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Armenia: Overcoming Economic and Geopolitical Obstacles

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Armenia: Overcoming Economic and Geopolitical Obstacles

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Abstract

Over thirty years of Armenian independence has been characterized by existential security threats, a hollow political establishment, economic and defense reliance on Russia, and an out of touch diaspora. This paper takes on a historical analysis to identify the roots of these problems, and ultimately attempts to seek out potential solutions and identify Armenia's place in an ever changing global landscape. Beyond the history, it studies the relationships Armenia has with its neighbors, its diaspora, and the international community at large. Establishing a forward looking outlook, Armenia's goals should be oriented toward investment based relations with its diaspora; embracing the role of a north-south transit state from Iran to the Black Sea; and expanding defense partners beyond Russia to willing states such as India or Iran. Furthermore, it should begin taking efforts to evaluate and revamp its energy infrastructure, diversifying and domesticating ownership. Ultimately, the region at large is likely on the precipice of turbulent change. Between the potential implications of Russia's war in Ukraine, continuous instability in Iran, and rampant autocracy between Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia is unique in being not only democratic, but with growing untapped human potential and geographic relevance.

I. Introduction

In geopolitics and state rivalries, power and leverage is first and foremost. For some states, this power and leverage was earned and embedded early in their histories – prior to the contemporary order of nations – and resulted in a legacy of power. Others through sheer and lasting conquest and empire – such as Britain, Russia, or China. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the peaks of many empires but also marked the slow curtailment into what resembles today's global configuration.

The implications of power earned by nations is demonstrated in trade, military might, alliances, and rivalries. Economic arrangements bind dependencies, security guarantees leave smaller countries unable to develop their own means of defending themselves – or more importantly, developing and asserting their own power – and when, at the end of the day, the countries whose borders are defined by imperial pasts and meddling find themselves subjugated by the will of global and regional powers, they often lose their own will at its basis of the populous. Political institutions become staffed not by patriots and experts but by those who are most keen to cooperate with the domineering outside powers. The people, who make up the conscience and identities of a nation are gradually disenfranchised and left without a voice to direct *their* nation; most dangerously, their nation becomes a place where they are unable to actualize their own interests and ambitions.

This paper seeks to address the complexities faced by Armenia since its independence from the Soviet Union, and relate them to its former imperial parent states – Russia and Turkey. How has Armenia been swept into the corner of today’s global order? What can it do to reassert its sovereignty and domestic will, and to overcome the imperial legacies that hold it back, and ideally, create a roadmap for success? Most importantly, the paper will examine what Armenia has done to hold itself back. Furthermore, it will analyze how global and regional powers compete for geopolitical dominance and cast a shadow over fledging nations. Through this lens, Armenia has been geopolitically confined and economically exploited by the domineering of Russia and Turkey, to include their respective imperial predecessors. Nevertheless, avenues for greater prosperity can be sought by examining factors within Armenia’s control as well as by considering particular global dynamics and interests as strategic opportunities.

The method for developing such a roadmap will focus on first identifying how Armenia has gotten to where it is today, then analyzing the different facets of its national framework (state, society, business, and culture), criticizing where it have fallen subject to detrimental influence, and how it can break free from constraints placed upon its people and institutions. A critical point in this effort will be to distinguish between malicious elites, who scrape off the top and collaborate with outside forces, from influential benevolent elites and the broader ‘skilled and educated’ socioeconomic classes potentially capable of disrupting the *status quo*.

