Azerbaijan's Modern Military Strategy in The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020

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ABSTRAK

Perang Nagorno-Karabakh Kedua tahun 2020 menandai perubahan signifikan dalam karakter peperangan modern, ditandai oleh dominasi informasi, penggunaan teknologi canggih, dan integrasi operasi lintas domain. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Azerbaijan menerapkan strategi militer modern dalam konflik tersebut, dengan konflik interaksi antara inovasi teknologi, modernisasi doktrin, dan efektivitas operasional. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis data sekunder, penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi sistem C4ISR, pemanfaatan UAV dan *amunisi berkeliaran* , serta pelaksanaan operasi gabungan yang menjadi landasan keberhasilan militer Azerbaijan. Analisis dilakukan melalui kerangka *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA) sebagaimana dikembangkan oleh Andrew W. Marshall dan Andrew F. Krepinevich, yang menekankan pentingnya integrasi teknologi, doktrin, dan organisasi dalam menciptakan keunggulan strategis.

Kata Kunci : Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Strategi Militer

ABSTRACT

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 marked a significant change in the character of modern warfare, characterized by the dominance of information, the use of advanced technology, and the integration of cross-domain operations. This study aims to analyze how Azerbaijan applied modern military strategy in the conflict, emphasizing the interaction between technological innovation, doctrinal modernization, and operational effectiveness. Using a qualitative approach based on secondary data, this study examines the implementation of C4ISR systems, the use of UAVs and cruise munitions, and the execution of joint operations that formed the basis of Azerbaijan's military success. The analysis is conducted through the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) framework developed by Andrew W. Marshall and Andrew F. Krepinevich, which emphasizes the importance of integrating technology, doctrine, and organization in creating strategic superiority.

Keywords: *Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Military Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

In security studies, modern military strategy can be understood as a way for countries to organize and deploy their military forces based on technology integration, information management, and cross-domain coordination as the main sources of strategic superiority. This shift reflects a change in the nature of warfare from conventional patterns that rely on static defense to more flexible, interconnected, and information-oriented military operations. In this context, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which lasted from September to November 2020, was a turning point in the evolution of modern military strategy. Unlike previous conflicts, which were dominated by conventional ground combat and static defense structures, this war demonstrated a fundamental change in the nature of warfare through the use of technology, information dominance, and advanced weapon systems (Amirkhanyan, 2022). This transformation is most evident in Azerbaijan's military strategy, which has been able to combine technological modernization with a more adaptive and networked doctrine of operations. Thus, the 2020 war not only reflects the escalation of regional disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also serves as an important empirical example of how countries can gain strategic advantages through the application of modern military strategies.

Historically, Armenia has maintained control over Nagorno-Karabakh since its victory in the first war (1988–1994) through the application of a static defense doctrine. Trenches, bunkers, layered defense lines, and artillery positions based on the mountainous topography formed the basis of their defense strategy for nearly three decades (Broers, 2019). However, the relevance of these positions has eroded since Azerbaijan began systematic military modernization in the early 2010s. Using its oil and gas revenues, Azerbaijan has invested in precision artillery, attack and kamikaze UAV systems, satellite-based intelligence, modern combat vehicles, and integrated communications and command networks. Defense cooperation with Turkey and Israel has accelerated this capability upgrade, making Azerbaijan one of the most aggressive regional actors in adopting modern military technology (Putri., A.T. et al., 2025)

The peak of this modernization is clearly evident in Azerbaijan's implementation of network-centric warfare (NCW) principles through the integration of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. This integration enables Azerbaijan to identify targets in real time, coordinate precision strikes, and respond quickly to changes in the tactical situation. UAVs not only serve as attack platforms, but also as key intelligence sources that direct artillery and ground troop maneuvers. This information advantage creates operational superiority that gradually cripples Armenia's defenses, which still rely on Soviet-era technology and static doctrines with minimal mobility (Abidah, 2024).

