

White Paper

## **Armenia in the South Caucasus**

### **Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities Over the Coming Decade**

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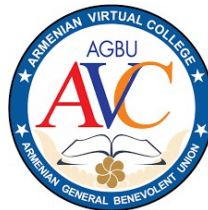
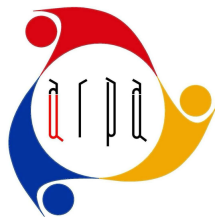
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# Table of Contents

Background	3
Scope	5
Executive Summary	6
Türkiye and Armenia. Neighbors with difficult history and uncertain future: Dr. David Akopyan	12
Iran's regional policy in times of global turbulence: Ms. Anna Gevorgyan	20
Azerbaijan: A Glimpse of the Present, Darkness for the Future: Dr. Nzhdeh Hovsepyan	27
Russian Influence on Armenia: Status and Projections: Dr. Alexander Iskandaryan	34
The Contours of U.S.-Armenia Relations: America's Geopolitical Posturing and Armenia's Western Pivot: Dr. Nerses Kopalyan	37
The Geopolitical and Geo-economic Background of the Armenian-Indian Partnership: Mr. Yeghia Tashjian	45
The Role of the European Union in the Security of Armenia: Sossi Tatikyan	52
References	61
Biographies	64

## Background

In Feb 2023 AVC Armenian Virtual College organized a Panel Discussion on Strategic Planning and Scenario Analysis and Relevance to Armenia's Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities in the South Caucasus. Fourteen subject matters experts (SMEs) made presentations and more than 50 participants attended mostly representing leaders of the booming Tech sector in Armenia as well as experts interested in strategic scenario planning. A White Paper was published and posted at: <https://www.avc-agbu.org/edu/mod/hvp/view.php?id=163154#h5pbookid=46261&chapter=h5p-interactive-book-chapter-f93a892a-f756-4496-b245-8c22c5b7499d&section=0>.

In June 2023, ARPA organized a follow-on panel discussion based on “Strategic Planning and Scenario Analysis: Relevance to Geopolitical Challenges of Armenia” with selected panelists. The recording can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUzf0e1jHKL&t=9s>

Following are some of the key observations made by the 2023 participants:

Armenia is in the eyes of a perfect global storm in between Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and the Middle East. Many tectonic plates around are in motion, and it will require an extraordinary ability to meet these challenges.

Armenia may find it relatively advantageous to maintain the current status-quo rather than choose between a peace agreement made with painful concessions and a repulsive war.

The status-quo strategy may seem the least of the evils for Armenia, although in the long-term perspective it may not be favorable to Armenia.

Armenia is currently facing a challenging situation with no easy solutions. In each scenario, Armenia has serious homework to do, first defining its priorities considering the current geopolitical and regional situation:

Maintaining territorial integrity and sovereignty,

Exclusion of war and establishment of predictable stability,

Implementation of security measures in the diplomatic and military fields.

This Report assesses the impact of these challenges on Armenia over next decade.

## Scope

Review the 2023 forecasts and strategize considering some of the key regional and global changes that have taken place over the last year:

Loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, and accommodating over 100,000 population in Armenia

US very proactive Involvement in the region

India as new important partner

Upcoming elections in several countries with potential impact on Armenia's relations with those countries

The Russo-Ukrainian war

EU extended hand and Armenia queuing in line after Georgia for EU talks

Regional consequences of enhanced Western Influence in the S. Caucasus

Enhanced Chian/Azerbaijan trade relations

This White Paper will include analyses of the following countries: Azerbaijan, Russia, Türkiye, Iran, India, the EU and the US.

# Executive Summary

Dr. Hriar Cabayan

The sections below briefly summarize each of the contributions. The summaries are primarily meant to entice the reader to read the full chapters and have intentionally been kept short.

In his article entitled **“Türkiye and Armenia. Neighbors with Difficult History and Uncertain Future,”** Dr. David Akopyan states up front that as Türkiye navigates the challenges of a changing global landscape, it will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping regional and international affairs. He states that under the leadership of President Erdogan, Türkiye has shifted its focus away from the West towards a more assertive role in its immediate neighborhood. He goes on to say Türkiye maintains strategic partnerships with a wide range of nations, reflecting its geopolitical importance as a bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In this context, it harbors ambitions for regional dominance. While Türkiye’s relations with Azerbaijan are often presented as a total unity (two states, one nation), he points out there are potential fault lines. He states that overall, the autocratic quartet of Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye are moving closer but how far they will come together is an open question. Regarding the relationship between Türkiye and Armenia, he points out that it has been marked by pain, conflict, and difficult historical legacies. Deep-rooted historical grievances and geopolitical complexities will continue to shape the relationship, making reconciliation a challenging endeavor. He concludes by stating that Armenian diplomacy must be creative and think outside the box -a) to explore variety of unorthodox avenues with Türkiye, especially on joint path for EU accession and b) to find niches on fault lines between Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

In her article entitled **“Iran’s Regional Policy in Times of Global Turbulence,”** Anna Gevorgyan analyzes Iran's nuanced stance in the South Caucasus post the Nagorno-Karabakh War. She underscores the complex interplay of regional dynamics and Iran’s “red lines” and positions re the so-called “corridor” issue. In the process, she highlights the significant transformations marked by the intentional erosion of old security frameworks and observes the security landscape in the South Caucasus is undergoing

significant transformations that can only be described not so much as the making of a new security architecture but rather as the erosion of any security architecture at all. This leads to the emergence of spontaneous and fragmented constructs without cohesive strategic security and foreign policy planning and implementation. She addresses the EU monitoring mission deployed in Armenia-Azerbaijan borders in 2022 and observes that in her opinion Iran does not declare it openly but perceives it as a compromise. She goes on to discuss in detail the issue of the so-called “Zangezur corridor” and observes that it’s not obvious “who promised what to whom” and the scenario spins across multiple promises. She states in all meetings Iranian officials declare their unequivocal support of Armenia’s territorial integrity and full support of the of the “Crossroad of Peace” announced by the prime minister of Armenia. She observes that the corridor issue as well as the importance of the protection of the territorial integrity of Armenia have created a common ground for the cooperation of Iran and France in the region. She states Iran’s strategic calculations and diplomatic maneuvers amid complex regional and global realities focus on the proactive policy in the South Caucasus region and trying to increase cooperation with all actors. She concludes by stating the balancing approach towards regional countries remains the main feature of Iran’s policy in the South Caucasus.

In his article entitled **“Azerbaijan: A Glimpse of the Present, Darkness for the Future,”** Dr. Nzhdeh Hovsepyan states upfront that Azerbaijan has accomplished its primary objectives: gaining full control over Nagorno-Karabakh, escalating military actions into Armenian territory, and demonstrating aspirations of becoming a regional hegemon. He observes that there are no barriers to finalizing and implementing a peace treaty. Yet the negotiations remain deadlocked. He goes on to address the following key question: What are Azerbaijan's objectives and is its policy geared towards signing a peace treaty and ensuring its practical implementation? He observes that with most of its objectives achieved, Azerbaijan can afford to wait for the right moment to sign a peace agreement when it sees maximum advantages to itself. Backed by practical support from Türkiye, maintaining cautious relations with Russia, and occasionally displaying assertiveness with Iran, Azerbaijan is actively pursuing a unique form of 21st-century vassal-suzerain relations in the Caucasus. In this context Russia also benefits from this neither war nor peace situation in the Caucasus, which

aligns with its current objectives in the region. He states that from Azerbaijan's perspective, there may be little incentive to rush and sign a peace agreement when time appears to be on its side. It has the luxury to bide its time and only commit to a peace deal when it is most advantageous. He states that in the tumultuous year of 2024, Azerbaijan's decision between peace, war, or maintaining the status quo will not only shape the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also influence the trajectory of the region's development. He concludes by stating that Azerbaijan can afford to wait for the right moment to sign a peace agreement and furthermore it has the luxury of patience and will only commit to a peace deal when it sees maximum advantage.

In his article entitled “**Russian Influence on Armenia: Status and Projections**,” Dr. Alexander Iskandaryan states that while Russia is arguably the most potent of all external players in the South Caucasus, it is also the only one whose presence and influence is decreasing. Specifically, what we currently observe is a time of drastic change in terms of external influences not only in Armenia but also in the region as a whole. The hard security that formed the basis of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet South Caucasus since the very first years of its independence is no longer the case. He points out that as a result of the 2020 Second Karabakh War, a new and significant external actor appeared in the region namely Türkiye which became a player in the military and strategic spheres. He states that the total investment in the war against Ukraine has arguably left Russia with no opportunity or incentive to be active in other areas. As a result, Russia is no longer able to act as a security guarantor for Armenia. He posits that had it not been for the Ukrainian campaign, Azerbaijan would hardly have had the chance to carry out its 2023 brutal ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. He concludes by stating that Russia no longer has much to offer in the realm of security in the South Caucasus region and it is hard to imagine the restoration of such hegemony.

In his article entitled “**The Contours of U.S.-Armenia Relations: America's Geopolitical Posturing and Armenia's Western Pivot**,” Dr. Nerses Kopalyan states upfront that the Armenian nation has failed to convince the United States that the Republic of Armenia is important to American interests because until 2022 it lacked a



cogent strategy of advancing such mutual interests. He advances five policy areas that are vital for the development of such mutual interests: America's regional strategic interests, American soft power, regionally weakening Russia, supporting democratic growth, and finally developing a regional democratic dyad. Re America's regional strategic interests, he points out that the preservation and securing of Armenia's sovereignty and the security of its borders are of fundamental importance to America's interests. In this context, U.S. policy in the South Caucasus is defined by three main pillars: regional stability, expansion of democracy, and long-term peace. He states that it is in America's strategic interests for a stable Caucasus to serve as an important transport and commercial hub. For economic growth contributes to regional stability, while simultaneously opening markets for Transatlantic commercial interests.

He points out that in this context, Armenia's sovereignty, and the threats posed against it, are harmful and in contradiction to America's regional and global interests. When it comes to soft power, he points out the U.S. exercises immense soft power in Armenia and has organic support and admiration from the Armenian population. In contrast, Azerbaijan's relationship is purely transactional, and the values and interests of both countries are diametrically opposed. When it comes to U.S. regional interests and balancing Russia, Armenia's continued existence as an independent, sovereign state that is outside of Russia's sphere of influence is of vital interest to the United States. He states that Armenia's democratic breakthrough in 2018 and its persistent democratization, despite heightened regional insecurity, is an important development that aligns with U.S. interests in Eurasia. This Armenian model of undertaking a democratic breakthrough in an authoritarian orbit, and one that was done under Russia's sphere of influence, is a development that bolsters U.S. interests, yet one that has not required U.S. resources. He goes on to state that a strong and democratic Armenia, and one that is outside of Russia's orbit, will serve as an important regional hub in promoting American values.

He then addresses the development of a U.S. supported regional democratic dyad led by Georgia and Armenia which could enhance the spillover effect of democratization, while further growing and enhancing American regional interests. He states U.S. policy in the South Caucasus remains defined by maintaining a healthy balance in its

relationship with all three countries in the region, namely Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In this context, he states U.S. policy still views Baku as a partner that can be managed. He observes the U.S. operates under the logic that the Aliyev regime is a rational actor that can collaborate with the U.S. in curtailing Iran's regional aspirations, while at the same time believing that for all of its bellicose rhetoric, Baku still seeks peace with Armenia. In this context, the U.S. is displaying an aversion to taking punitive actions against Azerbaijan for its bellicose demeanor, as it considers such punitive actions to be counterproductive to the peace process. He states the U.S. is addressing the "problem of peace" by not "forcing" Azerbaijan to come to terms, but rather, by strengthening Armenia's ability to resist Azerbaijan, which, in turn, will change the entire power dynamics and the coercive approach of Baku.

In his article entitled **"The Geopolitical and Geo-economic Background of the Armenian-Indian Partnership,"** Yeghia Tashjian points out that in recent years a strong political bond has been established between Yerevan and New Delhi. He states that India's involvement in the South Caucasus has both geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions. This includes the realization of the "International North-South Transport Corridor" (INSTC) connecting the Indian Ocean to northern Russia and the Baltic Sea. He points out the INSTC is perceived as New Delhi's counterweight strategy to China's ambitious "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). In this context, India aims to establish itself as a reliable defense player globally and secure its national interests by containing the expansion of the Turkish-Azerbaijani-Pakistani axis. He goes on to say the implementation of the INSTC project has benefits for Armenia such as enhancing Armenia's geo-economic position within regional trade interconnectivity and developing Armenia's infrastructure and economy. In this context, the project will provide serious development opportunities for all communities from the North to the South of Armenia. It will also facilitate communication with neighboring countries; expand and facilitate access to foreign markets towards Central Asia and Europe; develop major economic spheres and export expansion such as industry, agriculture, mining industry, construction, and tourism. According to Armenia's PM Nikol Pashinyan, this project will enhance communication between Armenia and neighboring countries, connect the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf to the Black

Sea, and defuse tension in the South Caucasus. The author concludes by stating the defense relationship is a testament to India's growing role in the global defense sector and Armenia's strategy to diversify its defense partnerships. In this context, this collaboration not only strengthens defense ties but also contributes to regional stability.

