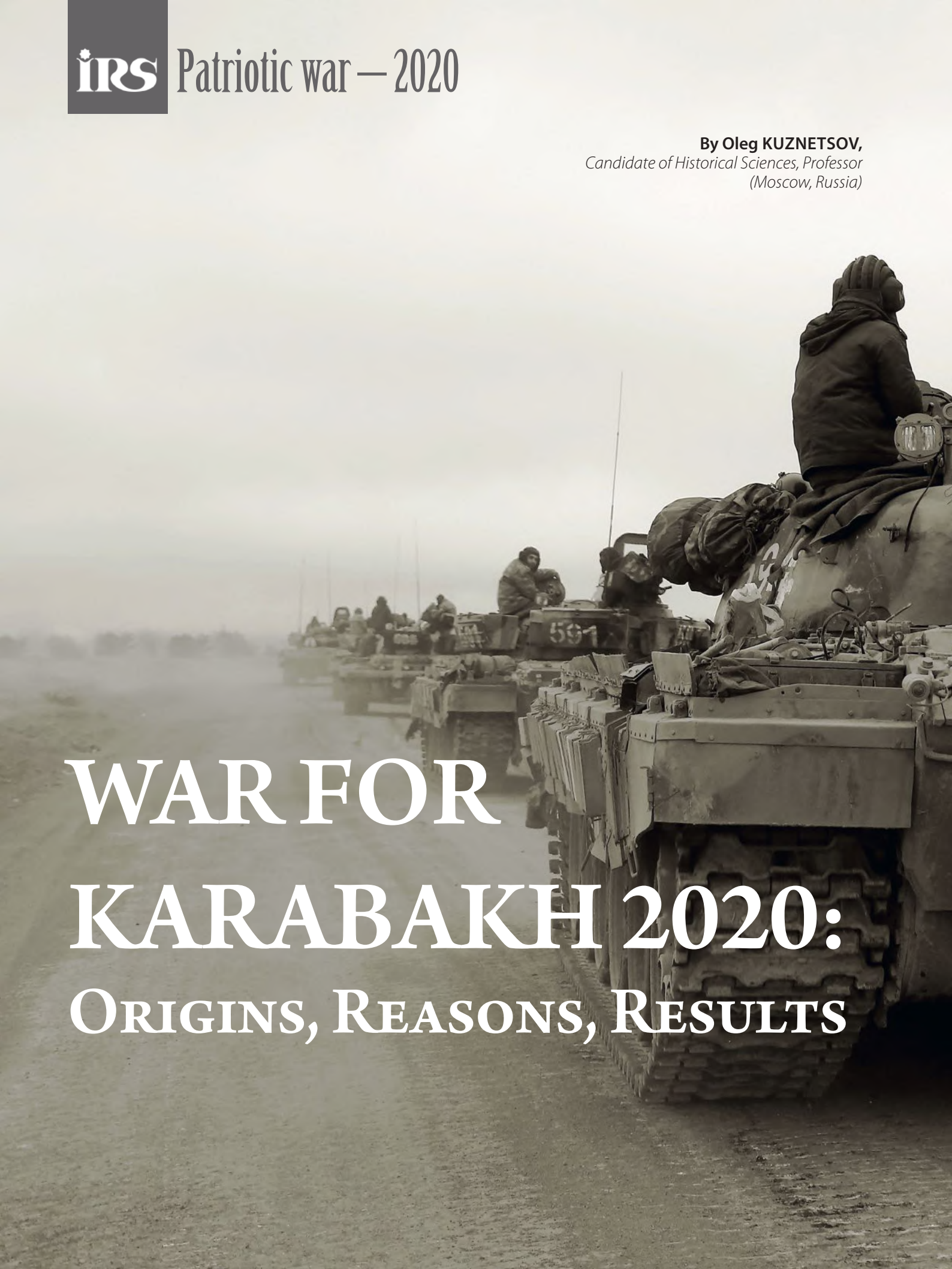


The logo for the Institute for Russian Studies (IRS) is located in the top left corner. It consists of the letters 'IRS' in a white, serif font, with a small crown-like symbol above the 'I'. The logo is set against a dark grey rectangular background.