Armenia's failure to adapt to the changing nature of modern warfare can be seen as a contrast that highlights why Azerbaijan's strategy was more effective. During the 2020 conflict, Armenia still relied heavily on static defense patterns, an unresponsive command system, and troop formations that were not designed to deal with fast-moving threats. This made many Armenian units relatively easy to detect and attack before they could utilize their advantages by combining the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, precision artillery, and ground troop movements in a more coordinated pattern of operations, thereby gradually suppressing the enemy's logistics and communication lines. Beyond the operational aspect, this conflict also highlights the importance of the psychological and informational dimensions. The widespread dissemination of UAV attack footage not only built confidence on the Azerbaijani side, but also contributed to weakening the morale and effectiveness of the Armenian command, while shaping international perceptions of Azerbaijan's military strategic superiority. (Meichella et al., 2024)

The study entitled "Azerbaijan's Military Efforts to Defend Nagorno-Karabakh Province in 2020" written by Sugeng Riyanto explicitly places the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war as the object of military study (Linsani & Riyanto, n.d.). The main focus of this research is to describe the military steps taken by Azerbaijan to defend and recapture the Nagorno-Karabakh region from Armenia. Sugeng's research emphasizes the military efforts made by Azerbaijan and how these efforts contributed to success on the battlefield. Conversely, this research does not stop at merely describing military efforts but attempts to analyze how these various elements are integrated into the framework of modern military strategy.

The next study, titled "Analysis of Armenia-Azerbaijan Foreign Policy Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh Territorial Dispute According to John P. Lovell's Theory," written by Devany et al., focuses on the dynamics of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the perspective of foreign policy and international relations theory. (Devany, 2023). Devany et al. use a realist approach and John P. Lovell's political strategy framework to explain how Armenia and Azerbaijan respond to the territorial dispute through confrontational foreign policies. Although both discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and involve military dimensions, the focus of Devany et al.'s research differs fundamentally from this study. The study places the use of military force as part of a country's foreign policy and political strategy, rather than as an object of strategic and operational analysis itself.

Based on these gaps, this study departs from the question: how did Azerbaijan implement modern military strategies in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020? This article argues that Azerbaijan's success stemmed not only from its use of advanced technology, but primarily from its ability to integrate military modernization into a modern military strategy that was connected, adaptive, and coordinated across various domains. Conversely, Armenia's failure to transform and adapt its doctrine to the demands of modern warfare created strategic vulnerabilities that determined the final outcome of the conflict. This study aims to describe and analyze Azerbaijan's implementation of modern military strategy, including its operational characteristics, patterns of technology use, and strategic factors that influenced the dynamics and final outcome of the war.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The author uses the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) as an analytical framework to understand how Azerbaijan applied modern military strategy in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020. RMA is one of the most influential concepts in contemporary strategy studies, explaining how major changes in military technology, doctrine, and organization can result in fundamental transformations in the character and conduct of warfare. This framework provides a theoretical basis for assessing how the integration of technology and doctrinal renewal can create operational advantages that determine the outcome of combat (Odom, 2008).

The modern RMA concept was greatly influenced by the thinking of Andrew W. Marshall and Andrew F. Krepinevich, two figures who played an important role in developing the study of military revolution at the US Department of Defense. Both referred to the Military Technological Revolution (MTR) literature developed in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, but made significant analytical expansions. While MTR essentially viewed military transformation as the result of technological progress alone, Marshall and Krepinevich emphasized that technology was only one requirement; revolutionary changes in warfare would only occur if technological innovation was accompanied by changes in operational doctrine and military organizational structure.

Andrew W. Marshall emphasized that military revolution must be understood as a systemic process. In the definition of the Office of Network Assessment (ONA), RMA is a major change in the nature and dynamics of warfare that arises from the application of innovative new technologies, but at the same time is combined with doctrinal reforms, new operational concepts, and military institutional reorganization. With this approach, Marshall rejects the reduction of the RMA to mere weaponry modernization. For him, a military revolution occurs when technological change is capable of transforming not only the way the military fights, but also the way they think about war. (Daniels, n.d.).

Andrew F. Krepinevich reinforced and formalized this approach. He emphasized that there are three main components, namely technological innovation, doctrinal change, and organizational reform, which must be present simultaneously in order to be categorized as RMA (Real-Modernization and Adaptation). In his view, technological advances without doctrinal adaptation only result in gradual modernization, not strategic transformation. Conversely, when information technology, precision sensors, and communication networks are combined with a doctrine that emphasizes speed, precision, and information dominance, the nature of warfare changes fundamentally. Krepinevich also emphasizes that this transformation requires changes in command structures, decision-making patterns, and cross-unit integration to produce significant operational superiority (Prasetyo et al., 2023).