In her article entitled "**The Role of the European Union in the Security of Armenia**", Sossi Tatikyan points out the EU deployed its mission in Armenia (EUMA) upon the request of the Armenian Government and states It is within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) to strengthen its understanding of the situation on the ground and to contribute to de-escalation and stability in the region. She goes on to say The EUMA is envisaged to be a small civilian mission that is neither mandated, nor has the capacity to resist any military offensive. Instead, it is expected to be a deterrent to another potential Azerbaijani offensive. As such, the Mission raises the awareness of EU member countries about the security situation and military provocations, and it decreases Armenia's security dependence on Russia. She points out the EU's prompt action in relation to the deployment of both temporary and long-term missions in Armenia is unprecedented. Geopolitical experts see the establishment of an EU mission as a competition between Russia and the EU for influence in the region. She states even if the EUMA is a purely soft deterrent and does not provide Armenia with hard security, its deployment reduces Armenia's vulnerability to Azerbaijani aggression and military coercion. While being soft on Azerbaijan and failing in their mediation role in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the US and the EU have been more robust in expressing their support for Armenia's territorial integrity in face of Azerbaijan's military intrusions and creeping annexation of Armenia's border areas. The EU is considering further steps aimed at enhancing Armenian-EU cooperation, including visa liberalization. Recently the European Parliament adopted a resolution proposing to the EU to consider the possibility of granting Armenia a candidate status for its membership. She points out both Azerbaijan and Russia have objected to the deployment of the EUMA and launched an increasing disinformation campaign and hybrid war about the nature and objectives of the mission. While Azerbaijan will be cautious about inciting military aggression against Armenia in the presence of the EU monitors, and Russia will likely avoid direct confrontation with countries, most of which are NATO allies, both may use hybrid war instruments and coercive diplomacy against Armenia. She concludes by stating there is no better alternative for Armenia than an EU membership in the future.

## **Türkiye and Armenia.**

### **Neighbors with Difficult History and Uncertain Future**

Dr. David Akopyan

Türkiye's identity and place in the modern world are shaped by its rich history, geopolitical significance, and complex internal dynamics. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Türkiye has played an east west bridging role for centuries. The Ottoman Empire mindset, which spanned across the Middle East, Central and South Europe, and North Africa, is still influencing Türkiye's ambitious expansionist agenda and its role in the region. As it navigates the challenges of a changing global landscape, Türkiye will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping regional and international affairs.

On top of political aspirations is Türkiye's claims to the legacy of the Ottoman caliphate role of a center of Sunni Islam. It has positioned itself as a supporter of Muslim causes globally, particularly the Palestinian cause, that includes proactive support to Hamas in Gaza, seen by the west as a terrorist organization.

At the same time, Türkiye is unique in being the first Muslim country to embrace democracy. As a member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership, Türkiye has historically balanced its Western alliances with its regional aspirations. However, under the leadership of President Erdogan, Türkiye has shifted its focus away from the West towards a more assertive role in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. Frustrations with the slow progress of EU accession have led Türkiye to pursue a more independent foreign policy, emphasizing its role as a bridge between civilizations and asserting its influence in the region.

Türkiye's domestic politics are characterized by deep polarization, with tensions between pro-European liberal factions, nationalistic Kemalist forces, and pro-Muslim Brotherhood. It is hard to see the center of gravity, and much depends on individual charisma of the leaders. Erdogan is so far dominating the agenda with his charismatic persona, while gradually shifting the gravity center to more nationalistic and Islamic in line with his own convictions. The urban-rural divide further complicates the political

landscape, as does the longstanding issue of Kurdish autonomy. Many surveys conducted recently indicate that the public at large is more pro-Russian than pro USA, and Erdogan is embracing it with mastery.

The 2023 May 14th election showcased Türkiye's commitment to democracy, despite concerns about authoritarian tendencies within the government. The election showed that democracy still works within some limits and also showed that Türkiye's drift towards authoritarianism has limits. While Türkiye has flirted with Russia in recent years, the outcome of the election shows that nothing like Russian or Azerbaijan style "election" will be accepted in Türkiye. Recent overtures with NATO greenlighting the Sweden accession and advancing the F16 deal is one more proof that totally burning bridges with the West is not part of Erdogan's agenda. So far, he is carefully balancing between its short-term benefits from its relationship with Russia and its long-term commitment to Western alliance.

## **Economy**

Türkiye's economy has been widely recognized as one of the most dynamic in the early 21st century, with ambitious goal set to reach a 2 trillion-dollar economy. However, the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the century brought up many challenges that put the resilience of the Turkish economy at test. Notably, GDP per capita has experienced a significant decline in 2018-2022, dropping from \$10,500 USD to \$8,600 USD.

Much of the last few years economic turbulence in Türkiye can be attributed to the unorthodox and faith-based monetary and economic decisions made under President Erdogan's leadership. These decisions have rocked the Turkish economy, leading to concerns about stability and growth prospects. Erdogan's fiscal policies have often been criticized for prioritizing faith over economic science, leading to uncertainty among investors and exacerbating economic volatility.

Recent years have also seen the emergence of even more economic challenges, including skyrocketing inflation rates, with inflation reaching as high as 80% in 2022. Türkiye's economic challenges extend beyond monetary issues. The country is grappling with the influx of millions of Syrian refugees and the slow recovery after the catastrophic earthquake in February 2023. There is significant outgoing migration, and

most concerning is the brain drain, with a large percentage of the population expressing a desire to leave the country. Thousands of IT professionals and doctors (30000 IT and 1400 doctors) have already left the country in the last 2 years, posing a threat to Türkiye's human capital and innovation potential.

On the bright side, Türkiye has traditionally been seen as a manufacturing powerhouse for Europe, with its strategic location and skilled workforce making it an attractive destination for foreign investment. It has still strong economic fundamentals, cheap and productive labor, open to risks entrepreneurs, outward and export-oriented economy. Many risk takers are looking for new markets in Asia, Africa and are proactively working on new transport routes to Central Asia, China, and Africa. Turkish Airlines, for instance, flies to over 110 countries, including all African nations, showcasing the country's global reach. Military industry is rapidly expanding and one more proof is the emergence of 6 unicorns of Turkish origin in the last three years, indicating the presence of capability to grow seeds of innovation and entrepreneurship within the economy. An additional benefit came with capital inflows from Russia and the role Turkish businesses have been playing to by-pass the sanctions on Russian economy.

To address economic challenges and maintain its position on the global stage, Türkiye has sought investment from countries beyond the NATO allies, including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. These new partnerships reflect Türkiye's efforts to diversify its economic ties and reduce reliance on traditional Western allies and investment.

### **Türkiye's Regional and Geo-political Outreach**

In terms of international relations and diplomatic influence, Türkiye's leadership has pursued a multifaceted approach. Despite tensions with some Western countries, Türkiye maintains strategic partnerships with a wide range of nations, reflecting its geopolitical importance as a bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Türkiye's assertive foreign policy stance, combined with its economic ambitions, underscores its determination to assert itself as a key player on the global stage.

Türkiye's regional, and geopolitical dynamics are characterized by a delicate balancing act between national interests, security concerns, expanding economic interests, and international alliances. With ambitions beyond its national borders, Türkiye faces the challenge of managing its expanding influence while maintaining crucial relationships with NATO, the United States, and the potential for EU integration.

However, the aggressive stand against many neighbors pushed down the ambitious goal of making peace in its neighborhood and from declared zero problem with neighbors, it has now problems with all the neighbors.

Türkiye harbors ambitions for regional dominance and accelerated economic growth and its strategic position as the second-largest army in NATO gives it a significant geopolitical importance. Its aspirations for EU membership remain a dream, despite or because of its large and growing population. If taken in within the EU, it will be both by the territory and population the largest country in the EU, while very different by culture and religion. Relations with the EU and the USA are crucial for Türkiye's economic and diplomatic prospects, but tensions persist, particularly concerning issues such as human rights and democratic values. Despite sometime barrage of anti-western rhetoric, President Erdogan does not want to completely burn bridges with the Western allies, including Israel. The membership in NATO also will continue as a spoiled child but still needed for many reasons.

Türkiye's relationship with Russia has evolved, especially since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Türkiye's reluctance to follow Western sanctions against Russia has strengthened its bond with Moscow and the very special bond between Erdogan and Putin, both with strong nostalgic feelings about their country's imperial pasts and authoritarian instincts. The future of their relations will much depend on Russia's stability and the end game in Ukraine war as well as the balance between various power centers.

Türkiye competes for influence with Russia in Middle east, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia. Both were involved in proxy wars in Syria and Libya. At the same time, it relies on Russia for natural gas and support with the construction of nuclear power plants. The economy depends a lot on Russian tourists and currently Türkiye supports

the transit of many goods to Russia, while the capital inflow from Russia is what kept GDP growth up in 2022.

In the Middle East, Türkiye's relations with Israel, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and Egypt is a complex mosaic with many layers. Each case has many nuances, history, background, interest on both sides, regional dimensions etc. The size of this article does not allow to get deeper into these issues. But with all the countries one thing is common: if earlier in the century it was a concerted effort to build bridges aiming for zero problem with every neighbor, now Turkish troops control part of Syria, bomb from time to time Kurdish villages in Syria and Iraq, personal and family friendship with Assad family is long gone, relations with Egypt after Sisi took power got soured, with many tension points from Muslim brotherhood to Libya and more. The most dramatic is the change with Israel, especially after the last months Gaza assault. Lately there is a rapprochement with some from Arab world aiming to form a united front on Gaza.

Türkiye and Azerbaijan. It is an important topic especially in the context of Armenia's future positioning. While relations with Azerbaijan are often presented as a total unity (two states, one nation), there are also potential fault lines, particularly if Azerbaijan gravitates towards the autocratic alliance, while Türkiye remains part of the US led NATO alliance.

Overall Azerbaijan boasts a multifaceted identity shaped by its complex history and geopolitical positioning. Its Soviet past and proximity to Russia have left enduring imprints on its societal fabric, with echoes of Soviet influence resonating in its governance structures and cultural heritage. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's Shia Muslim majority population shares deep-rooted religious, historic, and cultural connections with its neighbor Iran, contributing to a rich tapestry of cultural exchange and solidarity. The most prominent gravity center for Azerbaijan is Türkiye, and over the last few decades they have developed a unique bond, forged through historical ties, linguistic affinity, and shared cultural practices. This triad of identities — intertwines to shape Azerbaijan's dynamic socio-political landscape.



In recent years we have seen a stronger push to strengthen political alliance, and economic and military cooperation with Türkiye. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, a significant energy corridor, is a win win for both sides and underscores that and enhances the mutual reliance that spans in many directions.

On military cooperation. Türkiye invested a lot in modernizing Azeri defense system and capacity of Azeri forces as per NATO standards. The collaboration was particularly evident during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where Türkiye provided unwavering support to Azerbaijan, including major military assistance, diplomatic backing, and supplying Syrian mercenaries.

President Erdoğan's was very vocal on support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, and he frequently threw his weight to support any move by Azerbaijan and it all resonated strongly with President Aliyev and the Azerbaijani people. The relationship between Aliyev and Erdoğan is also characterized by strong personal ties and common authoritarian instincts.

There are few potential fault lines, coming from mix cultural identity of Azeri people, so far not dominant but it may evolve. The Shia Islam in Azerbaijan and those with strong religious sentiments may gravitate towards Iran. The Azerbaijan military has two wings pro-Russian and pro-Turkish, and overall, many legacies and memories from Soviet times that may force the country to move back under the Russian wing. Azerbaijan compared to Türkiye is much more pro-Israeli and anti-Iran, and carefully silent on Gaza, while Türkiye is very vocal on Gaza and does not shy away from very anti-Israeli rhetoric and has a different stand vis a vis Iran.

Looking ahead, Türkiye and Azerbaijan will continue to explore avenues for convergence/collaboration, ranging from trade and investment to cultural exchanges, and in military domain moving to more unified armed forces. Türkiye's involvement in conflict with Armenia will continue and relations with Armenia will surely be constantly correlated with Azeri Armenia peace process. On Russia relation for both are on converging side.

Overall, the autocratic quartet of Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye are moving closer but how far they will actually come together is an open question.

## **Türkiye and Armenia**

The relationship between Türkiye and Armenia has been marked by pain, conflict, and difficult historical legacies that stretch back to the late 19th century. At the heart of this contentious history lies the Armenian genocide of 1915, which saw the systematic extermination of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, resulting in widespread suffering and loss of life.

Despite this dark chapter, Türkiye was the first country to recognize Armenia's independence in 1918. Throughout the last two centuries Armenia was on the fault line between expanding Russian and weakening Ottoman empire/Türkiye. For most of that time Armenian choice was with the Christian brother to the north. In broader terms the rivalry between Türkiye and the Soviet Union pushed Türkiye into the arms of NATO, and Türkiye was for decades the NATO's outpost to contain SU/Russia, which Armenia was part of.

The first Artsakh war, which erupted in the late 1980s, further strained relations between Türkiye and Armenia. While Türkiye supported Azerbaijan during the conflict, it was not prepared to intervene directly. However, it blocked the borders and froze any effort to establish diplomatic relations.