Patriotic war — 2020

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The background of the cover is a black and white photograph of a military column of armored vehicles, likely tanks or heavy infantry fighting vehicles, moving along a dirt road. The vehicles are in a line, receding into the distance. The atmosphere is hazy or smoky. A soldier in a dark jacket and hood is visible in the foreground, sitting on the back of the lead vehicle. The overall tone is somber and historical.

WAR FOR
KARABAKH 2020:
ORIGINS, REASONS, RESULTS



Cannons of the Azerbaijani army fire at Armenian fortifications in Karabakh



On 10 November 2020, the fourth Armenian-Azerbaijani war in the last two centuries ended. It has already gone down in the history of the independent Azerbaijani state as a Patriotic war. The first of them, which thanks to the tsar's governor in the Caucasus, Count I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, was labeled as the "Armenian-Tatar massacre" in which 158 Azerbaijani and 128 Armenian settlements were destroyed and up to 10,000 people died, happened back in 1905-1906. In the second war, which occurred in 1918-1920, the fighting involved the armies of the Dashnak Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The war and the genocide of the civilian population was stopped only at the end of 1920, after the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan and Armenia by the 11th Red Army. That war ended in the killing or expulsion of up to 150,000 Azerbaijanis from their traditional places of residence). The third war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which went down in history as a "Karabakh war", was waged in 1988-1994. It began with Azerbaijani pogroms in the Armenian city of Kafan and ended with the signing of the Bishkek Protocol to end the armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. It ended in the death of up to 10,000 civilians, Armenian occupation of the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region and

seven adjacent administrative districts of Azerbaijan, the expulsion of 1.2 million ethnic Azerbaijanis from their homes (500,000 from Armenia and 700,000 from the occupied territories). So the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict did not start yesterday, it has a history of more than a century, and the recent developments around Nagorno-Karabakh that attracted the attention of the world community are only a small part of it, very brief and not particularly significant in terms of spatial and geographical localization.

If one looks at the history of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation with an honest and impartial view, one can see that it has never stopped over the past one and a half centuries. Sometimes it subsided but then flared up with fresh ferocity. Many people today are trying to present it in the light of Samuel F. Huntington's concept of a "clash of civilizations", as a "war on the fault line", portraying it purely as a Christian-Muslim confrontation. However, such a primitive view of the essence of the issue stumbles over two immutable historical facts that are not very pleasant for the modern Eurocentric model of the world.

First, since its proclamation in 1918, the Republic of Azerbaijan has always positioned itself as a secular state, ahead of not only the Republic of Turkey but also the rest of the Muslim world. Even if a religious factor

Azerbaijan's reactive artillery shells enemy fortifications in Karabakh

did play a role in the life of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis throughout the 20th century, it was rather cultural, not political, and therefore could not influence the state life of the ethnos. As a result, the modern Azerbaijani version of secular “non-political” Islam is characterized by loyalty, tolerance and non-conflict with other religions and cultures, which qualitatively distinguishes it from the “Arab-Maghreb” political Islam.

Secondly, over the past hundred years, the Armenian ethnos has created its country in its present form not at all on the religious canons of the officially declared Monophysite Christianity, referring quite often to the pagan roots of its national mentality. This process became very fast during the years of Soviet power, and not without the support of the authorities of the Armenian SSR for which neo-paganism was a trump card in the ideological struggle against the clerical influence of the Armenian-Gregorian Church and the ideologists of the Armenian diaspora in the countries of the bourgeois and “third” world. For this, the Institute of History and Ethnography (now the Institute of History and Armenian Studies) was specifically established within the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR in 1959. This is also evidenced by

the active state support of neo-paganism at state level in Armenia, which was particularly pronounced in the first decade of the 21st century.

