-existing as neighbours”²⁶.

Azerbaijan’s political leadership is invariably regarded as Armenophobic, aggressive, belligerent, bellicose, destructive, intolerant: “Coercion, violence, terror, war; these are our opponent’s notions of reality”²⁷. It is noteworthy that infamous “Safarov case” considerably resonated with Sargsyan and toughened his stances towards Azerbaijan. Sargsyan expressed his utter shock, stating that broad daylight cynicism

²⁵ **De Waal T.**, Azerbaijan’s Perfect Storm, *Carnegie Europe*. January 19, 2016. Available from: http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=62501_ (Accessed: 18 May 2016).

²⁶ *Statement of Serzh Sargsyan the President of the Republic of Armenia in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*. Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/10/02/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participated-at-the-session-of-the-PACE-speech/> (Accessed 10 Sep. 2015).

²⁷ *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Ceremony of Inauguration*. Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/04/09/Statement-by-Serzh-Sargsyan-at-the-Ceremony-of-Inauguration/> (Accessed 10 Apr. 2015).

and violation of international norms by which the glorification of the murderer is being carried out by Azerbaijan was mindblowing²⁸.

He repeatedly questioned the European identity of Azerbaijan and its commitment to European values, contending that Azerbaijan has largely misperceived the essence of European values and tends to regard Europe chiefly as ‘a convenient market for selling oil and gas’: “It is preposterous when our neighbor, which has adopted the European way, threatens to destroy Armenian civil aviation aircrafts, conducts belligerent propaganda on a daily basis and is making threats to solve the NK issues by war”²⁹.

President went so far as to question the civility and norms of human conduct of “the Azerbaijani dictatorial regime”³⁰, asserting that there is a huge gap between the perceptions of the Azerbaijani authorities and the norms accepted by the civilized world³¹.

Unsurprisingly, President Sargsyan distanced ‘European’ Armenia from “non-European” Azerbaijan, implicitly mentioning that there is little to no common ground between them:

“The Eastern Partnership had some problems in its formation period yet... I still do not understand the criterion of grouping Armenia and Azerbaijan into one partnership – different opportunities, different approaches, different goals – and this is the reason that component did not work”³².

²⁸ *Joint Press Conference of the President Serzh Sargsyan and the Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen.* Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2012/09/06/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Anders-Fogh-Rasmussen-NATO-press-conference/> (Accessed 7 Mar. 2015).

²⁹ *Official Visit of President Serzh Sargsyan to the Republic of Slovenia.* Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2011/04/13/news-1530/> (Accessed 17 Apr. 2015).

³⁰ *President Makes Address at Session of UN General Assembly.* Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/09/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-UN-General-Assembly/> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2015].

³¹ *Address by President Serzh Sargsyan to the Representatives of the U.S. Expert Community at the Carnegie Endowment.* Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/10/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-Carnegie/> (Accessed 28 Mar. 2016).

³² *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-Level Meeting on the 5th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership.* Available

In line with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Sargsyan has tended to blame the other party-Azerbaijan for lack of political will to break the logjam on Nagorno-Karabakh: “We offered our neighbours dignified peace, anchored to universal human values. But the experience of recent years has demonstrated that they are not ready to accept the offer”³³. In his view the aggressive policy pursued by Azerbaijan resulted in the absence of any meaningful progress of negotiations for the conflict settlement, and the situation drifts toward increasing tension³⁴, which in its turn led to the Four-Day April War.

Sargsyan’s position towards Azerbaijan has markedly hardened since September 2015, due to its application large caliber artillery* on the front line. He attributed increasing tension on the front line to ‘aggressive policy of dictatorial regime’ which ‘has irreversibly lost both the sense of reality and of norms of human conduct’³⁵.

“Unfortunately, there is currently a huge gap between the perceptions of the Azerbaijani authorities and the norms accepted by the civilized world. While the civilized world is creating the necessary conditions for a people’s exercise of their right to self-determination, Azerbaijan, blinded by its oil revenues, is trying in all possible ways to impose its views on

at: <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/04/25/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Eastern-Partnership-Prague/> (Accessed 14 Jan. 2016).

³³ *Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Extended Meeting Held at the RA Ministry of Defense*. Available at: <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2013/01/15/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-session-Ministry-of-Defense/> (Accessed 20 May 2015).

³⁴ *President Makes ...*, Op. cit.

* According to Armenia’s Ministry of Defense, Azerbaijani army has used Russian-made D-30 howitzers firing bordering districts of Armenia. In retaliation the Ministry issued a statement contending that “in order to silence the enemy, thwart its actions and thereby support the [Karabakh] peace process, from now on the Armenian Armed Forces will use adequate means of artillery and rocket fire, constantly targeting the sites of Azerbaijani troop deployments and movements, military hardware and personnel.” Armenia Will Use Heavy Artillery, Says Defense Ministry, September 26, 2015. Available from <http://asbarez.com/140195/armenia-will-use-heavy-artillery-says-defense-ministry/> (Accessed 10 October 2015).

³⁵ *President Makes Address...*, Op. cit.

not only Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, but also the mediator countries...”³⁶.