Some positive developments happened in early 2000s. Many expectations came up with the football diplomacy in 2008 and efforts by Serj Sargsyan and Abdulla Gul and it was all part of Turkish policy of zero problem with neighbors. The deal that was almost done was stopped the last minute and since then, and especially with Erdogan's policy of pressure and dominating in region, has so far not progressed.

From the Armenian side, the unresolved issue of the genocide continues to be an open wound. Türkiye views Armenia with suspicion, with no intention to apologize, like the Germans did, and often seeing Armenia as a proxy for Russia or the United States.

Türkiye's relationship with Armenia is also intertwined with its close ties to Azerbaijan. Türkiye sees the security of Azerbaijan as vital to its own interests, particularly in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In general, reconciling with Armenia holds the potential to improve Türkiye's international standing and alleviate the burden of the Armenian genocide on its national prestige. However, deep-rooted historical grievances and geopolitical complexities continue to shape the relationship, making reconciliation a challenging endeavor. For Armenia also land route via Türkiye goes to EU and in the long run it is in our national interest to establish diplomatic, trade, economic relations.

### **The Way Forward**

In conclusion, Türkiye's path forward is fraught with challenges and opportunities. Navigating its relationships with both Western allies and regional powers like Russia, the Arab world, and China will require strategic diplomacy and careful consideration of its long-term interests. Türkiye aims to maintain its role as a bridge between Europe and Asia while preserving its Islamic democracy. While EU membership aspirations may be on hold, Türkiye seeks special trade relations and a visa-free regime, as well as to act as a mediator between the West and the Islamic world.

Erdogan's last 10 years of stretching muscles in the region and the aggressive, brinkmanship-style politics with many neighbors possibly reached its limit. Türkiye's overtures with autocracies are paying in the short term and this is beyond Russia also. It includes China, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and possibly more in Central Asia and Africa.

Discussions with Armenia on opening borders may gain traction, especially if Armenia enters special partnership arrangements with the EU. The EU integration becomes a gravity force for both. However, Türkiye's competition with Russia in various regions, including the Middle East and Central Asia, remains a significant factor in its geopolitical strategy.

Armenian diplomacy must be creative and think outside the box -a) to explore variety of unorthodox avenues with Türkiye, especially on joint path for EU accession and b) to find niches on fault lines between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The wound of Armenia controlling 7 regions of Azerbaijan and military defeat in 1994 is still fresh and drive for revanche is strong in the Azeri psyche. However for Türkiye it is lesser issue and not much of psychological trauma that may help our agenda for the split approach.

# Iran's Regional Policy in Times of Global Turbulence

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**Abstract:** The report delves into Iran's foreign policy dynamics, particularly in the context of significant geopolitical events such as the Ukraine war, escalation in Gaza and their impact on the country's evolving relationship with Russia, strategic interests in the South Caucasus and the changed security dynamic of the region.

In the realm of Iran-Russia relations, the report explores the peculiarities of Iran's alignment with Moscow in the Ukraine war and its broader strategy to capitalize on the emerging new international order and in the framework of its “Pivot to the East” strategy. A focus on military cooperation reveals Iran's collaboration with Russia, exemplified by the inspection of Iranian-built drones and missile defense systems. Concurrently, Iran's support for Hamas in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict demonstrates Tehran's regional influence and highlights one more dimension of Iran- Russia cooperation.

Regarding the South Caucasus, the report analyzes Iran's nuanced stance post the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Addressing Iran as a crucial security partner of Armenia in the country's current security challenges, the report underscores the complex interplay of regional dynamics, its “red lines” and important support in the topic of the so-called “corridor” issue.

Examining the broader security landscape in the South Caucasus, the report observes significant transformations marked by the intentional destruction of old security frameworks. The report concludes by exploring Iran's commitment to Armenia's territorial integrity and its cooperation with France in the South Caucasus.

**Iran-Russia relations in the context of the war in Ukraine:** According to the Iranian government's state discourse, the war in Ukraine has heavily impacted the remapping of power competition and politics. Because of that it is high time for Iran to deepen bilateral and multilateral relations with rising countries like Russia and China. The March 2021 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement with China, full

membership in the Russian and Chinese-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was realized in September 2022, and military support for Moscow in the Ukraine war are all part of a single strategy to capitalize on the "emerging international order" and [“pivot to the East”](#) strategy.

Although [Tehran officially denies providing drones to Moscow](#) for use in the Ukraine War—or supporting the Russian invasion in general—the evidence of Iran’s support of Russia. [Iran has also provided Russia](#) with surface-to-surface ballistic missiles deepening the military cooperation between the two U.S.-sanctioned countries and receiving even more sanctions because of that. It's worth noting that under Resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran was prohibited from importing and exporting certain missiles, drones, and related technologies without prior UN Security Council approval. However, this resolution expired in October 2023.

**With all this military support, however,** Iran [is not openly supporting Russia](#) as it will be the country that was a subject of aggression itself during Iran-Iraq war supporting another aggressor. Another obstacle to the open support of Russia is Iran’s security concerns concerning some neighbors' territorial demands towards Iran. Taking into consideration the ethnic minorities living in the areas that are subject to those demands, it will be a risky step for Iran to praise Russian policies towards its neighbor and annexation of its territories.

The cooperation of the countries, though, is reflected in the economic indicators. By January 2023, Russia had become the largest foreign investor in Iran, putting \$2.7 billion into Iranian manufacturing, mining, and transport sectors. This part highlights Russia's status as the largest foreign investor in Iran by January 2023 and discusses the significance of Russian investments in Iranian manufacturing, mining, and transport sectors. On May 17, 2023, [a new agreement was signed between Russia and Iran](#) regarding the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway. This railway will be an important link connecting India, Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan, becoming a competitor for cargo transportation through the Suez Canal. Although the issue of Russia-Iran relations is at the center of the attention of Western analysts, especially in the conditions of the current global confrontation, the factor of Azerbaijan, an intermediate link in these

relations, seems to be often ignored. Azerbaijan, for its part, uses its anti-Iranian and sometimes anti-Russian rhetoric to present itself as part of the collective West. At the same time, however, Azerbaijan is deepening its economic cooperation with Iran and Russia, and these countries consider Azerbaijan as an important partner in the energy sector, with the increasing role of a bridge between them. The status of the [largest foreign investor Russia kept also according to 2024 reports](#).

**Iran-Russia and conflict in Gaza:** After the October 7th attack of Hamas on Israel, the international players focus their attention again on Iran's relations with Hamas. [Iran declared full support of the Hamas](#) and afterward called for the immediate ceasefire and "[end of genocide in Gaza](#)". In this regard, Iran and Russia have a common understanding and cooperation, too. On the military side, two weeks before Hamas carried out its brutal Oct. 7 terrorist attack on Israel, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu traveled to Tehran. During his visit, Shoigu stated that Tehran and Moscow had worked for months on long-term military cooperation, with "serious military and defense dimensions" and "[an entire range of planned activities, despite opposition from the United States and its Western allies](#)." The two countries also use the developments in Gaza and Israel's harsh response, and killings of civilians as a "[sign of hypocrisy of the west](#)".

**Iran's South Caucasus Policy:** The security landscape in the South Caucasus is undergoing significant transformations that can be described not so much as the making of a new security architecture as the disappearance of any security architecture. There is intentional destruction of the old security and political frameworks, meaning weakened old security and political ties and a significant lack of new configurations. This leads to the emergence of spontaneous and fragmented constructs without cohesive strategic security and foreign policy planning and implementation. In this reality, the current geopolitical changes and the enlargement process of the EU create opportunities as well as significant risks for Armenia's security and its relations with neighbours. Iran's attitude in this regard is crucial, too. Iran-EU tense relations and the influence of EU-Armenia relations on Armenia-Russia and Armenia-Iran are most crucial topics in that regard.

The discussions continue on whether Iran is against the EU monitoring mission deployed in Armenia-Azerbaijan borders in the 2022 mission or not, considering their sensitivity towards extra-regional powers. Considering that the deterrent role of the EUMM is preventing another large-scale war in the region and further increasing the influence of Russia and Türkiye, my thinking is that [Iran does not declare openly but perceives it as a compromise.](#)

After the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, shifts in Iran's stance toward the South Caucasus countries became a subject of scrutiny within the academic and analytical community. These discussions on the shifts were prompted by certain political statements from Iran that aligned with Armenia's security interests, coupled with periodic “war of words” between Iran and Azerbaijan. Consequently, Armenian- Iranian high-ranking meetings became as frequent as ever: during the visits of Armenian ministers and the prime minister, Iranian ministers, and foreign policy adviser of the Supreme Leader the necessity to deepen the cooperation is being underscored and importance of avoiding extra-regional powers stressed.

**The Corridor Issue and Iran:** After the military attack on Nagorno Karabakh in September 2023 and the ethnic cleansing of the entire population from Karabakh, the focal point of contention in the region remains the so-called “Zangezur corridor” circulated in Azerbaijani and Turkish discourses and supported by Russia: the demand and terminology that continues being circulated though Armenia did not commit to any corridor with any name, and has its signature only on the statement that declares Armenia as a security guarantor of the transit route and Russia as responsible for the transportation. And even this statement is out of date because of the loss of Karabakh and because absence of the main subject of the agreement.

In Armenia, these discussions are perceived as a major obstacle to the mutual understanding of the logic of opening regional communications. The story behind the mutual accusations reminds a thriller where it’s not quite obvious “who promised what to whom”. Though the fable of the history of emerging a mysterious “corridor logic” is still unclear, the scenario spins across the multiple promises. Türkiye insists Armenia has promised a corridor, in Armenia there is an assumption that Russia has promised to Azerbaijan a corridor, In Iran they say the corridor is a “NATO corridor” and that is

US and “Zionists” that promised it. Beyond the discourses of promises, Russia, so far clearly opposing any “corridor” between Türkiye and Azerbaijan and even publicly stating that such roads cannot have extraterritorial status (the main point of Baku argument) by several [statements of the deputy prime-minister Alexey Overchuk](#), seems to concede to Azerbaijani demands: like in almost every other regional issue because of its weakened position as a result of its invasion in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Türkiye are manipulating this issue from one side by presenting it as a necessary implementation of the 9<sup>th</sup> point of the trilateral agreement of November 9<sup>th</sup>, and from the other side by presenting it as an attractive regional project for the West. From the Armenian interpretation, the trilateral statement was about the Nagorno Karabakh, mainly, and now, because of ethnic cleansing, the overall logic and necessity of the statement has changed. Besides, even if there is an assumption that the 9th point of that agreement is still relevant, there is no mention of an extraterritorial corridor according to that point..

The choice of a mediator for this matter is crucial. [The Western interpretation aligns with Armenian aspirations, emphasizing the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity.](#) This dimension underscores the strategic significance of Western support in navigating the intricacies of the corridor issue. Furthermore, it’s important to mention that only through this kind of implementation of that project the regional integration of Armenia can be possible, whereas an extraterritorial corridor will once again exclude Armenia from regional economic communications, will create a new risk for military escalation this time with the involvement also Türkiye and Iran, taking into account [Iran’s harsh opposition](#) to the cutting of the Armenia-Iran border.

The transit route via Armenia can be a crucial part of the middle corridor and help Western countries to reach the Asian markets by bypassing Russia. Azerbaijan uses this advantage of the road for another manipulation: it declares that if Armenia will not give the corridor”, [Azerbaijan will create a corridor via Iran](#). The manipulation here is the fact that Azerbaijan always had a transit route to Nakhijevan via Iran and though it constructs a new and shorter one it still is just a transit route in the framework of Iran’s sovereignty. It uses this narrative to mislead the main assumptions in the West concerning this issue, portraying an alternative of routes passing through Azerbaijan or



Iran, thus expecting support to Azerbaijan considering the relations between Western countries and Iran. The reality is though, that the alternatives are a transit route under the sovereignty of Armenia (within the logic of opening and opening of all the regional communications via negotiation), peacefully, or, gaining an extraterritorial corridor by military means, creating a new field of possible regional war. In that case Russia will gain a new opportunity to intervene and “relocate” some of its “peacekeepers” still being in Nagorno Karabakh.

**Iran, regionalism and Armenia-France relations:** Iran continues its policy of regionalism declaring constantly that all [the problems of the region must be resolved by the regional powers](#) and without extra-regional participation. In this context high- level meetings have become very frequent. Armenia accepted the invitation to [participate in the 3+2 format in Tehran](#). This was especially because of the Iran’s stance concerning the corridor issue and the fact that alternative format for that discussion could be Yerevan-Moscow-Baku format where Yerevan has no allies. During the past year several high level visits occurred between Armenia and Iran, including, Security council’s Secretary [Armen Grigoryan’s](#) visit, followed by Armenia’s FM [Ararat Mirzoyan’s visit to Tehran](#), and most recent Vice Prime Minister. From the Iranian side Foreign Minister [Abdollahian visited Armenia](#) in December 2023, The delegation led by Kamal Kharrazi, Foreign Policy Advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader and Head of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran [traveled to Armenia in January 2024](#) . In all the meetings Iranian officials declared their unequivocal support of Armenia’s territorial integrity and full support of the of the [“Crossroad of Peace”](#) announced by the prime minister of Armenia. Stressing Iran’s “red line” of geo-political changes in the region became the symbol of Armenia-Iran recent diplomatic exchanges.