Consequently, this conflict had completely different driving forces, and it is necessary to understand their presence. Armenians are one of a handful of peoples the majority of whose representatives live outside the territory of their political state, i.e. the Republic of Armenia. In other words, the aggregate number of people from the Armenian diaspora who often do not have political ties of citizenship with the country usually referred to as a “historical homeland” exceeds the population of this state. Even though ethnographers believe that it is impossible to calculate the exact number of Armenians in the world due to their dispersion in the diaspora, it is still possible to estimate their number with an accuracy of a hundred thousands people. I think I will not be mistaken if I say that there are about 11.5 million Armenians in the world today. At the same time, less than 3 million Armenians currently live in Armenia, or a quarter of the total.

To consolidate an ethnos that is predominantly dispersed, an external unifying factor is needed, and

Azerbaijani tank heading into battle



the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict turned out to be one. It is worth remembering the historical conditions in which it was unleashed: during the Soviet era, there was an iron curtain between citizens of Soviet Armenia and their fellow tribesmen from other countries. The presence of this curtain implied an ideological split between the two communities of representatives of this ethnic group. For many years, Armenians in the

USSR lived in accordance with completely different moral values and social guidelines than their fellow tribesmen in Lebanon, Syria, the United States or France. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting acquisition by former Soviet Armenians of their own national statehood gave rise to the need for their quickest integration into the world Armenians because the diaspora traditionally exceeded, and still does, the autochthonous population of the sovereign Republic of Armenia. Armenia and the diaspora had to unite, and the motive for such unification was the armed struggle for Karabakh, which in modern history received the name of the 1988-1994 Karabakh war. Post-Soviet Armenia with its underdeveloped economic and social infrastructure (there is not even water supply in many regions of the Republic of Armenia today) could not be an object of interest for investors from the Armenian diaspora without Karabakh. In fact, the Karabakh war of 1988-1994 became a kind of pass for the former Soviet Armenians (both of Yerevan and Karabakh) to the Armenian community of the world. Therefore, the reasons for the Armenian-Azerbaijani



Azerbaijani infantry heading into battle

A tank bearing the name of National Hero of Azerbaijan Albert Agarunov with infantrymen heading into battle



war of the fall of 2020 must be sought in the results of the Karabakh war of 1988-1994.

Armenia, having occupied Azerbaijani territories around Nagorno-Karabakh and declared them a “buffer zone of security” (Agdam, Gubadli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Fizuli, Kalbajar, Lachin) did not carry out any economic activity on these lands at all. Moreover, the entire industrial, economic and social infrastructure of these administrative districts of Azerbaijan was deliberately plundered and destroyed after occupation – the property of residents was sold for a pittance to Armenia, Georgia and Iran, industrial equipment was dismantled and sold as scrap metal, all buildings and structures built of brick or sawn stone were dismantled for construction materials, which were also sold at meager prices most often to Iran. I happened to visit Karabakh a month after its liberation, and I saw with my own eyes not only villages and settlements, but entire cities razed to the ground. Prior to the Armenian occupation, these cities were home to 50,000-70,000 people. The material damage caused to the Azerbaijani people by the Armenian occupation amounts to tens of billions of dollars. One has to have so much strength,

desire and, most importantly, hatred to literally wipe out the memory of a half-million citizens of Azerbaijan who lived here a quarter of a century ago!

It is worth mentioning an important nuance in this context: it was not only Azerbaijanis who were persecuted by the Armenians, as propagandists from Yerevan are claiming today in an effort to interpret the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Karabakh as purely ethnic or ethno-religious. Along with ethnic Azerbaijanis, Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, and Meskhetian Turks were also expelled from the occupied territories. In other words, unable to bring anything of their own and originally Armenian to the occupied lands, the invaders sought to destroy everything non-Armenian in these territories, and they did not care what exactly to destroy. This was most clearly manifested in the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage sites: in Karabakh, 63 out of 67 Muslim mosques were dismantled and the remaining four were seriously damaged. The same was in store for the Temple of the Transfusion of the Lord in the village of Kuropatkino in Khojavand District, which was completely plundered and partially destroyed during

Azerbaijan's extensive use of unmanned aircraft revolutionized military affairs



the years of occupation even though the Russian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Gregorian Church

maintained ecumenical ties with each other all this time and the supreme hierarchs of the two churches met more than once. By the way, immediately after the occupation, the Armenians, in accordance with their policy, changed the name of the village of Kuropatkino to the contrived Armenian "Kakavadzor" and expelled the Russian (Molokans) population from there.