This analysis will be established partly on the backdrop of Russian-Turkish ‘co-opetition,’ “a term coined by Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff to describe a paradoxical strategy of cooperation among competitors, enabling them to collectively achieve mutual gains.”¹ Both nations have long histories of empire and, since the contemporary era, have a track record of maintaining a grip on their former subjects – now themselves independent states. This dynamic is underscored in Armenia, as well as elsewhere such as Syria. Russia and Turkey not only butt heads for influence and control, but also pragmatically utilize the circumstances to each other's benefits, often to assert a sort of backyard dominance in order to stave off outside competitors from entering the sphere. As Jeffery Mankoff puts it in his book *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security*, “Russian president Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are particularly adept in portraying themselves as heirs to their respective countries’ imperial traditions – a new tsar and a new sultan”.²

¹ Tashjian, Yeghia. “The Russian-Turkish ‘Co-opetition’ in Eurasia and Beyond.” *The Armenian Weekly*, 23 November 2021.

² Mankoff, Jeffery. *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security*. Yale University Press, 18 April 2022, 3.

Imperial legacies leave a lasting effect on a state's ability and posture in governance. The subject states – those that were under imperial rule – more often than not become plagued by a shadow of their imperial past, and as a consequence limited in the ability to exercise full national sovereignty, and for the development of a strong and conclusive national consciousness. Conversely, the former imperial powers largely rely on their dominating past as rhetoric and justification for present decision making in foreign policy. This dynamic challenges legal and ethical frameworks – mostly established after the First and Second World Wars – for equality among nations, and the pursuit of national interests, especially in the cases of states who are disadvantaged because of their history as imperial subjects. “Since 1945, the principles of self-determination, states' sovereign equality, and right to territorial inviolability have served as the bedrock for claims of political legitimacy, and the foundation upon which norms and institutions underpinning the global order rest.”³ In practice however, these norms are frequently violated, setting little precedent for realistic aims especially for disadvantaged states, states whose issues and lack of resources force them to gravitate to more influential powers.

II. Methodology

“Yes, *hokis*, reality is often bitter but nevertheless it is reality we have to look it straight into the face, live through it, and someday change it. Until we change it we have to do many things we'd prefer not doing; we have to be responsible and politically realistic... The fact is that an enormous amount of people do very bad things – things that are against our people's true interests – without even knowing it. Many of them are even convinced they're doing something good and necessary.” - Monte Melkonian, *Letter to his wife Seta* (19-20 November 1988)⁴

“Change, of course, is constant, and new and frequently unexpected circumstances come to the fore. Nevertheless, it is equally true that history, society and human behavior are proper objects of scientific inquiry. Despite periodic appearances to the contrary, nothing ever spontaneously goes berserk. Most historical change has been unintended, of course, but there are always identifiable *causes* of historical change. This is why a *scientific*

³ Mankoff. *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security*, 4.

⁴ Melkonian, Seta. “Monte Melkonian: Reality is Often Bitter.” *Hetq*, 24 November 2012.

political line can be drawn up, and why we can speak of a realistic and systematic political strategy.” - Monte Melkonian⁵

In writing a thesis, it was determined early on that it ought not to be a drawn out analytical essay, but rather an attempt to devise potential solutions for real problems. The choice to take on the crisis in Armenia derives from its fluidity, nuance, and the increasingly dire need for a creative solution; moreover, it should seek to draw a narrative of cautionary tales.

To achieve these aims there are definite biases. I am an Armenian – though from the United States – who has lived and worked in Armenia. I view taking on this matter in such detail as a means to develop my own expertise on the subject as a first step to becoming an active player in Armenia’s future.

While I am not an expert researcher in geopolitics, economics, or even the South Caucasus, I have caught glimpses of the Armenian reality. Understanding and valuing the reality is a key basis for establishing viable ‘ways out.’ That begins with identifying the constraints – security, economic, political, and cultural – and their roots.

This paper will specifically focus on how – since its independence in 1991 – Armenia has been economically manipulated and constrained by Russia, while simultaneously having its security made a strategic leverage point between Russia and Turkey, who – by different means – restrict Armenia’s access to global markets and even basic efforts at exerting a sovereign foreign policy agenda. In seeking solutions to the exploitation and constraints, the paper will not only consider the role of the outside entities which have affected the Republic of Armenia, but also the factors within the broader *Armenian nation* – to include its influential and widespread diaspora. Solutions will primarily be sought out by looking inward, framing potential models that

⁵ Melkonian, Monte, and Markar Melkonian. *The Right to Struggle: Selected Writings of Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question*. Sardarabad Press, 1993, 53.

emphasize the reassertion of economic independence and the strengthening of security against legitimate and existential threats faced from Azerbaijan and its effective backer Turkey.