Armenia has increased its relations also with France not only in the political but also in the military field. This fact has created a notion that Iran is against that cooperation because of its “red lines” on extra-regional forces involvement in the region. This attitude is manipulating both the Azerbaijani and Russian side. The detailed analysis of the cooperation goals though, and Iran’s and France’s stance towards Armenia’s security concerns speak about the opposite. The corridor issue as well as the importance of the protection of the territorial integrity of Armenia have created a

common ground for the cooperation of Iran and France in the region. The press release on the meeting of the ambassadors of France and Iran to Armenia was an important political message. The press report stated that [the ambassadors discussed the situation in Armenia and the events in the region](#). Two experienced diplomats “are ready to meet frequently and discuss the security issues of Armenia because Iran’s and France’s attitudes towards Armenia’s territorial integrity and unacceptability of the border changes are almost entirely identical”, declared the ambassador of Iran during the meeting with the expert community of Armenia<sup>[2]</sup>.

Thus, Iran's strategic calculations and diplomatic maneuvers amid complex regional and global realities focus on the proactive policy in the South Caucasus region, trying to increase cooperation with all actors. Balancing approach towards regional countries remains the main feature of Iran’s regional policy in the South Caucasus region.

<sup>[1]</sup> *It declares the necessity of opening all regional communications and giving access to Azerbaijan to reach its Nakhichevan exclave with the Russian FSB being the security guarantor of the transportation and not the road itself*

<sup>[2]</sup> *It's important also that the French ambassador’s extensive diplomatic career includes a crucial role as a second counselor at the French Embassy in Iran from 2012 to 2015, where he effectively managed the nuclear portfolio and supervised Iran’s regional policy.*

# **Azerbaijan: A Glimpse of the Present, Darkness for the Future**

Dr. Nzhdeh Hovsepyan

## **Summary**

In the period between 2020 to 2023, Azerbaijan has achieved its primary goals: gaining full control over Nagorno-Karabakh, escalating military actions into Armenian territory, and demonstrating aspirations of becoming a regional hegemon. Currently, Azerbaijan sees little reason to hurry and agree to a peace deal with Armenia based on equality and reciprocity principles, as it believes time is on its side. Azerbaijan has already succeeded in weakening the Armenian economy and obstructing its institutional progress. Pursuing its regional hegemonic ambitions, Azerbaijan might find it beneficial to keep Armenia in a state of limbo, as neither war nor peace has been favorable for Armenia's political development. Furthermore, Azerbaijan continues to profit from its oil and gas resources, while Armenia's economy remains under blockade. With most of its objectives achieved, Azerbaijan can afford to wait for the right moment to sign a peace agreement. It has the luxury of patience and will only commit to a peace deal when it sees maximum advantage.

## **Context**

The 44-day war, which shattered the entrenched status quo established in 1994 in Nagorno-Karabakh, left the issue of a final conflict resolution unresolved. Despite the Armenian armed forces relinquishing control over the remaining two Azerbaijani regions and Azerbaijani military deployment in the former Nagorno-Karabakh territories, thus violating the border delineation of the former autonomous region, the situation did not culminate in a peaceful settlement. Azerbaijan's military aggression against Armenia's sovereign territory in September 2022 not only faced no resistance but also garnered no criticism from Armenia's allied states, particularly Russia and other CSTO members. During Prague Summit, which involved the participation of the President of France and the President of the EU Council, Armenia and Azerbaijan issued a statement acknowledging each other's territorial integrity. This effectively resolved the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Two months later, Azerbaijan closed the Lachin Corridor, which, as outlined in the November 9 trilateral statement, was supposed to be under the control

of the Russian peacekeeping contingent. In 2023, Azerbaijan conducted a military special operation against Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in the President of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic issuing a decree announcing its dissolution. Within days, over 100 thousand Armenians evacuated Nagorno-Karabakh and relocated to Armenia: Azerbaijan detained the former leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh and transferred them to jails in Baku. As of now, only around two dozen Armenians remain in the entire Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan resolved the Nagorno-Karabakh issue through the use of force, contrary to the hopes, assurances, and political statements from mediators that the conflict had no military solution. This use of force went beyond the conquest of the entire Nagorno-Karabakh territory, involving the coercion of Karabakhi Armenians to leave their homeland due to existential threats, a typical ethnic cleansing of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Azerbaijan has successfully accomplished its primary objectives: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has ceased, there are no longer any independence fighters, the principle of self-determination has been nullified, the state flag of Azerbaijan flies over Stepanakert, and the matter is no longer under international diplomatic consideration, with its absence even in the potential peace treaty text. While it appears that there are no longer any barriers to finalizing and implementing a peace treaty, the negotiations remain deadlocked, with the document still pending completion. Merely convening the leaders for a meeting is seen as progress amidst the stalemate in negotiations. Assessing the current circumstances prompts the question: what are Azerbaijan's objectives, and is its policy geared towards signing a peace treaty and ensuring its practical implementation?

### **Objectives & Motives**

Since the 2000s, Azerbaijan's political influence has diverged from that of the other two Caucasian countries, primarily due to two pivotal factors: (1) its strategic geographical positioning, which has consistently attracted major global powers, and (2) its oil reserves, which have become a focal point of interest for various transnational financial and economic entities. Since then, Azerbaijan has embarked on a policy with two distinct objectives: firstly, leveraging the interests and tensions among major powers to secure a seat at the table of influential actors and to participate, at the very least, in

decision-making processes that affect the region. Secondly, Azerbaijan aims to assert itself as a regional hegemon in the Caucasus in relation to Georgia and Armenia by employing both economic and military coercion. It has utilized soft economic power, framed as partnership, with Georgia, while employing a harder approach with Armenia. Between 2021 and 2023, through methodical, systematic, and successive military escalations, Azerbaijan managed to conquer several strategically important heights, thereby violating Armenia's territorial integrity. This resulted in the occupation of 127 square kilometers of Armenian territory and the elimination of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Through its military aggressions and wars, Azerbaijan cut the Gordian knot and took one step further in advancing its strategy of becoming suzerain of the region. Backed by practical support from Türkiye, maintaining cautious relations with Russia, and occasionally displaying assertiveness with Iran, Azerbaijan is actively pursuing a unique form of 21st-century vassal-suzerain relations in the Caucasus. This strategic objective appears to be the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's regional ambitions, aimed at establishing clear political dominance over its two neighboring countries. In one of his recent statements Aliyev emphasized Azerbaijan's leading role in the Caucasus: *"Russia, I think, understands now clearly what has happened and accepts the new realities. But I think the United States and France should also do the same. Otherwise, the situation will not be in line with their plans. They have to work with Azerbaijan, the leading country in the Caucasus, with the leading economy, army, and very broad international connections."*

The internal atmosphere in Azerbaijan, notably the anti-democratic regime, serves as a significant political impetus for the realization of its regional hegemonic ambitions. Azerbaijan's natural partners in the region are countries that are not typically regarded as democratic: Türkiye, Russia, and Iran. In such an environment and given the close political ties, the hegemony of a democratic state is essentially unattainable. In this context, Azerbaijan's domestic governance structure is particularly advantageous, especially as it seeks regional legitimacy from similar non-democratic partners. Certainly, domestic dictatorship poses its own set of challenges, including the potential for revolutions, coups, and other upheavals. However, with the successful conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, Aliyev effectively postponed the regime's collapse for a while.

Another crucial aspect of Azerbaijan's policy towards Armenia is rooted in the aftermath of the defeat in the 1990s. This defeat left a profound impact not only on Azerbaijan's military development but also on its governance, as well as on President Aliyev personally. He was active observer of the events when Azerbaijan suffered losses not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but also in 7 surrounding regions. The defeat in the war, the stigma of being labeled as a loser, the shortcomings in state management, irreparable losses, social polarization, and the inter-clan dynamics within the domestic setting, coupled with over 25 years of self-humiliation, undoubtedly fostered a psychological complex not only within society but also within the establishment. Equally significant were Aliyev's sarcastic remarks about Pashinian, continuous manipulation of the term "capitulation", the "walk of fame" on the Nagorno-Karabakh flag in Stepanakert, and the proud deliberation of intentionally provoking Armenian society, etc. All of these actions reflect the mindset of Azerbaijani leadership, which in turn influences their military and political decisions. While the psychological aspect may not be the primary driver, it undeniably impacts decision-making.

The non-peaceful nature of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations since the early 1990s has evolved into a dynamic where these two political entities have consistently constrained each other. Armenia has politically hindered Azerbaijan's autonomy and prevented it from emerging as an independent political force in the region, while Azerbaijan, in turn, has stifled Armenia's economic development. The conflict has inflicted mutual damage on both countries and hindered each other's progress, essentially operating as a mechanism of mutual destruction. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan has already experienced significant success with its policy, as the Armenian economy has been unable to overcome natural limitations and has remained stunted, deprived of opportunities for institutional growth. Indeed, in line with its suzerain ambitions, Azerbaijan may find it advantageous to keep Armenia economically captive, weak and fragile.

Azerbaijan has calculated that it can comfortably sustain the status quo in its relations with Armenia. In this regard, Azerbaijan employs a wide range of tools, including provoking domestic anxieties and anger within Armenia, occasional border skirmishes

and fatalities, and engaging in information warfare. The current phase of relations can be characterized as a hybrid war, within which the Armenian society is frequently subjected to psychological terror. This systemic approach is designed to perpetually instill fear and anxiety in the other party, keeping their nerves on edge and undermining their composure.

In addition to the political aspect, Armenia presents a geographical challenge for Azerbaijan. Beyond mutual territorial claims, there is also the issue of establishing a direct road connection between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The significance of such an unimpeded linkage appears to hold strategic importance for Azerbaijan. The geographical connection between Türkiye and Azerbaijan serves not only the interests of these two countries but also holds a broader purpose of establishing a regional umbrella, which includes pushing Russia further away from the region and completely surrounding Iran from the north, among other strategic objectives. Through the implementation of the so-called "corridor," Azerbaijan not only achieves an uninterrupted connection with Türkiye but also emerges as one of the primary economic arteries from the East to the West, whose geopolitical significance cannot be overstated. This corridor not only solidifies Azerbaijan's dominance over Armenia but also positions Azerbaijan at the center of a crucial infrastructure project connecting the East and the West, effectively excluding regional competitors not only economically but also politically. The geopolitical significance of this corridor is notable, especially when considering the backdrop of US-China rivalry and the key interests of the EU, Türkiye, Iran, and Russia in this initiative.

### **Russia & Status-Quo**

Azerbaijan's interest in peace with Armenia is not entirely altruistic. Firstly, major powers are preoccupied with their own affairs, including conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and lack the willingness or resources to actively pursue peace efforts. Moreover, imposing peace on Azerbaijan would require significant investment of capital, which these powers may be reluctant to provide, especially considering the benefits they currently derive from Azerbaijan's energy resources and strategic geographical location. The military-political focus of the West remains primarily in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, while Russia, reluctant to disengage from the Caucasus, is preoccupied

with its involvement in Ukraine. Russia may lack interest in actively engaging in the establishment of a security architecture in its "neighborhood," preferring the current status quo as it aligns with its interests. Essentially, Russia benefits from the neither war nor peace situation in the Caucasus, which aligns with its current objectives in the region. Indeed, stable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would remove a favored instrument of perpetuating tension in the region for Russia. Azerbaijan is acutely aware of this dynamic and proceeds cautiously, particularly given its relatively non-confrontational stance towards Russia thus far.

Azerbaijan's reluctance to pursue stable peace over maintaining the status quo may stem from the perception that Armenia is under siege and oppressed, rendering it more vulnerable, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding its economic development. From Azerbaijan's perspective, there may be little incentive to rush and sign a peace agreement when time appears to be on its side. Additionally, Azerbaijan continues to benefit from oil and gas resources, while Armenia's economy remains under blockade. The current neither war nor peace status quo has undoubtedly had a devastating impact on Armenia's political development. However, Azerbaijan finds itself in a position where it has already achieved most of its objectives and can afford to wait for the opportune moment to sign a peace agreement. It has the luxury to bide its time and only commit to a peace deal when it feels most advantageous.

Currently, Azerbaijan is making efforts to transition the normalization process from a trilateral format to a bilateral one. By doing so, it aims to exclude third parties whose presence may disrupt the balance of power and impede the transition from peace talks to domination. Moreover, with a one-on-one setting, Azerbaijan believes it has greater leverage to exert pressure on Armenia and enforce its conditions through various means. Azerbaijan even emphasized it publicly that it stands prepared for direct negotiations with Armenia and it is up to two countries to decide the future of relations. Furthermore, Azerbaijan places significant importance on Armenia's own demand for non-interference from external actors such as the EU, Russia, and Iran in the normalization process. The Armenian Prime Minister has accurately caught the underlying basis of Azerbaijan's position: give me what I want diplomatically, otherwise I'll pursue it militarily.