One of the main aspects of RMA is the shift towards a network-centric warfare (NCW) paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of information networks in modern military operations. Through the integration of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR), the military can improve situational awareness, accelerate the decision-making cycle, and deliver coordinated precision strikes. NCW enables the integration of sensors, precision weapons, and combat units into a unified network, creating the information superiority that is at the heart of modern warfare strategy. This paradigm shows that warfare is no longer determined by the strength of individual combat platforms, but by the effectiveness of the network connecting all elements of the operation (Collmer, 2007).

This study operationalizes the concept of Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) through three main analytical dimensions: changes in military technology, the adaptation of doctrine and operational concepts, and the transformation of organizational structures and command systems. Together, these dimensions provide a framework for assessing the extent of military transformation. These three dimensions are used as a lens to assess the extent to which Azerbaijan's military practices during the 2020 conflict reflect modern warfare as described in RMA literature (Aini & Triantama, 2021).

In terms of technology, Azerbaijan's military modernization is marked by the adoption of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and precision surveillance systems, including Bayraktar TB2 UAVs and Israeli-made loitering munitions. A number of studies show that UAVs in this conflict do not function as standalone weapons, but rather as part of a connected sensor-shooter system, enabling rapid target identification and layered precision strikes (Yasir Abdad, 2022). This pattern is consistent with the RMA's view that technology becomes significant when integrated into broader operational systems, rather than standing alone.

The second dimension, doctrinal adaptation, is reflected in changes in how Azerbaijan utilizes this technology. Azerbaijan's military operations demonstrate a shift from an attrition-based approach to a doctrine that emphasizes speed, precision, and information dominance. UAVs are used not only to attack, but also to direct artillery fire, support ground forces' maneuvers, and accelerate the decision-making cycle (Muradov, 2025). This pattern is consistent with Krepinevich's argument that military transformation occurs when new technology is accompanied by operational concepts that redefine the relationship between sensors, shooters, and commanders.

The third dimension, organizational transformation and command systems, is evident in Azerbaijan's ability to coordinate various combat elements within the framework of joint operations. The integration of UAVs, precision artillery, special forces, and ground maneuver units demonstrates a relatively effective level of cross-domain coordination, supported by command and communication systems that enable the continuous flow of operational information (Gurbanov, 2025). Post-conflict studies assess that Azerbaijan's effectiveness does not lie in the superiority of individual platforms, but rather in its ability to connect various units within a cohesive operational network.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of understanding and analyzing in depth the application of modern military strategies by Azerbaijan in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine operational dynamics, doctrinal developments, and the integration of contemporary military technology through a comprehensive interpretation of various relevant and reliable sources of information. The data used in this study is sourced from secondary data, which was collected through library research (Magister et al., n.d.). Data collection was conducted by reviewing various documents and publications related to the conflict, including scientific journal articles, books on modern military strategy, and reports from international defense and security research institutions. These sources were deliberately selected based on their relevance in explaining aspects of Azerbaijan's military modernization.

The validity of the data in this study is maintained by prioritizing sources that have epistemic authority, narrative consistency, and empirical evidence support. Each finding was cross-checked between sources to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information used. Through this secondary data-based qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide a systematic and in-depth understanding of how Azerbaijan integrates military modernization, technological innovation, and doctrinal changes into combat operations. Thus, this research method not only describes Azerbaijan's military strategy descriptively, but also tests its consistency with the theoretical characteristics of RMA as proposed by Andrew W. Marshall and Andrew F. Krepinevich, resulting in a more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of war and contemporary military transformation.

DISCUSSION

Azerbaijan's Military Modernization as a Foundation for Implementing Modern Military Strategy

Azerbaijan's military transformation since the early 2010s has been an important foundation that enabled the implementation of modern military strategies in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020. In the previous phase of the conflict, particularly in the first Nagorno-Karabakh war (1988–1994), the Azerbaijani armed forces still operated within a post-Soviet framework characterized by dependence on Soviet-era weaponry, rigid command structures, and conventional territorial defense-based combat patterns. During this period, neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia had developed the integration of information technology, modern reconnaissance systems, or joint operations doctrine that characterize contemporary warfare (Hirschfeld et al., 2023). Thus, Azerbaijan's military capabilities at that time did not support the implementation of precision-based, networked, and information-dominant strategies.