Sargsyan has invariably advocated peaceful settlement to the conflict stating the necessity of the compromise. The latter has an obvious red-line referring independent status of Nagorno-Karabakh based on the exercise of the right to self-determination, which, as a norm of international law, can not be subjected to disputes and compromise. Strikingly, whereas Aliyev asserts that “Azerbaijan will never recognize Nagorno-Karabakh”, Sargsyan regards the recognition of its independence as an irreducible and undisputed issue. A close scrutiny of Sargsyan’s discourse suggests that compromise can take the forms of territorial concessions in exchange for recognizing the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Regarding Sargsyan’s closed and instrumental beliefs pertained to conflict resolution, he has repeatedly stressed that Armenia is committed to peaceful settlement to the conflict, though has the potential to resist and counter Azerbaijan’s military aggression. Moreover, in response to Azerbaijani delegate Samad Seyidov’s remarks about Armenia’s occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijan’s territory at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, President particularly noted: “If Azerbaijan launches military actions, then Armenia will defend Nagorno-Karabakh with all its power. If such actions take place, then after few months you will complain about the occupation of 25-30 per cent of your land”³⁷. This statement is indicative of a great deal of confidence in terms of Armenia’s military capabilities and the potential to stand up to Azerbaijan.

Regarding the situational constraints of Sargsyan’s beliefs, it should be emphasized, that Armenia is subjected to double blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey due to long-stalling Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The blockade has been considerably hobbling steady economic

³⁶ *Address by President...*, Op. cit.

³⁷ *Serzh Sargsyan to head of PACE Azerbaijan’s delegation: “Why should Armenia be accountable to Azerbaijan?”* Available at: <http://araratnews.am/serzh-sargsyan-to-head-of-pace-azerbaijans-delegation-why-should-armenia-be-accountable-to-azerbaijan/?lang=en#sthash.ApzPBUtJ.rzZat013.dpuf> (Accessed 11 March 2016).

development, compounded by heavy burden put on the economy due to the full-blown arms race with Azerbaijan. Steadily mounting tension on Armenian-Azerbaijani front line inevitably results in high number of casualties. All this leads Sargsyan to blame Azerbaijan for its belligerent, aggressive policy, which tends to neglect its commitment to peaceful conflict settlement.

The infamous “Safarov’s case” substantially resonated with Sargsyan, explicitly hardening his stances towards Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Aliyev, who tends to exploit any occasion to convey his attitude to ‘fascist’ Armenian state, and Azerbaijan’s number enemy in the world – Armenians, Sargsyan’s response has emerged out of the need to react to his Azerbaijani counterpart’s expansionist statements. He has strictly drawn boundaries between Azerbaijani state and society, addressing his criticism to “dictatorial leadership” and its “aggressive” policy.

Table 1: The conceptions of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Aliyev’s and Sargsyan’s discourse

Aliyev’s conception of Armenia	“Fascist state located on historical Azeri lands”; “Barbarian”, “vandal” and “aggressor”; “Colony, which is not even worthy of being a servant”; “Number 1 enemy of Azerbaijan”
Sargsyan’s conception of Azerbaijan (elite)	Armenophobic; Bellicose; Aggressive; Dictatorial; Destructive, (uncommitted to a negotiated outcome to the conflict settlement), Non-European (misperceived the essence of European integration)

Conclusion

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev's anti-Armenian beliefs significantly influence his confrontational stances towards Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement. In his discourse Armenia is invariably associated with negative connotations such as a "fascist state", "barbarian", "vandal" and "aggressor county". Moreover, the line between state and society has often been overstepped, say, negative attitude towards Armenia extends to Armenians all over the world who are regarded as "Number 1 enemy" of Azerbaijan.

Aliyev's discourse reveals his marked extraversion characterized by closed beliefs -uncompromising stances and the tendency to put the entire blame for "freezing" the conflict on Armenia. His instrumental beliefs place sheer faith in Azerbaijan's military capabilities and forceful settlement of the conflict. Essentially, there is strict consistency between Aliyev's anti-Armenian beliefs and deeds, say, beliefs shape behavior.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Aliyev's bellicose rhetoric and Armenophobic attitudes are specific to the basic philosophy of authoritarian regimes. The latter are persistently searching for 'external enemies' to divert the focus from domestic shortcomings to external threats facing the entire nation. Furthermore, the necessity of standing up to the external enemy serves as a perfect pretext to suppress dissent and pluralism in the country. Therefore, situational constraints rather than a belief system or cognitive complexity determine overly anti-Armenian discourse featuring extreme positions.

In contrast to his Azerbaijani counterpart, Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan makes a clear distinction between Azerbaijani state, elite and society, contending that the latter has been held hostage to bellicose policies adopted by Aliyev's dictatorial regime. Regarding Sargsyan's closed and instrumental beliefs pertained to conflict resolution, he has repeatedly stressed that Armenia is committed to peaceful settlement to the conflict, though has the potential to resist and counter Azerbaijan's military actions

Sargsyan's position towards Azerbaijan has markedly hardened since September 2015, due to its application large caliber artillery, and

particularly after the Four-Day April War in 2016. Arguably, Sargsyan's beliefs lead him to regard Azerbaijan as Armenophobic, aggressive, belligerent, bellicose, destructive, intolerant and dictatorial. Yet, Sargsyan's stances have emerged out of the need to react to his Azerbaijani counterpart's belligerent rhetoric.