## **Conclusion**

It still remains unclear whether Azerbaijan's strategy will transition from political pressure to military action, but it clearly indicates the range of objectives Baku aims to achieve. At the very least, Azerbaijan seeks to secure a vague and ineffective peace treaty with Armenia, lacking specific and enforceable provisions, particularly concerning border demarcation, genuine security assurances, and the establishment of robust economic relations (based on 4 principles: sovereignty, jurisdiction, reciprocity and equality). Nonetheless, it aims to cement Azerbaijan's absolute sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh in a legally binding manner. With this approach, Azerbaijan would assert its dominance over Armenia, establishing the legal and political foundations for implementing the peace treaty. It would dictate the pace of normalization and impose the parameters for on-the-ground solutions. On the maximal end, Azerbaijan may pursue the seizure of the road through Armenian Syunik. However, this endeavor appears to be a risky one and could potentially escalate into a regional conflict, with the genuine possibility of military involvement from Iran, Russia, and Türkiye. Azerbaijan is arguably grappling with the dilemma of choosing between peace and war, carefully assessing its options. In the tumultuous year of 2024, which stands as one of the most challenging of the modern era, Azerbaijan's decision between peace, war, or maintaining the status quo will not only shape the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also influence the trajectory of the region's development.

# **Russian Influence on Armenia: Status and Projections**

Dr. Alexander Iskandaryan

Regardless of any trends, Russia's presence in Armenia, and in the South Caucasus in general, is something to be reckoned with. Even though not directly bordering on Armenia, Russia is a regional neighbor, separated from Armenia by just a four-hour drive across Georgia's territory. It is a huge neighbor by all standards – a nuclear power with military, economic, human, and financial resources incomparable to Armenia's modest ones. Russia's territory, the biggest of any country in the world, is 600 times that of Armenia. Russia's population is also large, about 50 times that of Armenia. Moreover, given that the USSR was arguably a continuation of the Russian Empire, Russia was – until very recently – the power that colonized and ruled Armenia for hundreds of years. Thirty-odd years after the fall of the empire, Armenia remains connected to the former imperialist center by thousands of links in the economic and cultural realms, by people-to-people networks, and by geographical ties – roads, cables, and all forms of communication.

Another important factor is that Russia is home to the world's largest Armenian diaspora, and a special one in many ways. Unlike the century-old Armenian diasporas in the U.S., Europe and other parts of the world, the Armenian diaspora in Russia is, to a much larger extent, recent, resulting from migration waves that followed the disintegration of the USSR. Accordingly, this diaspora maintains strong human, cultural and economic ties with Armenia the way none of the old diasporas can, especially since they chiefly originated from territories outside the modern Republic of Armenia.

Last but not least, Armenia is a member of Russia-led bodies in the realm of politics (the Commonwealth of Independent States), economics (the Eurasian Economic Union) and security (the Collective Security Treaty Organization). Given the relative size and power of the member states, Armenia clearly cannot aspire to leadership in any of these bodies. Rooted as they are chiefly in geography, all these major circumstances appear objective, but only from a static perspective. In a dynamic perspective, they look different.

While Russia is arguably the most present and potent of all external players in the South Caucasus, it is also the only one whose presence and influence are decreasing. Entering the region in the post-soviet decades, other external actors gradually established themselves in it, competing against Russia in some of the realms to varying

extents – up until the 2020s. What we see now is a time of drastic change in terms of external influences, especially in Armenia but also in the region as a whole. The 2020 Second Karabakh War, the 2022 unleashing of the war in Ukraine and the 2023 ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh have triggered a radical redesign of the region's balance of external powers.

It may be too soon to say that Russia is leaving the region, and, arguably, it is not likely to leave for good. In the light of the geographical and historical circumstances described above, Russia's role in the region will remain significant even in the event that Russia decides to pursue an isolationist policy with regard to the South Caucasus, which is one of the options in the medium- or longer-term. Even in such a scenario, Armenia is likely to continue relying on Russia for some of its communication and trade.

However, it is neither communication nor trade but hard security that formed the basis of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet South Caucasus since the very first years of its independence. This was especially true in the case of Armenia. A cheap supply of arms and ammunition, options for military training plus some political forms of security were the formats that made Russia indispensable for Armenia, or, at the very least, made Russia appear as such in the eyes of Armenia's political elites. The Armenian army was built on Soviet and Russian models, and for decades, the Armenian public and elites viewed Russia as its security guarantor in its confrontation with Azerbaijan. Accordingly, in Azerbaijan, Russia was perceived as the monopolist in the realm of hard security in the Caucasus.

Now this is no longer the case. First, as a result of the 2020 Second Karabakh War, a new and significant external actor appeared in the South Caucasus: Türkiye. Türkiye was an active participant of the 2020 war at many levels, including planning, military training, and even operational command. For the first time in the post-Soviet space, a player external to this space became directly involved in a conflict on the side of one of the parties. As a result of the war, Russia's ally lost, and Türkiye's ally won. Turkish presence in the South Caucasus is hardly a new phenomenon; in the sphere of economics and culture, Türkiye has long taken a firm stand in Azerbaijan and Georgia. After the 2020 Karabakh war, Türkiye became a player in the military and strategic sphere that Russia has to reckon with.

Second, Russia's 2022 aggression against Ukraine dramatically changed the entire security architecture of the post-Soviet space. While the hostilities actually take place in Ukraine, the conflict is in fact much broader. At least in the minds of the Russian

elite, it is a conflict with the entire West, and one which is existential for Russia. Accordingly, total investment in the war against Ukraine leaves Russia no opportunity or incentive to be active in other areas.

All this has meant that Russia would no longer wish or be able to act a security provider for Armenia. The dwindling of Russia's engagement and cooperation with Armenia in the military sphere has been dramatic. It is clear to all parties involved that Russia cannot, under any circumstances, decide to open a second front in the south, which makes it impossible to act as an agent of containment the way it did back in 2016. The supply of Russian weapons to Armenia has also decreased drastically, almost tenfold from 2021 to 2024. Azerbaijan has been well aware of the new power layout. Arguably, had it not been for the Ukrainian campaign, Azerbaijan would hardly have had the chance to carry out its 2023 brutal ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, violating all agreements with Russia and even killing Russian peacekeepers in the line of duty.

Accordingly, Russian peacekeepers in Azerbaijan and the Russian military base in Armenia have lost functionality. Even should they remain in the region, they no longer serve any purpose. Both to the victor, Azerbaijan, and to the loser, Armenia, Russia no longer has much to offer in the realm of security.

With Russia having lost its main leverage over the region, diversification of influences becomes the prevailing trend. This said, it might not unfold rapidly, and is far from final. We live inside an unfinished process in which making predictions is a thankless task. A lot will depend on how long the war in Ukraine lasts and how it ends. But overall, it is hard to imagine the restoration of Russian hegemony in the South Caucasus.

# **The Contours of U.S.-Armenia Relations:**

## **America's Geopolitical Posturing and Armenia's Western Pivot**

Dr. Nerses Kopalyan

Armenia, for the last 30 years, has struggled to enhance and strengthen its relationship with the United States. Successive Armenian governments, until 2022, consistently failed to convince Washington that Armenia should be prioritized within the framework of America's strategic interests. The Armenian-American lobby, regardless of its bona fide efforts in Washington, but due to *strategic limitations*, has been out-maneuvered and out-strategized by Azerbaijani interests. Meanwhile, Armenia's diplomatic initiatives in Washington, collectively speaking, have been a mosaic of underperformance. 30 years of Armenian's diplomatic underperformance can be reduced to a single postulate: the Armenian nation has failed to convince the United States that the Republic of Armenia is important to American interests. The Armenian realm has operated under the assumption that the United States "likes" Armenia, that it "cares" for Armenia, and as such, America "helping" Armenia should be taken as a given. It is this *givenness* that better explains why Armenia has failed to enhance and expand its relationship with the U.S. In essence, Armenia, until 2022, lacked a cogent strategy of advancing mutual interests.

From the lens of the United States, both at the strategic and policy level, it needs to be explained why or how Armenia is important to American interests. Conceptually, until Armenia reconceptualized and demonstrated a realignment of its strategic initiatives in late 2022 through its diversification policy, the U.S. remained uncertain of Yerevan's policy orientations.

Five policy areas are introduced in this policy brief as vital to U.S. strategic thinking and the development of mutual interests with Armenia: America's regional strategic interests, American soft power, regionally weakening Russia, supporting democratic growth, and developing a regional democratic dyad.

## **America's Strategic Regional Interests**

Azerbaijan's continuous violation of Armenia's sovereignty, and the latter's continued presence on the internationally recognized territorial boundaries of Armenia, pose a severe problem for American interests and how America qualifies the expansion of its interests within international law. As the reigning global hegemon, the international order remains fundamentally hinged on the role the U.S. plays in advancing and, when need be, enforcing international norms and standards. Azerbaijan's behavior starkly contradicts this important underlying pillar that shapes U.S. posturing and interests in the world, and more specifically in the Eurasian space. Qualified within the framework of U.S. regional and global interests, and the immense resources that the U.S. applies in expanding and enforcing international norms and regulations, the preservation and securing of Armenia's sovereignty, and the security of Armenia's borders, are of fundamental importance to America's interests. U.S. policy in the South Caucasus is defined by three main pillars: regional stability, expansion of democracy, and long-term peace. These three pillars are specifically designed to be commensurate with both America's interests as well as its broader international obligations. Contextualizing within this framework and framing it within America's broader grand strategy on the global scale, the sovereignty of states like Armenia, their strategic relevance to U.S. interests, their role in reinforcing international norms and regulations, and the detrimental effects and outcomes should the sovereignty of such countries be violated contradict and harm U.S. interests.

Collectively, the sovereignty and security of the Republic of Armenia, as an extension of U.S. regional values and global interests, remains inherently crucial to the U.S. More specifically, stability in the South Caucasus is of important strategic relevance to the U.S. As long as Armenia's sovereignty is violated, or attempts are made to negate it, this produces the opposite outcomes to what America considers vital to its goals. It is also in America's strategic interests for a stable Caucasus to serve as an important transport and commercial hub, for economic growth contributes to regional stability, while simultaneously opening up markets for Transatlantic commercial interests. Namely, the modernization of the economic and political sectors of developing societies, especially in the post-Soviet space, are an important part of America's vision

for the region. Regional development, connectivity, stability, peace, and economic modernization are all hinged on the preservation and security of the sovereignty of the states within the region. In this context, Armenia's sovereignty, and the threats posed against it, are harmful and in contradiction to America's regional and global interests.

### **America's Soft Power**

The U.S. exercises immense soft power in Armenia and has organic support and admiration from the Armenian population. Armenia's intrinsic pro-American culture and overall value system makes Armenia, in the eyes of U.S. policymakers, a ripe country through which American interests can be advanced, enhanced and proliferated. In this context, a sovereign, developed and prospering Armenia would serve as a vital hub in the region that not only serves specific American interests, but also a springboard to strengthen America's regional goals.

In the South Caucasus, and in the Eurasian space in general, the U.S. does not have organic allies; it only has subsidized allies or partners. Azerbaijan's relationship, for example, is purely transactional, and the values and interests of both countries are diametrically opposed. Only due to specific transactional variables is a working partnership maintained. This, to a large extent, has been damaged by Baku's growing authoritarianism and its closer alliance with Russia. Similarly, U.S. relations with Ukraine, and much of Central Asia, is defined by the U.S. subsidizing, providing material support, or offering direct assistance as the cornerstone of maintaining such relationships. Collectively speaking, these relationships are not organic or based on real shared values; they are based on these countries benefiting off America's resources, or in the case of Ukraine, serving as a functional buffer against Russian expansionism. In the case of Armenia, relations are fundamentally driven by shared values, growth of U.S. soft power, and organic public support for the U.S. In this context, the relationship is not transactional or cost-heavy, but rather, it is cost-effective and sustainable, especially the role Armenia has been playing in diminishing Russia's influence and status in the region.

## **U.S. Regional Interests and Balancing Russia**

Important components of America's regional grand strategy include both the containment of Russia, as well as the weakening of Russia as a regional actor. From the lens of U.S. policymaking, a diminished Russia is a more collaborative Russia, especially when it comes to establishing stability and regional functionality in the South Caucasus. Within this broader reconfiguration, Armenia's continued existence as an independent, sovereign state that is outside of Russia's sphere of influence is of vital interest to the United States, as Armenia serves as both a hub for advancing American values in the region, as well as a sovereign actor that can serve as a platform for regional cooperation.

More specifically, it is in America's interest that a strong and viable Armenia be supported in the South Caucasus in order to serve as a balancing force in the region, as opposed to a weakened, dependent state whose loss of sovereignty will result in Russia's absorption of Armenia. In this context, the weaker Armenia's sovereignty becomes, and the less Armenia flourishes as an independent state, the stronger and more expansive Russia becomes in the region. This, by definition, contradicts America's interests, for a stronger and expansive Russia negates America's capacity to balance, contain and weaken Russia. For the U.S., the removal of an independent actor from the regional configuration structure weakens American geopolitical posturing and strengthens Russian geopolitical posturing.