The changes began to take place gradually after Azerbaijan's energy revenues increased in the early 2010s, giving the country the fiscal capacity to modernize its military more systematically. This modernization was reflected not only in increased defense spending, but also in a shift in combat capabilities and operational practices. Azerbaijan began to develop precision-based capabilities through the procurement of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), modern artillery systems, and more integrated reconnaissance capabilities, which were then supported by updates to doctrine and command structures (Mustafayev et al., 2022). Unlike the 1988–1994 conflict, which was dominated by conventional ground combat and limited inter-service coordination, Azerbaijan's operational practices in 2020 demonstrated a pattern of using UAVs for reconnaissance and target acquisition, followed by precision artillery fire and coordinated ground maneuvers. This comparison indicates an increase in operational effectiveness as a result of the modernization process that had taken place previously (Croissant, 1998).

Within the framework of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), Azerbaijan's military technological changes should be understood as a gradual process that began to develop in the early 2010s and is not limited to the context of the 2020 conflict. In the early stages of modernization, the procurement of precision weaponry systems, reconnaissance equipment, and UAVs was aimed at overcoming the limitations in detection capabilities and firing accuracy that were characteristic of the Azerbaijani armed forces in the post-Soviet period. Over time, these technologies were no longer used separately, but began to be integrated into a single operational framework that linked reconnaissance, target acquisition, and precision strike functions. This sequence of developments shows that Azerbaijan's adoption of military technology has evolved gradually, from improved situational awareness to more coordinated precision operations capabilities (Goltz, T. 2015).

The development of this technology was followed by the evolutionary adaptation of doctrines and operational concepts. In the early stages, the use of UAVs and modern surveillance systems focused on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) functions. In subsequent developments, these systems began to be integrated into the planning and execution of combat operations, particularly in supporting target acquisition and the synchronization of precision strikes. This shift reflects a change in doctrine from a conventional combat approach to an operational concept that emphasizes inter-system integration, speed of decision-making, and information superiority. This doctrinal adaptation took shape before the 2020 conflict and became the conceptual foundation for the implementation of Azerbaijan's modern military strategy in the subsequent phase (Niyazov & Niyazova, 2021)

In line with changes in technology and doctrine, transformations also occurred at the organizational and command system levels. Adjustments to the command structure and decision-making mechanisms were carried out gradually to improve operational flexibility and coordination capabilities between units. This organizational transformation enabled more effective integration between reconnaissance elements, precision weapon systems, and ground maneuver units within a unified operational framework. From an RMA perspective, changes in organization and command systems are essential prerequisites for translating technological innovation and doctrinal adaptation into improved operational effectiveness. Therefore, Azerbaijan's military capabilities in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are better understood as the result of a gradual process of change that had been underway previously, rather than as a military transformation that emerged instantly in a single conflict (Vas et al., 2023).

Integration of Technology and Combat Innovation in Azerbaijan’s Military Capability Transformation

The integration of technology into Azerbaijan's military capabilities cannot be understood solely as a direct response to the outbreak of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, but rather as the result of a strategic adaptation process that has been ongoing in a relatively stable but protracted threat environment since the end of the first war in 1994. The absence of a final peace agreement, Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory, and ongoing military incidents over more than two decades have created security conditions that demand long-term military preparedness (Meichella et al. 2024). In this context, technological modernization is seen not as a temporary option, but as an instrument to change the balance of power that has been detrimental to Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's military failures in the early 1990s and the stalemate in limited escalations, such as the April 2016 fighting, underscore the limitations of conventional strategies based on ground maneuver and traditional artillery. The mountainous geographical characteristics of Nagorno-Karabakh, reinforced by Armenia's static defense system, make conventional offensive operations not only costly in material terms but also highly risky in strategic terms. These structural conditions forced Azerbaijan to reevaluate its military paradigm and seek more adaptive alternative approaches, particularly through the integration of technology capable of reducing dependence on frontal combat and minimizing casualties. (Cutler, 2024). Thus, Azerbaijan's military technology modernization can be understood not merely as technical innovation, but as a strategic response to historical failures and systemic limitations in facing the opponent's defense configuration.