In establishing this outlook, a case ought to be made in evaluating Armenian national identity. Armenians have constructed a legacy of struggle and defiance. From ancient folklore to the work of *fedayees*, having faced a genocide but never justice, Armenians have managed to cling on to national identity on the basis of perseverance. The perseverance is characterized and grounded by culture, language, religion, and land. In building the ideal Armenian nation many have cited Israel as a model, but the fact is that the situation (particularly regarding security and the matter of Artsakh) has come to look more like Palestine.⁶ What has the degradation of a nation done to the identity of its people? How has it pulled them away from their cause or brought unwanted compromises? This will be another key discovery sought out through the case studies.

The primary objective is to detail how a small and embattled country like Armenia can elevate itself from being a ‘chess piece’ on the board of global powers, to a self asserting nation free to pursue its own genuine interests. This is easier said than done. Armenia faces numerous realities that make any sort of immediate and absolute severance from Russia practically impossible, the process should be understood as gradual. Moreover, regarding the security dilemma at Armenia’s borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, this issue requires that Armenia begin to ‘pull its own weight’ and act strategically in the domestic and international playing fields.

III. Background:

Early History

⁶ Minasian, Haig, host. “Tebi Artsakh.” *Haytoug Talks*, season 2, episode 31, ARF West, 25 October 2022.

Throughout Armenia's millennia long history, it has existed as a sovereign state less than a handful of times, most distinctly it was the Kingdom of Armenia from 331 BC to 428 AD, Bagratid Armenia from 885 to 1045 AD, and the Kingdom of Cilicia from 1198 to 1375.⁷ With the exception of Cilicia – which was founded as a sort of exile state upon the Seljuk invasions into Anatolia – all of these states presided over the area known as the Armenian Highlands, spanning from eastern Anatolia in today's Turkey, eastward into contemporary Armenia and parts of Azerbaijan. In the interspersed periods between these kingdoms, and in the long period after them, Armenia was inherently subject to the push and pull of different conquerors. From the Assyrians to the Romans, the Mongols, the Arab Caliphates and Persia, finally to the Ottomans and Russians – Armenia was and still is at a geographic crossroads for empires and their desires to expand east and west.

Outside of these brief moments of sovereignty, Armenia and Armenians were often divided, shuffled around, and persecuted by different prevailing kingdoms and empires. Of this long and disjointed history, fundamental to its survival and persistence was the unique Armenian language – specifically the creation of the Armenian alphabet – and the early adoption of Christianity. “By adopting the new religion in the fourth century, Armenia renounced its Eastern or Persian-influenced past, established a distinct Christian character of its own, and, at times, became identified with the Western World.”⁸ While Christianity was adopted in part as a strategic move, the Church became a power mechanism that – to an extent – transcended empires and kept Armenians from assimilating. Centuries later, Armenia's Christianity would become yet another facet to its subjugation, as both a basis for Ottoman persecution, and by Russia, utilizing Christian solidarity as one mechanism to justify its assertion of influence.

⁷ Bournoutian, George A. *A Concise History of the Armenian People: From Ancient Times to Present*. Mazda Pub, 30 June 2002.

⁸ Bournoutian. *A Concise History of the Armenian People: From Ancient Times to Present*, 47.