A completely natural question arises in this regard: what purpose did the occupying authorities of Armenia pursue in deliberately destroying the captured cities and other settlements of Azerbaijan? After all, even the Nazis, who occupied half of Europe in 1939-1942, always sought to preserve the industrial potential and infrastructure in the conquered countries or territories in order to use them to their advantage. I think they were driven by the same reasons that Western leaders are guided by today, plunging the European countries of the post-Soviet space into economic chaos and collapse. Most of the former Soviet republics by themselves are not interesting to anyone, they are seen as a buffer zone of "scorched earth" between Russia and Europe, are deliberately driven into chaos and devastation so that Russia cannot enter there again, and even if it did, it would spend trillions of dollars



The result of a drone operation: an Armenian tank destroyed by a precise strike

and decades to revive them. The West has the same prospect for Georgia and Armenia now. For the same reason, the Armenian occupying authorities, which declared a “buffer zone” around Karabakh, intentionally destroyed its infrastructure, as they thought that seeing this devastation, the Azerbaijanis would never dare to return and revive this man-made desert in the occupied territories. However, the recent events that have become part of the glorious history of Azerbaijan have shown that they were wrong in their calculations: Azerbaijan has returned and will revive and restore its lands from the ashes. This is precisely where the superiority of the Azerbaijani national spirit over the Armenian mentality is manifested today.

The Karabakh war of 1988-1994 certainly had a decisive influence on the process of self-identification or the formation of the identity of the modern Azerbaijani ethnos, which resulted in its transformation into a fully-fledged state-forming nation. At the same time, it should be noted that the direction of this process in Azerbaijan was different from what was present in the ideology of Armenians, as well as the majority of other peoples that gained their state independence in the 1990s (including peoples of the former Yugoslavia,

Slovakia, Eritrea, countries of Central Asia, partly Sudan). In most of these countries (the former Yugoslavia, Eritrea, Sudan). The war was a consequence and often the main result of the national-religious polarization of the ethnic groups participating in it. In Azerbaijan, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh had a slightly different impact on public consciousness: thanks to it, the country and its people acquired a national and state identity, realizing themselves not as Transcaucasian Muslims (as the Armenian opponents would like), but as a nation consciously and consistently forming a single multi-ethnic state.

There is no doubt that the choice by Azerbaijanis as an ethnos of this vector of institutionalization of their identity was not conditioned by the influence of external factors associated with the war, but was predetermined by the content and course of the process of ethno-genesis of the Azerbaijani nation, first as part of the Russian Empire, and then of the Soviet Union, the hallmark of which was secularity. Its influence was most vividly manifested in the short period of the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918-1920, which proved that it was possible and became the first example of secular



Armenian self-propelled anti-aircraft gun destroyed by an Azerbaijani drone

Spoils of war: Armenian tanks



statehood in the Islamic ecumene. In this sense, the inhabitants of Azerbaijan asserted themselves first as secular nationalists and only then as Muslims. The creation of their own political nation took them

a quarter of a century, and when this process was completed, the issue of restoring the historical habitat, i.e. the implementation of the de-occupation of the territories seized by Armenia, became part of their agenda.