Within this framework, the integration of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has become one of the main pillars of Azerbaijan's combat capability transformation. Since before 2020, UAVs have not only been viewed as reconnaissance tools, but have also been gradually integrated into broader operational concepts. The use of armed UAVs such as the Bayraktar TB2 and loitering munitions such as the Harop and Harpy has enabled Azerbaijan to overcome terrain limitations and target key Armenian assets, including artillery, armored vehicles, and air defense systems, without having to rely on direct contact with ground forces. This integration reflects a fundamental shift in how Azerbaijan projects its power, from a quantity-based approach to precision and target selectivity (Terzic, 2022).

This technological transformation does not stand alone, but is closely linked to the integration of sensor and shooter systems in combat operations. Intelligence data obtained from UAVs and optical sensors is used directly to support long-range artillery fire, creating a faster and more accurate attack detection cycle compared to the combat patterns of previous conflicts. (KINIK & ÇELİK, 2021). This pattern shows that Azerbaijan's superiority does not stem solely from its possession of certain technological platforms, but rather from its ability to connect various technological elements into a cohesive operational flow. This kind of integration is a hallmark of modern warfare, which emphasizes information dominance and efficient use of force.

In addition, Azerbaijan's combat innovations also include the development of intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities in response to vulnerabilities identified in past conflicts. The ability to disrupt enemy communications and radar systems provides additional operational advantages by weakening Armenian defense coordination and opening up space for UAVs to operate with lower risk. Although the technical details of electronic warfare operations have not been fully disclosed to the public, the role of the electromagnetic spectrum in supporting Azerbaijan's air and ground operations shows that technological modernization is aimed at creating multidomain superiority, not just kinetic superiority.

Thus, Azerbaijan's integration of technology and combat innovation can be understood as the result of a gradually developing perception of threats: the threat to the post-1994 status quo, the limitations of conventional approaches in previous conflicts, and an awareness of the changing nature of modern warfare. This transformation did not occur suddenly in 2020, but rather was the accumulation of long-term strategic decisions aimed at changing the way Azerbaijan approached the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the perspective of the revolution in military affairs (RMA), Azerbaijan's technological integration reflects an evolutionary process that links technological change, operational adaptation, and threat perception into a coherent framework of military capability transformation.

Implementation of C4ISR Systems and Network-Centric Warfare in Operations in Azerbaijan

The implementation of the C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) system is a key element that distinguishes Azerbaijan's military strategy from the traditional approach used by Armenia in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. Through C4ISR integration, Azerbaijan successfully created an operational network that enabled rapid, accurate, and coordinated information gathering, situation analysis, and attack execution. This implementation represents the main characteristics of network-based warfare, namely the use of information architecture to increase decision-making speed and combat effectiveness (Cheterian, 2024) .

One of the most significant aspects of Azerbaijan's C4ISR implementation is its ability to connect reconnaissance platforms, particularly UAVs, with command centers and artillery units on the front lines. Information obtained by UAVs is transmitted in real time, which is then used to guide precision artillery or direct follow-up attacks using armed drones. The sensor-to-shooter link created by this mechanism enables a much faster attack cycle than conventional warfare practices, allowing Armenian defensive positions to be destroyed before they have time to move or organize a response (Giragosian, 2016).

In addition to reconnaissance functions, Azerbaijan's integrated communications and command capabilities enable more effective coordination between units in joint operations. A more flexible and responsive command structure facilitates tactical decisions based on actual battlefield data. This enhances synergy between UAVs, artillery, special forces, and ground maneuver units, allowing operations to be conducted simultaneously and focused on destroying Armenia's main defensive points. This capability demonstrates that Azerbaijan does not rely solely on technology, but also uses integrated information flows to optimize combat operation mechanisms across various sectors.