The long-held narrative that Armenia is a satellite of Russia has been ruptured and no longer holds within the policy-making establishments of Washington, as the Velvet Revolution, Armenia's proliferation of democratic values, and its pivot away from Russia has led to a significant alignment of interests with the U.S. In this framework of thinking, a strong and independent Armenia actually curtails and limits Russia's influence and dominance in Eurasia, as opposed to a weakened Armenia whose sovereignty has been dilapidated. Per the growing thinking in Washington, the erosion of Armenia's sovereignty, the weakening of the Armenian state, and by extension the weakening of a democratic Armenia, will not only advance Russian interests, but critically harm American regional interests.



## **U.S. Strategic Interests in Supporting Democratic Growth**

The Biden Administration has prioritized the strengthening of democratic values abroad, putting forth a value-driven foreign policy. Recognizing that democracy is under siege both at home and abroad, President Biden has elevated democratic values to a strategic priority for the U.S. Cognizant of democratic decline globally, Washington recognizes such developments as being detrimental to American interests. The strengthening of liberal democracies in the world, in this context, has become an important cornerstone of enhancing and growing America's global interests. While the success of this policy has come under serious question due to developments in the Israel-Gaza conflict, Washington, nonetheless, remains more sympathetic to nascent democracies than it would otherwise be.

Against this backdrop, Armenia's democratic breakthrough in 2018 and its persistent democratization, despite heightened regional insecurity, is an important development that aligns with U.S. interests in Eurasia. More specifically, it is viewed as a model for the West in managing and supporting democratic breakthroughs in otherwise authoritarian and inhospitable environments. The Armenian model of undertaking a democratic breakthrough in an authoritarian orbit, and one that was done under Russia's sphere of influence, is a development that bolsters U.S. interests, yet one that has not required U.S. resources. In this context, it is deemed a vital interest of the U.S. to support Armenia's democratic growth, which, for the U.S., is inherently tied to Armenia's sovereignty and security. Further, Washington qualifies its potentially robust and rigorous support for Armenia's democratization as a mechanism of influencing the proliferation of America-centric values in the Eurasian continent. Supporting pro-democratic processes and movements, rather than anti-Russian elites and political actors, is essential for U.S. foreign policy. An important part of this assessment are the long-term trajectories of U.S. interests in Eurasia: whereas dictatorships and authoritarian regimes are unstable, unreliable and require resources from partner states, democracies remain stable, reliable and engage in mutual advancement of interests. In this context, by supporting Armenia, the U.S. is in fact investing in advancing U.S. regional interests for the long-term. A strong and democratic Armenia,

and one that is outside of Russia's orbit, will serve as an important regional hub in promoting American values.

### **Developing a Regional Democratic Dyad**

Building democracy in authoritarian neighborhoods holds strategic promise for the U.S. Democratic breakthroughs in authoritarian regions create the conditions for democratic spillovers regionally, a finding supported by substantial social science research. Instead of attempting to contain Russia from the top of the shifting global security order, supporting democratic breakthroughs from the bottom-up, and doing so with regionally devised policies, is strategically significant for the U.S. An important example of this, aside from Armenia, is Georgia.

Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, and subsequent developments that gave way to much U.S. investment in Georgia's democracy, have been crucial to advancing American interests in the region. However, the Georgian model remains limited and the extent to which U.S. interests in the region could be advanced have not been sufficiently met. The Velvet Revolution of 2018 in Armenia changed this dynamic, for it created a democratic dyad in the South Caucasus. In this context, by supporting and growing Armenia's democracy, the U.S. will also be supporting the region's democratic dyad, further strengthening Georgia's democratization. Whereas Georgia found itself a lonely democracy in a neighborhood of non-democracies, the post-2018 developments have immensely changed the dynamics. A U.S.-supported democratic dyad led by Georgia and Armenia could enhance the spillover effect of democratization, while further growing and enhancing American regional interests. More so, a democratic dyad will rupture Russia's regional authoritarian orbit, thus weakening Russia's role as regional hegemon. Contextually, instead of viewing Georgia's democratization separately from that of Armenia's, the U.S. is now viewing developments as being in its strategic interest to qualify the democratization of the two states in a dyadic fashion, where the enhancement of one can contribute to and support the enhancement of the other. U.S. regional interests, in this context, will not only be advanced separately by Georgia and Armenia, but rather, by strengthening the dyad, the advancement of U.S. interests may be done in a coordinated and regionally devised strategy.

Just as importantly, the immense U.S. investments in Georgia's democracy have undergone many challenges in the last five years, and there are concerns of democratic backsliding. However, if the dyad is strengthened, cross-national support between the civic societies, democracy promotion groups, and grassroots movements may develop safeguards in not only stopping democratic backsliding, but also providing cross-national support in democracy promotion. Support for Armenia's growth and development, in this context, is now qualified by Washington as support for the growth and development of a regional democratic dyad, where the U.S. supports the strengthening of both Armenia and Georgia. This mutual adjustment and advancement of dyadic interests is becoming an important component of U.S. regional objectives.

## **Conclusion**

While these five policy areas and strategic initiatives qualify the reigning American interests for the South Caucasus, U.S. policy still remains defined by maintaining a healthy balance in its relationship with all three countries in the South Caucasus. In this context, Azerbaijan's success of establishing transactional, yet strong relations with the United States for the last 15 years remains an important lingering legacy, one that still offers Baku some political cover in face of what is generally considered a range of transgressions that are deemed harmful to U.S. regional interests. While the United States has fully accepted Armenia's Western pivot as genuine, and as such, has played an instrumental role in applying diplomatic pressure to deter Azerbaijan from invading Armenia, U.S. policy still views Baku as a partner that can be managed, as opposed to a former partner that is engaging in leash-slipping. Within this framework, the U.S. fully supports Armenia's claims vis-a-vis Azerbaijan's aggressive demeanor, Yerevan's claim that Russia and Azerbaijan have formed an axis, and that Azerbaijan remains the disruptive, destabilizing force in the region. At the same time, while conceding to these concerning developments with respect to Azerbaijan, the U.S. still operates under the logic that the Aliyev regime is a rational actor that can collaborate with the U.S. in curtailing Iran's regional aspirations, while at the same time believing that for all of its bellicose rhetoric, Baku still seeks peace with Armenia.

This almost contradictory perspective of the United States is driven by three factors: 1) U.S. is still acclimating to the development that Armenia is no longer a Russian satellite, and as such, it is attempting to balance its long-held and relatively close relations with Azerbaijan and the new reality that Armenia is no longer a Russian vassal, and as such, a healthier option for the U.S.; 2) while the U.S. concedes that Azerbaijan is the aggressor and the unjust party in the current state of things, it qualifies Baku's current state of animosity as a legacy of the 30 year Karabakh conflict, which, as far as the U.S. is concerned, Azerbaijan is the victim that was subjected to decades of Russo-Armenian occupation; and 3) while U.S., for all intents and purposes, strongly sympathizes and even sides with Armenia, its fundamental policy is driven by securing a peace treaty, and in this context, U.S. is displaying a severe aversion to taking punitive actions against Azerbaijan for its bellicose demeanor, as the U.S. considers punitive actions (i.e., sanctions) to be counterproductive to the peace process.

Within the confluence of these conflicting, yet inter-mitigating developments, the United States is seeking to support democratic Armenia against Azerbaijan's destructive ambitions, while at the same time supporting Armenia's decoupling from Russia to further weaken Moscow's influence in the South Caucasus. While being rigid on its position that sanctioning Azerbaijan is not a preferred option, the U.S. has displayed much openness to addressing the power disparity between the two countries, since it now concedes that as long as the balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains unequal, the stronger party will not agree to peace with the weaker party. As such, a developing policy position of the U.S. is to help close the parity disparity, which, in essence, revolves around two factors: enhancing Armenia's deterrence capabilities and potentially arming Armenia to close the power disparity. To this end, while the U.S. remains skeptical of taking punitive measures, it has decided to address the "problem of peace" by not "forcing" Azerbaijan to come to terms, but rather, by strengthening Armenia's ability to resist Azerbaijan, which, in turn, will change the entire power dynamics and the coercive approach of Baku.

# **The Geopolitical and Geo-economic Background of the Armenian-Indian Partnership**

Yeghia Tashjian

## **Introduction**

After Armenia's military defeat in 2020, the country became politically isolated. Due to its poor infrastructure compared to Azerbaijan, the latter started playing an active role in regional transport routes both within the context of the Türkiye-backed "Middle Corridor" connecting China to Europe, and the "International North-South Transport Corridor" connecting Russia to India. This prompted China to heavily invest in Georgia and Azerbaijan. This meanwhile, benefited India, as Yerevan has strived to establish ties with rising Asian countries aiming to diversify its economic and security relations. In recent years a strong political bond has been established between Yerevan and New Delhi. High-profile visits have characterized bilateral relations, and this was solidified with India's PM Narendra Modi's meeting with PM Nikol Pashinyan in New York in September 2019 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Thereafter both governments coordinated their positions on Kashmir and Azerbaijan's aggression toward Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

For many Indians and Armenians, the relationship between both countries has a civilizational approach. Many Indians view Armenia as a stronghold against Türkiye's pan-Turkic aspiration in the region. Türkiye's rapprochement with Pakistan and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's remarks on Kashmir have created anxiety among Indian policymakers. The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh and the loss of Armenians against Türkiye and Pakistan-backed Azerbaijan raised some concerns in New Delhi about the intention of this axis in the region. However, one should bear in mind that India's involvement in the South Caucasus and its military back up to Armenia is not only limited to geopolitical factors. New Delhi has also geo-economic ambitions in the region within the north-south connectivity trade linking the Indian Ocean to northern Russia and the Baltic Sea.

To go in-depth on this topic, the paper will analyze these two factors, examine the security and military dimension of relations between Armenia and India, and finally reflect upon the current status and suggest ways to deepen and consolidate political, economic, and security ties between both states.

### **India's Geo-economic and Geopolitical Interests in the Region**

India's main geo-economic objective in the South Caucasus is the realization of the "International North-South Transport Corridor" (INSTC) connecting the Indian Ocean to northern Russia and the Baltic Sea. In 2000, Russia, Iran, and India initiated this grand project of a 7200 km model of ship network, rail, and road project to facilitate trade in Eurasia. This mega project aims to reduce the delivery time of cargo from India to Russia and Northern Europe to the Persian Gulf and beyond. As [compared](#) with the sea route via the Suez Canal, this route's distance falls by more than half, which subsequently brings the time and cost of transportation down considerably (Info BRICS, 2022).

The INSTC is perceived as New Delhi's counterweight strategy to China's ambitious "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). This corridor is going to leave a huge impact on India's engagement with Eurasia. As the fifth largest economy in the world, India looks forward to fostering deeper and stronger ties in the region. The project also has geopolitical significance as it bypasses New Delhi's main opponent, Pakistan, and strengthens political and economic ties with Russia, which is eager to expand trade due to its ongoing war with Ukraine. To connect the Eurasian mainland to the Indian Ocean, India invested up to \$635 million to develop the Iranian port of Chabahar (Alexandra, 2019).

Iran is a key transit player when it comes to north-south connectivity. To facilitate trade between India and Iran, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in 2015 for the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project. The railway project is being said to align with New Delhi's interest in creating an alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Nag, 2021). Viewed from New Delhi, if implemented this would have been a strategic victory over China, which has been interested in having a major stake in the infrastructure sector of Iran.

Armenia is also a potential transit player. According to Aditi Bhaduri, Armenia can play a transit role in the INSTC and the Black Sea-Persian Gulf corridor. whereby engaging in trade and defense cooperation, Armenia can become a “strategically significant partner for India”(Bhaduri, 2022). Bhaduri mentions that India can set up bases and a commercial and defense hub for joint manufacture. She argues that Indian involvement in Armenia should not be a source of concern for Moscow, as it could bring security, and stability in the South Caucasus where a strong and proactive Armenia will be beneficial and not a military burden on Russia, which is involved in long war in Ukraine (Bhaduri, 2022).

This rapprochement between Armenia and India is also motivated by new geopolitical realities. On September 29, 2022, Pranab Dhal Samanra published an article in the leading Indian newspaper *Economic Times* titled “India cannot ignore the dangerous adventures of the ‘three brothers’ in Armenia and elsewhere”. The author warned that if the Turkish-Azerbaijani-Pakistani axis is cemented in the South Caucasus, it can be replicated elsewhere, including Kashmir (Samanra, 2022). “It is probably in India’s interest that Armenia puts up a stand and not be trampled upon because of a power vacuum (in South Caucasus) caused by Russia’s preoccupation in Ukraine,” wrote Samanra (Samanra, 2022). For this reason, India is eager to see Armenia playing an active role in transport routes. Given the geopolitical motives of India and Iran to see Armenia being a transit hub for north-south connectivity, it is imperative that Armenia becomes part of this transit hub.

Moreover, the expansion of BRICS in January 2024, should give additional motivation for Armenia to apply to such structures (even as an observer member) to increase its economic and political interaction with rising Eurasian powers such as India and even China. This can be an important step in the sense of positioning Armenia in a regional multipolar system, and also sending clear signals to Moscow that Yerevan does not intend to join anti-Russian alliances and is even ready to cooperate with other supra-regional organizations where Russia values its membership in its view of a multipolar world system (Tashjian, 2023).