Spoils of war: Armenian self-propelled anti-aircraft guns

Since the signing of the Bishkek Protocol to end the armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994, Azerbaijan has made every possible political and diplomatic effort to return its jurisdiction over the administrative districts occupied by Armenia, especially because the obligation to withdraw Armenian armed formations was explicitly stated by four resolutions of the UN Security Council - 822 of 30 April 1993, 853 of 29 July 1993, 874 of 14 October 14 1993 and 884 of 12 November 1993. The international community represented by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was also interested in the

The elite of the Azerbaijani army, special forces, at the Victory parade. Baku, 10 December 2020



settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To do this, the organization established the Minsk Group in 1992, which received a mandate from this organization only in December 1994. In the following year, a special OSCE representative for this conflict was appointed and an office was established in Tbilisi.

In the time the period between 1992 and 2005, the OSCE Minsk Group provided the conflicting parties with three different proposals as a basis for negotiations, which, however, did not lead to a mutually acceptable compromise, but allowed the situation to remain "frozen" for years. As a result, everything boiled down to a single compromise option, which provided

for a phased settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia through a gradual return of the occupied territories with the assistance of



An Azerbaijani reconnaissance detachment heading into the rear of the enemy

Tanks of the Azerbaijani army on the march



international peacekeepers. The approval of this plan, first presented by the Russian Foreign Ministry back in 2006, went through the crucible of numerous and, alas, fruitless multilateral and bilateral negotiations at the level of the heads of state (the last format of negotiations was initiated personally by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008), and responsibility for their disruption rested squarely with the military-political leadership of Armenia. The latest version of this document was handed over to the parties

by co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group in June 2019, three months before the resumption of hostilities on the Armenian-Azerbaijani frontline in Karabakh. But a very ambitious and laconic answer followed from Yerevan: “New war for new territories” (meaning that in case of resumption of hostilities, Armenia will easily win, after which it will expand the zone of occupation of Azerbaijani lands). By the end of the summer of 2020, it became clear to anyone in the know about the subtleties and nuances of the Nagorno-Karabakh

A salvo of rocket launchers of the Azerbaijani army



President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev in liberated territories

conflict that war is an inevitable form of resolving this long-standing military-political crisis. On 27 September, the Armenian military subjected a number of Azerbaijani settlements to rocket and artillery fire, after which Azerbaijani units and formations launched an offensive against the positions of the occupying corps of the Armenian army in Karabakh.

There is absolutely no point in retelling the content of this 44-day war, which ended with the total defeat of the Armenian armed forces in Karabakh. This topic may be of interest only to a small number of military professionals. One thing is clear: the plan of the military campaign was scrupulously thought out by the command of the Azerbaijani army, its implementation was guaranteed by at least two-fold resource support of the forces and resources involved, which indicates a high degree of readiness and long-term preparation of the Azerbaijani army for this war. However, this is not surprising because President Ilham Aliyev stated back in December 2008 that “no-one can find Azerbaijan’s commitment to abstain from military ways of resolving the conflict in any of the documents he signed. Therefore, hoping for a political settlement, we must always be prepared to

take any measures, and the military path is not and never has been an exception.” During the 12 years that followed, Baku hoped that common sense and the norms of international law would nevertheless prevail, knowing perfectly well that any war is, first of all about bloodshed and death, not a pleasant outing in the countryside, and it is necessary to avoid it as long as possible. However, the constant provocations of the Armenian side both on the front line in Karabakh and outside it (the last happened in Tovuz, more than a hundred kilometers from Karabakh, in July 2020 and in Goranboy District in August) deprived Azerbaijan of the opportunity to choose between peace and war, imposing the latter on it. And then the cannons began to speak – *Ultima ratio regum*, or “the last argument of the kings” (this motto was inscribed on all French cannons by Cardinal de Richelieu during the Thirty Years War; it subsequently decorated the barrels of the cannons of Prussian king Frederick II).

In the war with Armenia, Azerbaijan demonstrated a fundamentally new tactics of warfare on hard-to-reach and impassable mountainous and wooded areas, when the advancing troops always have to strike at the enemy sitting in long-term fortifications on a hill.