The application of network-based warfare is also reflected in Azerbaijan's control over the information spectrum. Through the use of sensor-based intelligence and surveillance systems, Azerbaijan was able to identify patterns of Armenian troop movements, monitor logistics routes, and detect the presence of enemy air defense systems. This information is crucial in planning attacks on Armenian radars, artillery batteries, and command positions, which are the centers of their defense coordination. This dominance of information has caused Armenia to lose its situational awareness, which has significantly reduced the effectiveness of their defense throughout the conflict (Anglim, 2021).

The C4ISR system also underpins Azerbaijan's ability to conduct precision operations and reduce the risk of casualties among ground forces. The accuracy of information and speed of data distribution enable Azerbaijan to select the most strategic targets and minimize the use of excessive force. This approach not only improves operational efficiency, but also demonstrates consistency with modern warfare principles that emphasize accuracy, information mobility, and cross-domain integration.

The implementation of C4ISR systems and network-centric warfare gave Azerbaijan an operational advantage that Armenia did not have. By integrating information gathering, tactical communications, and attack execution into a single adaptive command network, Azerbaijan was able to create faster, more precise, and more lethal combat operations. This success confirms that Azerbaijan's victory depended not only on technological superiority, but also on its ability to leverage modern information architecture to change the dynamics of war and achieve strategic superiority in the 2020 conflict.

Joint Operations and Modern Maneuvers in Azerbaijan's Military Campaign

Azerbaijan's success in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 was determined not only by its technological and information architecture superiority, but also by its ability to translate that superiority into coordinated joint operations. Combined arms operations became the main instrument in Azerbaijan's modern military strategy, in which various branches and combat units, including UAVs, precision artillery, special forces, and ground maneuver units, were combined into a single, complementary operational framework. It was this cross-domain integration that enabled Azerbaijan to create a cumulative effect that gradually but systematically destroyed Armenia's defenses.

One of the most striking dimensions of Azerbaijan's joint operations is the role of UAVs as a link between intelligence and direct fire elements. UAVs are used to identify targets, track the movements of Armenian units, and provide post-attack damage assessments. This information is then integrated directly with long-range artillery systems, which can conduct precision strikes based on real-time coordinates. This creates a rapid attack cycle that leaves Armenia no room to maneuver or reposition its forces. Thus, UAVs serve not only as offensive tools, but also as core components for optimizing artillery operations and maximizing the effectiveness of combat forces (Jati et al. 2022).

Azerbaijani special forces also played a crucial role in the modern maneuvers. Exploiting gaps in Armenian defenses weakened by UAV and artillery attacks, the special forces penetrated fortified areas, cut off supply lines, and captured strategic positions in hilly areas and along key communication routes. The special forces' role was evident in Azerbaijan's advance in the southern sector, particularly in the Jabrayil and Fuzuli regions, which opened the way to the Shusha region. With Armenian forces already under pressure from weak logistical support and precision strikes, the rapid maneuvers of the special forces further accelerated the collapse of their defensive positions (ATUL SINGH, 2023).

At a broader operational level, Azerbaijan employed a maneuver strategy aimed at bypassing Armenia's strong, static defensive points. Rather than engaging in direct confrontation along Armenia's main defensive line, Azerbaijan concentrated its attacks on the flatter southern sector, which allowed for the movement of combat vehicles. This approach demonstrates that Azerbaijan's combined operations are designed based on an understanding of the battlefield, mobility advantages, and the effectiveness of precision strikes. By cutting off communication lines and accelerating the isolation of Armenian positions, Azerbaijan has succeeded in creating layered pressure that the opponent's static defense doctrine is unable to withstand.

The joint operations and modern maneuvers used by Azerbaijan show that victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was not solely determined by technological superiority, but by the ability to integrate all elements of combat power into a coherent and adaptive operational strategy. The combination of UAV systems, precision artillery, special forces, and ground maneuver units produced a synergistic effect that systematically weakened Armenia's defenses in various sectors of the battlefield. The effectiveness of Azerbaijan's operations was also reinforced by their ability to leverage information superiority to coordinate troop movements, prioritize targets, and adjust the tempo of operations in accordance with tactical developments.

The execution of this joint operation demonstrates that Azerbaijan has moved beyond the conventional warfare model based on frontal combat and numerical superiority. Instead, they have successfully created an operational structure that emphasizes flexibility, speed of decision-making, and the use of information space as the primary domain of combat. Integration between units has enabled more targeted attacks on critical points of Armenia's defense, both against logistics lines and troop concentrations, thereby accelerating the disruption and chaos of the enemy's defense structure.