## **How does the NSTRC Enhance Armenia's Geo-economic Position?**

Given the challenges posed by Armenia's infrastructure and lack of railway connection to neighboring countries, as compared to Azerbaijan's crucial role in the International North-South Transport Corridor, Yerevan has pushed for an alternative corridor within the North-South connectivity, which is the Black Sea - Persian Gulf corridor, connecting Georgia to Iran via Armenia's ambitious "North-South Transport Road Corridor" (NSTRC). This road is one of the largest projects in the history of independent Armenia. The project aims to reduce the distance from the Iranian to the Georgian border from 550 to 490 km and would simplify Armenia's access to the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf (Invest Armenia, 2022). India and Iran are encouraging Armenia to take an active role in this transport link. Already, in late January 2024, Iran granted access to Armenia to its Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports to facilitate Armenia's trade access to India and the Persian Gulf (Tasnim News, 2024).

The implementation of this project has two benefits for Armenia: enhancing Armenia's geo-economic position within regional trade interconnectivity, and developing Armenia's infrastructure and economy.

This project will make it easier for Armenian shippers to enter international markets, and export their products, through simplified procedures over both land and sea. This new road will facilitate communication with Iran, Georgia, and beyond. However, it is envisaged that the construction should be finalized between 2030-2032 (European Investment Bank, 2013). Within this context and to promote Armenia's role as a regional transit country, Armenia's PM Nikol Pashinyan during the "Silk Road" International conference held in Tbilisi on October 26, 2023, presented Armenia's "Crossroads of Peace" project, emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation and connectivity (Government of Armenia, 2023). According to the PM this project will enhance communication between Armenia and neighboring countries, connect the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea, and defuse tension in the South Caucasus. Many countries welcomed Pashinyan's initiative. Russia maintained its silence but stressed on the implantation of the ninth clause of the Trilateral Statement signed in November 2020, which mentions that the Russian border guards (FSS) must control the road connecting Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan.



Baku not surprisingly criticized the idea of the project, arguing that, it will continue blocking the transportation routes with Armenia unless the former grants a corridor (controlled by Russia) to Azerbaijan (Tashjian, 2024).

When it comes to its impact on Armenia's economy, the implementation of the project will improve the socio-economic conditions, most importantly in the Syunik province where the people will get access to safe and efficient transport systems and improved access to service sectors and will reduce logistical costs (Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development). Furthermore, reducing transport and logistics costs will improve life for businesses and families, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. Most importantly, this project will provide serious development opportunities for all communities from the North to the South of Armenia. It will also facilitate communication with neighboring countries; expand and facilitate access to foreign markets towards Central Asia and Europe; develop major economic spheres and export expansion (industry, agriculture, mining industry, construction, tourism), etc.

### **The Security-Military Dimension of Armenian-Indian Relations**

Armenia had shown interest in Indian weaponry before the 2020 war. Already in March 2020, Yerevan signed a \$40 million arms deal to supply four SWATHI radars to detect the location of weapons (Shahbazov, 2020). The radar system is designed to track incoming artillery shells, and rockets, and pinpoint the locations of enemy positions. They have been successfully located near India's borders with China and Pakistan.

The May 2021 and September 2022 Azerbaijani incursions on Armenian territory and Russia's inability to supply weapons to Yerevan due to its war with Ukraine, prompted Armenia to diversify its security partners and India was one of the best candidates. Already in September 2022, Indian newspapers started reporting that India would be exporting missiles, rockets, and ammunition, including the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher (MBRL) system to Armenia (Pubby, 2022). Pinaka has six launchers (12 rockets), which can neutralize an area measuring 1000 meters x 800 meters with a range of 60-75 km. It is also designed to replace the Indian army's Russian-built BM-21 Grad launchers.

In addition to Pinaka, some newspapers also reported that India would be exporting anti-tank missiles to Armenia. In November 2023, the Indian Defense Company Bharat Forge Kalyani Group confirmed another major export deal with Armenia. The deal included the sale of advanced MArG 155-wheeled self-propelled howitzers and ATAGS 155 mm towed guns (Horizon, 2023). However, Indian experts argued that Pinaka and howitzers are insufficient as Armenia needs “BrahMos” and “Akash” missiles to “break the opponents’ teeth.”

Akash missiles would strengthen Armenia’s air defense capabilities. The “Akash” medium-range mobile surface-to-air missile (SAM) system is one of India’s most powerful missiles that can engage multiple aerial targets in any weather. Already in February 2024, *Eurasia Times* reported that there are “clear indications that Armenia has purchased an Indian-built surface-to-air missile (SAM) Akash (Sharma, 2024). This system can simultaneously engage multiple targets in a group or autonomous mode. It can effectively engage fighter jets, helicopters, and UAVs flying in the range of 4-25 km and is immune to active and passive jamming.

With military relations deepened, both countries can also find ways to strengthen their security ties such as intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and Armenian officers graduating from Indian military schools, and inviting Indian military advisors to Yerevan.

From the Indian perspective, these military agreements with Armenia can be seen as a way to deepen strategic ties with Türkiye’s and Azerbaijan’s adversarial neighbor, in retaliation to Ankara’s and Baku’s defense cooperation with Pakistan. Hence, India’s arms sale to Armenia goes beyond a business-as-usual relationship. As seen in Indian media, Indian experts and commentators argue that there is a geopolitical component in this relationship. Where India aims to establish itself as a reliable defense player globally and secure its national interests by containing the expansion of the Turkish- Azerbaijani-Pakistani axis to its borders.

## **Reflection and Conclusion**

The defense relationship is a testament to India’s growing role in the global defense sector and Armenia’s strategy to diversify its defense partnerships. This collaboration not only strengthens defense ties but also contributes to regional stability as it creates

a certain balance of power in the region. This partnership is consolidated by geopolitical and geo-economic factors.

Geopolitically, by arming Armenia, Yerevan will become a deterrent force against the “three brothers.” For New Delhi, Yerevan would be the first near abroad stronghold against the Turkish-led emerging “triple alliance.” Geo-economically, moving forward with the INSTC and NSTRC projects, conflicting parties will realize that economic interconnectivity and trade interdependency are crucial to overcoming conflicts. This process may take time, however, similar cases elsewhere have shown that trade may prevent or compartmentalize conflicts.

Within this context, the Indian-Armenian arms trade can be a win-win solution for both countries. If the Indian arms prove effective in the battleground in repelling Azerbaijani incursions, it could boost the Indian defense market and increase interest among other states in purchasing Indian arms. As relations are developing along both economic and military-strategic dimensions, they need to be further deepened to reach a strategic partnership level where both countries can engage in joint military drills. Armenia’s de-jure commitment to the CSTO and Russia will not prevent Yerevan from taking such steps towards India, as Moscow may realize in the future that India’s involvement in the region and its positive economic ties with Iran and Azerbaijan may stabilize the South Caucasus through the north-south connectivity.

# The Role of the European Union in the Security of Armenia

Sossi Tatikyan

## Background

The European Union [launched](#) its civilian mission in Armenia (EUMA) on February 20, 2023, within its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EUMA patrols and reports, which strengthens the EU's understanding of the situation on the ground. The EU deployed the mission in Armenia upon the request of the Armenian Government. The EU attempted but could not obtain Azerbaijan's authorization to deploy on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

The official mandate of the EUMA is to contribute to de-escalation and stability in Armenia's border areas, as well as support the delimitation and demarcation process and confidence-building between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Mission was tasked to complement mediation efforts led by President of the European Council Charles Michel. Later, in 2023, an additional task of the human security was added to its mandate.

The EUMA has an initial mandate of two years, and was planned to consist of a total of 100 personnel, which expanded to 209 upon a revised decision by the EU in 2023. Its headquarters has been established in Yeghegnadzor, and its field offices in Yeghegnadzor, Jermuk, Martuni, Kapan, Goris and Ijevan, as well as a liaison office in Yerevan. It is headed by Dr. [Markus Ritter](#), a senior German police officer with rich national and international experience. Not only 23 EU member states but also two non-EU member states – Canada and Norway are contributing to it.

The EUMA followed the two-month EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia (EUMCAP) which consisted of 40 observers drawn from the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia. This temporary arrangement was based on the [statement](#) adopted at the quadrilateral meeting between Armenia, Azerbaijan, France and the EU on October 6, 2022, in which Armenia and Azerbaijan confirmed their commitment to the UN Charter and the 1991 CIS Alma-Ata Declaration, through which both States recognized each other's territorial integrity and

sovereignty.

## **The Concept of Common Security and Defense Policy**

The aim of CSDP is to help prevent or resolve conflicts and crises, enhance the capacities of partners and, ultimately, protect the EU and its citizens. The CSDP is an integral part of EU's comprehensive approach towards crisis management, providing stability and building resilience in fragile environments. It provides the EU with an operational capacity to deploy civilian and military missions and operations abroad.

CSDP missions and operations contribute to global security abroad & at home based on the notion that what happens beyond the EU's borders has a direct impact on the security of European citizens. Since the launch of the first missions and operations in 2003, the EU has continuously enhanced its structures, mechanisms and tools to promote stability and security in our neighbourhood and beyond, thereby contributing to increased security in the EU.

CSDP Missions can be military and civilian, and they have different configurations. Their main tasks are: a) Conflict prevention, Peace-keeping, Crisis management; b) Joint disarmament operations; c) Military advice and assistance; d) Humanitarian and rescue and post-conflict stabilisation tasks.

There has been a total of 40 CSDP missions with over 4000 civilian and military personnel, out of which 22 are ongoing, 9 are military and 13 are civilian in three continents – Europe, Africa and Middle East.

## **Stakeholders analysis**

### **Armenia**

Armenia is aiming to preserve its territorial integrity in light of Azerbaijan's military offensives in [May 2021](#), [November 2021](#) and [September 2022](#), as well as Azerbaijan's creeping annexation that is advancing its positions in between military offensives, expansionist Armenia in the South Caucasus

territorial demands and the threats to use force, i.e. launch new military offensives whether large- or small-scale, against Armenia if the latter doesn't agree to its demands. According to Armenian sources, Azerbaijan has [occupied](#) more than 200 square kilometers of the territory of sovereign Armenia in 2021-2023.

Moreover, while engaging in offensive operations, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense systematically spreads disinformation blaming Armenia for provoking them. Being far away, EU member countries did not know when to expect a new military escalation and did not know what position to adopt. By monitoring and reporting, the Mission raises the awareness of EU member countries about the security situation and military provocations. The positions of the EU member states in relation to Azerbaijani-Armenian issues have become clearer, and they have become more supportive to Armenia.

The EUMA's deployment overcame the common narrative amongst conservative circles in Armenia that only Russia is interested in maintaining a presence in the conflict zone between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It decreased Armenia's security dependence on Russia and the CSTO, both of which have become more of a perceived threat than a security guarantor, and empowered Armenia to consider withdrawal from CSTO. Armenia's alliance with Russia and membership to the CSTO cause a clash of values with its adopted system of democratic governance, stigmatizing Armenia in the eyes of the Euro-Atlantic community. At the same time, while [maneuvering](#) between major actors of the region, including Russia, Azerbaijan has been trying to label Armenia as a [Russian proxy](#). The EUMA's presence makes it difficult for Azerbaijan and its lobbyists to push that narrative further, especially given both Azerbaijan's and Russia's opposition to the mission. Thus, Aliyev has changed his narrative, now [stating](#) Armenia for having "lost the chance to become a really independent country" and "looking for a new master or masters".

Even if the EUMA is a purely [soft deterrent](#) and does not provide Armenia with hard security, its deployment reduces Armenia's vulnerability to Azerbaijani aggression and military coercion. Since the EU Mission was deployed, Azerbaijani offensives against Armenia have significantly decreased, along with its allegations that Armenia is provoking it. The EU Mission has not eliminated but has significantly reduced Armenia's anxiety about the  
Armenia in the South Caucasus

possibility of new military offensives by Azerbaijan.

## **Reactions by Azerbaijan and Russia to the EUMA's deployment and activities**

Azerbaijan and Russia have objected to the deployment of the EUMA and launched an increasing disinformation campaign and hybrid war about the nature and objectives of the mission.

The Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan has [cautioned](#) that the mission must consider “the legitimate interests of Azerbaijan” and “not be exploited for derailing the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia.” President Aliyev of Azerbaijan has [called](#) the EU’s intention to deploy the mission a “very unpleasant fact.” Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov has [stated](#) that the deployment of a new mission “could only be counterproductive” in building trust since it would not have the approval of the Azerbaijani side. He also [suggested](#) that the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) had prepared a plan to deploy a peacekeeping operation on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but Armenia chose the EU Mission.

Armenia relied on its military alliance with Russia and its CSTO membership for support in defending its territorial integrity until the incursions of Azerbaijan into Armenia in 2021-2022 and sent requests for support to CSTO after them. However, neither Russia nor the CSTO fulfilled their commitments, leaving Armenia alone in the face of military blackmail and aggression. Armenia’s urging of a UNSC [meeting](#) after the September 2022 military offensive was supported by France and not its formal ally Russia. The Permanent Representative of Russia failed to explicitly state at the meeting that Azerbaijan violated Armenia’s territorial integrity and presented it as a problem related to border delimitation and demarcation, which echoed the Azerbaijani narrative, unlike the US, France and the EU that demonstrated much more explicit political support to Armenia.