Nineteenth Century

The defining lead up to today's Armenia transpired most entirely between the Russo-Ottoman and Persian wars spanning from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. This period saw the concrete distinction of an Eastern and Western Armenia split between empires. The butting of heads between Tsarist Russia and Ottoman Turkey – as well as the ebb and flow of Persian dominance in the eighteenth century – went beyond simple expansion. Eastern Anatolia's Armenian majority population became the subject of a politicization game for favor and security. “In 1878, Russia pushed its borders as far as Kars in northern Anatolia. Armenians under Ottoman rule looked to it for support and protection.”⁹ Though it was support and protection under threat of decades long Ottoman-Turkish persecution and ultimately genocide.

The late nineteenth century saw the start of serious contention between Russia and Turkey over the native Armenian land of eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus. For Armenians caught in the middle, the matter was highly politicized, beginning to shape the present narrative.

The *Zartonk* Period

The perspective of Armenians in the late nineteenth into the twentieth century, while nuanced, possessed a general consensus. First and foremost, the future for Armenians living in their native lands within the Ottoman Empire was increasingly grim. Persecution and gradual deprivation of basic rights and citizenry were being stripped away. The need for a political awakening was heard and realized. This awakening – the *Zartonk* – advocated for, at the least, the observation of basic rights for Armenians as citizens of the Ottoman Empire; the more absolutist actors called for not just increased autonomy for Armenian majority regions in the Ottoman Empire but even a free and independent Armenian *nation*.

⁹ Trenin, Dmitri. *What is Russia Up to in the Middle East?* Polity, 11 December 2017, 14.

The ideologies surrounding Armenian national awakening were particularly salient among the peasant classes in rural areas. Armenian scholar Gerard Libaridian sums up the case, “The nationalism associated with the interests of the dispossessed classes in the provinces acquired additional potency since the laboring Armenian classes were in the Armenian provinces, where most Armenians lived. [...] By grounding nationalism in a historically well-defined territory, love of fatherland gave the emancipation movement a political legitimacy denied to those whose love was for the abstracted cultural-religious heritage of Armenians.”¹⁰ The distinction between legitimacy grounded in ‘historically-well defined lands,’ opposed to the ‘abstracted cultural-religious heritage of Armenians’ became a key basis for the early national movement, as the struggle became identified in part with class-conflict and socialism. Furthermore, Libaridian writes, “The peasants’ link to the land of Armenia was neither culturally inspired nor politically negotiable. [...] The land was their source of livelihood, just as it had been for their ancestors throughout the centuries. This identity was not, therefore, in and by itself an acceptance or rejection of Ottoman rule, just as Armenians’ attachment to the land was neither a threat nor a confirmation of Ottoman territorial integrity.”¹¹

Naturally, the proliferation of these sentiments were not received well by the Ottoman administration, and even select groups of the Armenian elite (in Istanbul and representative throughout Anatolia, mostly fearing the seizure and destruction of their assets by Ottoman forces or Kurdish tribes). The Ottoman Empire, under Sultan Abdul Hamid II, saw the *Zartonk* period as a legitimate threat and acted. This was epitomized in the Hamidian Massacres of 1894 to 1897, in which some 100,000 to 200,000 Armenians, as well as 25,000 Assyrians¹² were killed via systematic and state sponsored massacres. Amidst the massacres – as an effort to draw

¹⁰ Libaridian, Gerard J. *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, and State*. Routledge, 15 March 2007, 72.

¹¹ Libaridian. *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, and State*, 85.

¹² See Diyarbekir Massacres

European attention to the violence – in August 1896, members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF/*Dashnaktsutyun*) occupied the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul. The fourteen hour standoff resulted in direct retaliation, 6,000 Armenians throughout Constantinople (generalized as being cosmopolitan and more assimilated to Ottoman-Turkish society) were massacred.¹³

Early Twentieth Century: The First Republic and Sovietization

Only six years old at the time, the ARF – its members collectively referred to as the ‘*Dashnaks*’ – would become the key political, ideological, and resistance based organization in the Armenian struggle. Between the 1890s and the 1920s the *Dashnaks* were relentless and increasingly absolutist in their efforts for a free and independent Armenia. Internal politics and treachery notwithstanding – they had gained their goal. In 1918, the first Republic of Armenia was established; however, it was not carved out from Ottoman Anatolia, but the South Caucasus, or Eastern Armenia, in the ruins of the Russian Empire.