Thus, Azerbaijan's military campaign in 2020 can be seen as one of the most important illustrations in the study of the evolution of modern military strategy. The effectiveness of the joint operations carried out not only reflects the success of Azerbaijan's military modernization over the past decade, but also confirms that contemporary warfare requires far more complex cross-domain integration than simply the use of advanced technology. It is this success that places Azerbaijan's operations as a key case study in understanding how the concept of joint operations, when combined with information superiority and technological innovation, can significantly shape the outcome of conflicts in the 21st century.

The Weaknesses of Armenia's Defense Structure and Their Impact on the Effectiveness of Azerbaijan's Strategy

The effectiveness of Azerbaijan's modern military strategy in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War cannot be fully understood without examining the structural and operational weaknesses underlying Armenia's defense. For nearly three decades, Armenia maintained a defense approach that was heavily reliant on static structures and Soviet-era weaponry, which were essentially designed to counter conventional threats, not precision-based network warfare. This imbalance created a strategic asymmetry that Azerbaijan exploited to the fullest, meaning that Azerbaijan's superiority stemmed not only from its own military transformation, but also from Armenia's inability to adapt to the nature of modern warfare (Karlinsky & Torrisi, 2023).

One of Armenia's most fundamental weaknesses is its reliance on static defenses consisting of trenches, bunkers, and fortified artillery positions. These defensive structures were effective in the first war of 1988-1994, when Azerbaijan had limited capabilities and military operations were still dominated by direct contact between troops. However, in the context of the 2020 war, static positions provide ideal targets for Azerbaijani UAVs and precision artillery. Fixed defensive positions allow UAVs to identify targets, track minimal troop movements, and conduct direct precision strikes without significant risk. Armenia's inability to maneuver quickly resulted in the destruction of numerous command posts, artillery batteries, and air defense units in the early stages of the conflict (Gen. Shashi Asthana, 2020).

Furthermore, Armenia's command structure exhibits weaknesses in terms of flexibility and speed of decision-making. Command mechanisms that still adhere to traditional hierarchical patterns slow down the response to Azerbaijan's precision strikes. (Zohrabyan & Muradyan, 2024). This delay was further exacerbated by a lack of integration between intelligence, artillery, and ground forces, which prevented threat information from being processed quickly enough to avoid casualties. In contrast, Azerbaijan was able to leverage real-time information flows through its C4ISR system to detect, target, and destroy Armenian units before they could relocate.

Another significant weakness lies in Armenia's air defense system, which largely consists of Soviet-era products such as the Osa, Strela, and S-300 in outdated configurations. These systems were designed to engage manned fighter jets flying at medium to high altitudes, not small, low-flying UAVs with minimal radar signature. This limitation resulted in many Armenian air defense systems being identified and destroyed early in the war by Azerbaijani cruise munitions and attack UAVs. With its air defenses crippled, Armenia's ability to protect its ground forces and defend its airspace was further weakened, giving Azerbaijan unmatched air superiority. Low troop mobility further exacerbated Armenia's defenses. Many Armenian units relied on defensive positions with minimal repositioning capabilities, leaving them unable to evade precision strikes or counter-maneuver. While Azerbaijan actively incorporated UAVs, artillery, and maneuver units in joint operations, Armenia remained stuck in a defensive pattern unresponsive to changing battlefield conditions. This mismatch between outdated doctrine and the dynamics of modern warfare created a structural vulnerability easily exploited by Azerbaijani operations.