A salvo of the Azerbaijani army's artillery mounts



According to all the pre-existing textbooks of military tactics, in this situation, the attacking side always suffers losses in manpower and equipment three times greater than the defending side. But not this time. In particular, the irrecoverable losses of the Azerbaijani armed forces in personnel were almost 20 percent less than those of the opponent, in terms of equipment (in generalized average statistical terms) they were four times less and in terms of heavy offensive weapons six times less. The Armenian army lost 80 percent of its tanks, 70 percent of its armored personnel carriers and cannon artillery units, 50 percent of rocket artillery, and the entire air defense system. Such a result could only be achieved as a result of a dramatic change in the paradigm of the participation of troops in hostilities and a global modernization of the entire system of the armed forces towards structural reformatting and retraining of personnel to conduct war according to completely new principles and rules.

In 2013, the Azerbaijani government officially announced the implementation of a 10-year plan for the total modernization of the armed forces, the purpose of which was to prepare them for the war for the liberation of Karabakh, the most important and priority geostrategic task of the Azerbaijani state and its

most important political obligation to its own people. The initiator of this plan was President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, who also mobilized all the resources of the state for its early and comprehensive implementation. Quite often one can hear the phrase that politicians always steal victories from commanders, but in the case of Azerbaijan it is not the case. It was President Aliyev who created the resource and ideological prerequisites for victory in this war. The armed forces that were under his direct patronage for many years only had to win the battle, which was done in the fall of 2020. Therefore, he has every right to experience a "post-Karabakh euphoria", as Azerbaijan's ill-wishers write today, because no other person in this country did as much as he did to achieve the victory. Seven years of continuous work to achieve the goal of victory in the war (of course, in a close circle of like-minded people and assistants) and the month and a half of inhuman tension during hostilities give him every right to the sincere delight we see every time he raises the national flag of Azerbaijan in an administrative center of the previously occupied territories. He has earned this right with hard work, intellect and resolve.

Many military experts from all over the world identify three main factors for the victory of the Azerbaijani

An Azerbaijani reconnaissance detachment heading into the rear of the enemy

army in the war with Armenia – the highest level of discipline and professionalism of personnel, complete military-technical superiority over the opponent, and the highest level of moral and psychological motivation. It is no secret to anyone that the bulk of the officer and sergeant corps of the Azerbaijani army are those who were expelled from their homes and ancestral villages in the early 1990s (or their children). Therefore, there was a great risk that their temptation to free their homes as soon as possible would prevail over discipline, as was the case in April 2016. But this time not a single order of the high command on the pace of advancement was violated, not a single officer, contract soldier or conscript soldier allowed self-will during the execution of combat missions. Everyone knew exactly their maneuver under the new tactics of warfare.

The goal of gaining air supremacy was achieved not through the use of front-line aviation, as described in all modern textbooks on military tactics, but through the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones, especially offensive ones, which became a novelty in the theory of warfare. The Armenian army did not have such weapons systems, as well as systems to counter them, which largely predetermined its

defeat. Azerbaijan's military-technical superiority over Armenia was largely due to the fact that it had the ability and desire to arm itself from various sources, concluding arms contracts with suppliers from Russia, Belarus, Israel, France and many other countries of the world, while the Armenian military had to be content with predominantly Russian weapons, while many foreign weapons were developed from the outset to counter them. In other words, the Azerbaijani army had real opportunities to counter the armament of the Armenian army and therefore knew it perfectly well, while the opponent did not have such an opportunity.