Subsequently, the CSTO sent a fact-finding [mission](#) to Armenia in September 2022 and offered technical assistance; however, only after it realised the EU is planning to deploy a mission, and likely in order to hinder it. At that point, it had already has lost its credibility in Armenia in the South Caucasus

Armenia. At the CSTO summit in November 2022, Pashinyan [pointed out](#) that, “Armenia’s membership in the CSTO did not stop Azerbaijan from resorting to aggressive actions,” and the CSTO has not been able “to make a decision regarding its response to Azerbaijan’s aggression against Armenia.”

The lack of Russian support for Armenia in light of Azerbaijan’s military aggression has been conditioned by the growing alliance between Russia and Azerbaijan, reflected in their [Joint Declaration](#) of February 22, 2022. The CSTO’s reluctance to support Armenia is also based on other CSTO members’ [closer relations](#) with Azerbaijan — unsurprising given their common geopolitical interests and similarly [autocratic governance systems](#) while, in contrast, Armenia has committed itself to democracy. Moreover, liberal circles in Armenia are convinced that it is in the [common interest](#) of Russia and Azerbaijan to make Armenia concede an extra-territorial corridor controlled by the Russia’s Federal Security Service that would not only link Azerbaijan with Turkey but would be also used by Russia to bypass western-imposed economic sanctions.

## **The European Union**

The EU’s prompt action in relation to the deployment of both temporary and long-term missions in Armenia is unprecedented. As leading European experts have [noted](#), “no one imagined that this [Prague] meeting would lead to a new two-year civilian EU mission.”

It was not easy for the EU to decide to deploy this mission due to Baku’s opposition, Russia’s political and military presence in the area, Armenia’s formal membership of the CSTO, and reservations of several EU member countries due to their [energy deals](#) with Azerbaijan. Moreover, Armenia had suspended diplomatic relations with Hungary until [December 2022](#).

Geopolitical experts see the establishment of an EU mission as a competition between Russia and the EU for influence in the region. Some claim that Russia is trying to turn Armenia into an [outpost](#), while others believe that “now is a [good time](#) [for the EU] to use this situation to strengthen its positions and weaken Russia’s positions in Armenia.”



The September 2022 offensive followed the gas [deal](#) that the EU concluded with Azerbaijan in July 2022. Azerbaijan promised to double the supply of its gas to the EU through the expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor. The EU sees that cooperation as creating an alternative to Russian gas supplies and contributing significantly to Europe's energy security, calling Azerbaijan a [reliable partner](#). The EU was criticized for this deal not only by Armenian civil society and experts but also by international human rights [watchdogs](#), who have noted that it is [short-sighted](#) to replace one autocratic country with another as an alternative energy source. This makes for the EU to balance between its different roles —a value-based normative actor, an impartial mediator and a geopolitical actor in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Azerbaijan reportedly doesn't have the amount of gas that it has committed to supply, neither a capacity to deliver them to the EU member countries. Azerbaijan [needs to use](#) critical infrastructure co-owned by Russian Lukoil company to extract and transport the gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe, which may explain Lukoil's \$1.5 billion to raise its stake in the Azeri gas project in 2022. In November 2022, Azerbaijan also concluded a deal with the Russian Gazprom to import Russian gas, which may indicate that it is partially "laundering" Russian gas to Europe for a higher price.

The Azerbaijani offensive of September 2022 showed how fragile the security of the region is. The EU realized the high possibility of a new large-scale war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The war in Ukraine became a threat not only to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty but also to the security of the EU and associated countries — especially to Finland, the Baltic States and Moldova. Although threats by Azerbaijan towards Armenia are not considered direct threats to EU member countries, nevertheless, a new war in the European neighborhood will overwhelm the EU, and will make it more difficult to tackle the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Thus, the EUMA contributes to both Armenia's and regional security, and EU's external environment.

In terms of principles and values, if after [failing to prevent](#) ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh for the sake of the notion of territorial integrity, the US and EU do not support democratic Armenia's territorial integrity because of Azerbaijan's role as an energy supplier, in contrary to their support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, they will have a further

[reputational cost](#) as normative actors committed to human rights and democracy. Besides, it will undermine the notions of territorial integrity and sovereignty, international order, and weaken the case of Ukraine as well. The deployment of the EU Mission is based on both the geopolitical interests and core values of the EU, and therefore combines liberalist and realpolitik [motivations](#).

While being [soft](#) on Azerbaijan and failing in their mediation role in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the US and the EU have been more robust in expressing their support for Armenia's territorial integrity in face of Azerbaijan's military intrusions and creeping annexation of Armenia's border areas. If Azerbaijan continues its military offensives, it will invite more condemnation and it will become difficult for Europe to maintain a spirit of partnership with it. Even if the EU is becoming a [geopolitical actor](#), it cannot give up on its core values of human rights and democracy. Azerbaijan's President Aliyev most likely understands this and is cautious to take actions that will bring high political and economic costs.

## **Limitations and Expectations Management**

The EUMA is envisaged to be a small civilian mission that is neither mandated, nor has the capacity to resist any military offensive. Instead, it is expected to be a deterrent to another potential Azerbaijani offensive through its political leverage and physical presence.

It is important to manage expectations in relation to the EUMA mandate and capacities. Armenian society is highly polarized and while its liberal circles have exaggerated expectations, conservative groups tend to underestimate, be skeptical or critical of the EUMA's role in strengthening Armenia's security, and some even see it as a potential destabilizing factor.

While Azerbaijan will be cautious about inciting military aggression against Armenia in the presence of the EU monitors, and Russia will likely avoid direct confrontation with countries, most of which are NATO allies, both may use hybrid war instruments and coercive diplomacy against Armenia.

Armenia understands the limitations of the EU Mission, and has started restoring its security and defense sector to defend its territory and people, in particular, obtaining armaments and military equipment from India and France and advancing defense cooperation with Greece and Cyprus; however, Azerbaijan is continuing to purchase them in much higher quantities from Israel, Turkey, Serbia, Pakistan, Serbia, as well as two EU member countries – Italy and Bulgaria.

Armenia [requested](#) security assistance from the EU's Peace Facility (EPF) in June 2023. The EU did not rush to approve it but in November 2023, it decided to consider the provision of non-lethal security assistance from EPF to Armenia. If it materializes, it will contribute to the restoration of Armenia's defense and security sector.

A peace agreement without the reduction of the [military imbalance](#) between Armenia and Azerbaijan will not be sustainable. It is also important for the EUMA's exit strategy and sustainable peace and security in the region.

### **Armenia's Newly Forming EU Membership Aspirations**

One of the most significant [attempts](#) by Armenia to diversify its foreign policy was Armenia's intention to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013. Just weeks before the planned signing in 2013, Serzh Sargsyan was summoned to Moscow by Russian President Putin. During a joint press conference, Putin [announced](#) that Armenia had agreed to join the Russia-led Customs Union, which later became the Eurasian Economic Union. The sudden change in policy was presented to the Armenian public as a [choice between security and democracy](#), with the goal of preventing war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2017, Armenia signed a downgraded document called the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement ([CEPA](#)) with the EU, which did not include components related to security and a free trade zone.

Since October 2023, PM [Pashinyan](#) and Foreign Minister [Mirzoyan](#) have implied that Armenia in the South Caucasus

Armenia would be interested in taking its partnership with the EU as far as the EU is willing to consider, hinting at possible membership aspirations. Russian state media has quoted [the reaction](#) of an anonymous high-ranking official: "We see how Armenia is trying to turn into Ukraine No. 3, if we consider Moldova as Ukraine No. 2, and Pashinyan is following in Vladimir Zelensky's footsteps by quantum leaps." Armenia has [welcomed](#) EU's decision to grant candidate status to Georgia and indicated that Armenian people also share European identity and its civil society has European aspirations. If Georgia becomes an EU member, Armenia has to choose a similar path or remain stuck between mostly unfriendly autocratic regional powers. The EU is [considering](#) further steps aimed at enhancing Armenian-EU cooperation, including visa liberalization. On March 12, 2024, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) proposing to the EU to consider the possibility of granting Armenia a candidate status for its membership.

However, it is premature to expect a clear position from the EU on Armenia's membership aspirations. It remains to be seen whether the EU member states are interested in accommodating Armenia's [membership](#) aspirations, given Armenia's peripheric location in the European neighborhood. Even if the EU responds to Armenia's aspirations positively, it may take a long time to become a member, and it will be difficult to manage security challenges to Armenia throughout that period. Given that the EU is not a security organization, even its membership will not resolve Armenia's security issues. And even if there are more questions than answers, there is no better alternative for Armenia than an EU membership, and Armenia should aim to combine strengthening its security governance with reducing and neutralizing conventional defense and hybrid threats, and enhancement of relations with potential partners, with a focus on but not limited to the EU. Regionalization is not a favorable option for Armenia but a balanced combination of diversification, multi-polarity and integration may lead to favorable results.

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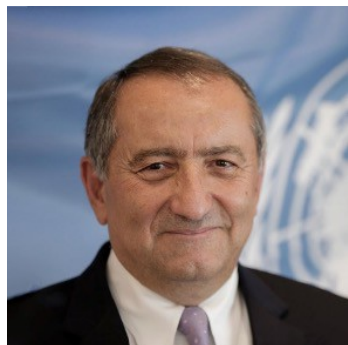
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## Biographies



**Dr. David Akopyan** had dual careers- PHD in physics studied complex systems, after for 26 years worked for the UN in 15 countries across many regions. Last 10 years of his UN career spent in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria, worst crisis affected countries, holding leadership positions as UN Development Program Deputy Director, Country Director and Resident Representative. He is also AUA (America University of Armenia), 2019 distinguished alumnus. Early 2021 David retired from the UN and joined the Artsakh Government as the Principal advisor to State Minister helping to coordinate humanitarian and development assistance. He is also an ex officio advisor to the President of Armenia, the Chair of the Board of Trustees of reArmenia foundation, member of APRI (Applied Policy Research Institute/ AGBU) Board of directors and the Insurance Foundation of servicemen.



**Dr. Hriar Cabayan** is currently a Visiting Scientist at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. He joined the Laboratory in 1977. In 1997 he joined the Joint Staff (Pentagon) where he managed a program to support operational planning. He received the Joint Meritorious Civilian Service Award from the Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2007 and again in 2019. He returned to Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in October 2019. He received his Doctorate Degree from the University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois. After graduating, he taught mathematical physics for four years at New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences and McGill University before joining Lawrence Livermore laboratory.



**Ms. Anna Gevorgyan** received her MA degree in Iranian Studies from the Chair of Iranian Studies in 2009 (Department of Oriental Studies, Yerevan State University (YSU)). Since September 2009 she has been a researcher at the YSU and



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**Dr. Nzhdeh Hovsepyan** is a historian. He received his PhD degree from the Yerevan State University. He studied Public Policy and Administration at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University as well as Diplomacy and International Affairs at the Diplomatic Academy of Armenian MFA. He is currently the Director of the "Radar Armenia" News Agency and at the same time has been chairing the

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**Dr. Alexander Iskandaryan** is a political scientist, the Director of the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute. His areas of study are ethno-political conflicts, post-Communist transformations and nation building in the former USSR in general and in the Caucasus in particular. He has published and spoken on the emergence of post Soviet institutions, elites and identities; he has also conducted and supervised

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**Dr. Nerses Kopalyan** is an associate professor-in-residence of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His fields of specialization include international security, geopolitics, political theory, and philosophy of science. He has conducted extensive research on polarity, superpower relations, and security studies. He is the author of *World Political Systems After Polarity* (Routledge, 2017), the co-author of *Sex, Power, And Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), co-author of *Latinos in Nevada: A Political, Social, and Economic Profile* (Nevada University Press, 2021), and co-author of *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War* (Taylor and Francis, forthcoming 2023). He is also a regular contributor to EVN Report with over 50 articles. He has also contributed publications with *Le Figaro*, *The Times of Israel*, and *The National Interest*. His current research and academic publication concentrate on geopolitical and great power relations within Eurasia, its impact on small state security, and the broader implications for democratic breakthroughs within authoritarian orbits. He has conducted extensive field work in Armenia on the country's security architecture and its democratization process. He has authored several policy papers for the Government of Armenia and served as voluntary advisor to various state institutions.



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**Sossi Tatikyan** received her YSU Diploma, Harvard MPA, ESCP Business School EMBA, and currently is a PhD Researcher in Sorbonne Nouvelle University. She has been a diplomat, representing Armenia in NATO, UNODC, IAEA and OPCW. Sossi has worked as a Political and Security Sector Reform Adviser in the OSCE and UN political and peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Central African Republic, African Union and Gambia, and is a member of the UN Senior Women Talent Pipeline. Tatikyan has coordinated UNDP and US Freedom House and has consulted DCAF good governance projects in Armenia. Since 2020, she has been providing policy advice on foreign and security policies of Armenia, peacekeeping and peacebuilding through policy articles, TV interviews and public diplomacy activities.