Beyond technical and operational aspects, psychological factors also played a role in deepening Armenia's weaknesses. Widely recorded and disseminated Azerbaijani precision strikes created psychological pressure on Armenian forces, further weakening morale and command effectiveness. The dissemination of this footage reinforced the perception that Armenian positions were insecure and vulnerable to attack, accelerating the erosion of troops' confidence in their own defense capabilities. Armenia's defensive weaknesses demonstrate that their defeat was not solely due to Azerbaijan's technological superiority, but primarily due to their failure to adapt to the changing nature of warfare. Unpreparedness for networked warfare, reliance on outdated defense systems, slow command mechanisms, and lack of troop mobility created operational conditions that were unable to withstand Azerbaijan's superiority. Thus, the effectiveness of Azerbaijan's modern military strategy can only be comprehensively understood when viewed within the context of the asymmetry of defense structures that characterized the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Synthesis of Azerbaijan's Modern Military Strategy Implementation in the Context of Revolution in the Military World

Azerbaijan's implementation of military strategy in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 cannot be understood as the result of a single innovation or technological superiority, but rather as a manifestation of a comprehensive and evolutionary process of military transformation. Within the framework of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), Azerbaijan's success reflects the systemic interaction between changes in military technology, adaptations to doctrine and operational concepts, and organizational and command system transformations that had been gradually evolving prior to the 2020 conflict. Thus, this war represents an operational phase of a mature RMA process, not a transformation that emerged suddenly as a result of a single conflict.

From the perspective of military technology transformation, Azerbaijan is developing a combat architecture oriented toward sensor shooter integration, not simply the accumulation of new weapons platforms. Unmanned aerial vehicles, cruise munitions, precision artillery, and optical sensor-based reconnaissance systems function as interconnected components within a unified operating system. (Jones et al. 2022). From the RMA perspective, technology serves as a structural enabler that transforms the way military power is employed, particularly through increased situational awareness, response speed, and attack accuracy. This transformation represents a shift from conventional, attrition-based warfare to precision warfare oriented toward information dominance.

This technological transformation was only effective because it was accompanied by progressive adaptations of doctrine and operational concepts. Azerbaijan gradually shifted its operational approach from frontal ground maneuvers to a concept of operations that emphasized information exploitation, layered precision strikes, and the degradation of enemy defenses before extensive ground engagement (Dadashov, 2024). UAVs and reconnaissance systems are no longer positioned solely as ISR tools, but are integrated into the cycle of targeting, operational planning, and fire control. This doctrinal adaptation reflects a key dimension of the RMA: a shift in how military power is understood and used to achieve strategic objectives.

Accordingly, organizational and command system transformation is a prerequisite for translating technological and doctrinal innovation into operational effectiveness. Azerbaijan is adjusting its command structure and decision-making mechanisms to increase flexibility, speed coordination, and interoperability between units. These reforms enable a faster and more coordinated flow of information from sensors to shooters, while also supporting the implementation of joint cross-domain operations. Within the RMA framework, the organizational dimension serves as a critical link that integrates technology and doctrine into concrete operational practices.

The synthesis of these three dimensions is reflected in Azerbaijan's ability to consistently execute network-based joint operations throughout the 2020 conflict. The integration of UAVs, precision artillery, special forces, and ground maneuver units not only enhanced the effectiveness of each element, but also produced a synergistic effect that systematically weakened Armenia's defenses. This superiority was not simply the result of material superiority but rather a consequence of Azerbaijan's successful operationalization of RMA principles within a coherent, modern military strategy framework.

Armenia's inability to make equivalent technological, doctrinal, and organizational adaptations highlights the asymmetric impact of this RMA process. A relatively rigid defense structure, reliance on legacy air defense systems, and slow command mechanisms make Armenia unable to respond to the dynamics of networked warfare and precision strikes. These differing rates of adaptation demonstrate that changes in the nature of warfare are determined not only by the innovation of one side, but also by the failure of the other side to similarly transform.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War reflects the effective application of modern military strategy consistent with the principles of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), rather than the isolated use of advanced technologies. The findings demonstrate that operational success emerged from the integration of technological modernization, doctrinal adaptation, and organizational as well as command-system reform that evolved prior to the 2020 conflict.

Theoretically, this case confirms and refines the RMA literature by showing that technology alone is insufficient to produce decisive outcomes. Instead, technological advantages become effective only when embedded within adaptive doctrine and flexible command structures. Moreover, the Azerbaijan case underscores the relational nature of RMA, where revolutionary effects are realized through asymmetries of adaptation rather than universal transformation. Beyond Nagorno-Karabakh, this study suggests that modern military effectiveness depends less on acquiring advanced systems than on a state's capacity to integrate technology, doctrine, and organization into a coherent operational framework.

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