The military-technical superiority of Azerbaijan over Armenia allowed its army the opportunity to engage the opponent in many sections of the front without getting into direct contact with it, destroying positions, command and control points, supply columns and locations of the Armenian military at a distance. Suffice it to say that the Armenian army lost two-thirds of its tanks and infantry fighting vehicles while they were on the march, not in fire contact with the opponent. The control of fire with the help of drones was of crucial importance in the application of such tactics of warfare by the Azerbaijani military. The presence of a significant and even excess amount of ammunition

Azerbaijan's special forces played a major role in the victory



and, in general, a well-oiled system of logistics, which the Armenian army could not boast of throughout the war, was also of key importance. This explains the relatively low level of casualties in the personnel of the Azerbaijani army in comparison with Armenia's, because it never had to make up for the shortcomings in the management and supply of blood. This was not the case in Armenia, which resorted to that repeatedly during the war. Armenian commanders did not spare their soldiers, who, in turn, did not spare themselves or the opponent, but it is very difficult to maintain morale in conditions when half of your unit has been destroyed before you even shoot at least once at the enemy or even see it on the battlefield. Therefore, it is not surprising that they left their combat positions without orders and often in panic under massive attacks from UAVs, rocket and cannon artillery without even trying to put up any resistance. Of course, this is not the fault of the soldiers, but of the military top brass and the military-political leadership of Armenia, who gave the order to start hostilities without actually realizing what results and consequences this would lead to.

Such behavior of the opponent on the battlefield raised the already high moral and psychological spirit

and motivation of the Azerbaijani military to liberate their native lands. The liberation of Shusha on 6-8 November 2020 can be seen as the culminating point of this manifestation. The Azerbaijan Armed Forces climbed the almost steep mountain slopes and engaged in hand-to-hand combat on the city streets, knocking the enemy out of houses with knives and grenades. Other examples of such attacks can be found in the military history of the world only during the storming of Berlin and the liberation of Prague in May 1945 (this epic battle can lay the groundwork for a cool action movie like the American "Rambo" or Russian "Flint"). Throughout the war, there was not a single case of non-observance of an order in the ranks of the Azerbaijani army even if it required self-sacrifice, not a single military crime such as desertion, embezzlement of military property or unauthorized abandonment of a unit. Neither do I know of a single case when parents or relatives of killed Azerbaijani soldiers would have expressed claims or reproaches to the state or society that their children, brothers or nephews died in this war. The war for Karabakh in the fall of 2020 showed a high degree of unity of the army, people and government of Azerbaijan, which was perhaps the key factor in achieving this victory.

Azerbaijani tank in combat position

In addition to what has been said above and to which my foreign colleagues drew their attention, I want to note one more circumstance that is not widely discussed, but also deserves special mention. In intellectual terms, the Azerbaijani military leaders turned out to be head and shoulders above the Armenian ones, which makes some of them real commanders. To prove this, it is enough to remember how the air defense system of the Armenian army in Karabakh was opened and destroyed. On the first or second day of the battles, several unmanned AN-2 civil aviation aircraft were taken into the air. They are generally used for economic purposes such as spraying pesticides over fields and are very similar in size to fighter-bombers. All of them were shot down by Armenian air defense systems, which thus gave away their positions to Azerbaijani reconnaissance UAVs and were soon destroyed by offensive drones and rocket-artillery fire. This provided the Azerbaijani armed forces with complete supremacy in the air on the third day of the war and predetermined the subsequent victory.

Armenia simply did not have a chance to win the war for Karabakh in the fall of 2020. Azerbaijan fought the war on its internationally recognized territory,

fought for the liberation of its occupied lands and, therefore, could not lose.

There is one more military-political aspect that distinguishes the Armenian-Azerbaijani war for Karabakh in 2020 from the total number of regional military conflicts of the last quarter of the 20th and the first quarter of the 21st century and puts it to an unattainable height. It is possible to say with absolute confidence that by winning this war, Azerbaijan made a very significant contribution to modern history of mankind, if not rewrote it altogether. For the first time in the entire existence of the system of international law within the framework of the United Nations, for the first time in the past 75 years, Azerbaijan used its arms to force the aggressor to unconditionally comply with the UN Security Council resolutions on the liberation of the previously occupied territories. Thus, it created an international legal precedent that clearly demonstrates the rule of law over geopolitical claims and ambitions of narcissistic power-lovers, and this has already become a serious lesson for the current and future generations of politicians. When a nation, state and army are united in their desire to restore historical justice, this union is able to withstand any external threat no matter who it comes from.✪