With the new Armenian state being formed on a Russian – not Ottoman – backdrop, a new precedent was set for Armenian national direction, with new threats and uncertainties. From its inception these challenges not only included having to embrace a swell of Armenian refugees fleeing from Ottoman Armenia due to the Armenian Genocide beginning in 1915, but also direct military confrontation with Kemalist forces in the Turkish-Armenian War of 1920. The result was a Turkish victory, and the beginning of the end of the First Republic. Turkish forces pushed the Armenians out of Kars (which was under Armenian control thanks to previous Russian advances in Turkish-Russo Wars), and established the contemporary Turkish-Armenian border.

Twofold to the Armenian defeat was the practically simultaneous Bolshevik invasion of Armenia. By December 1920 the first Republic of Armenia had essentially dissolved. The Treaty

¹³ Mayerson, Debroah. “Armenian Resistance to the Hamidian Massacres.” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2022, p. 69.

of Kars sealed its partition between Russia and the rising Kemalist regime. It should be noted that anti-Bolshevik resistance was quite fierce, for roughly eight months there existed the Republic of Mountainous Armenia, a *Dashnak* held territory in present day Southern Armenia.

The Bolshevik invasion and subsequent absorption into the Soviet Union was – while defeating at the core of the Armenian national cause – likely responsible for the survival of any Armenia at all. The weak state and civil infrastructure in the first republic was at serious risk of complete collapse from the Turkish-Armenian War. Nonetheless, Sovietization was highly politicized and divisive within Armenian national discourse itself – a particular point of controversy being when *Dashnak* elements attempted to seek aid from Kemalist forces (who were ostensibly seeking to exterminate any Armenian nation) as means to combat the Bolsheviks. The fall of the first republic was undoubtedly a defining moment in Armenian national history, and marked the end of overt struggle and resistance inside the Armenian historical homeland. It also coincided with the birth of the contemporary diaspora. A generation of genocide survivors found refuge in places across the globe but seldom forgot the trials and tribulations of their past, even as it became more distant. The decades to come would be fraught with political activity throughout the diaspora – revenge was at the forefront of many Armenian minds¹⁴ – with the ARF still largely at the helm.

In Soviet Armenia, as for much of the USSR, the early years were plagued with purges and poverty. It was not until the post-World War II period that a semblance of normalcy was felt. Gradually, within the Soviet context, Armenian national identity *within Armenia* was redefined and ultimately set the stage for what would come decades later upon Soviet collapse.

¹⁴ Operation Nemesis: A multi-year long coordinated series of assassinations planned and executed by members of the ARF throughout Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, of key Turkish figure heads responsible for the Armenian Genocide.

Unlike many other Soviet republics, specifically those of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, Armenia was comparatively quite successful in retaining its national heritage – mostly via language and religion. For instance, despite various efforts from the *Politburo* through both institutionalized and asymmetric (*Agitprop*) methods, it was realized that two thirds of Soviet Armenians still privately held onto their Christian beliefs,¹⁵ and as liberalization began to onset with Khrushchev, there grew a degree of tolerance towards elements otherwise deemed nationalistic, notably the 1965 Armenian Genocide March in Yerevan.

Mid Twentieth Century: Stability and Diaspora

The later half of the twentieth century both in Soviet Armenia and the diaspora was underscored by growth and solidification – though happening in parallel and largely uninfluenced by one on another – of post-Genocide Armenian identity. The Armenian SSR developed a robust cultural establishment within the Soviet Union’s top down framework. The establishment of research and educational institutions, creative unions and ‘Houses of Culture,’ as well as concerted state efforts to do away with the ‘old’ – that is, provincial life, orientation around the church, as well as dispelling the revolutionary sentiments of the earlier half of the century – and implementing the new. This era saw prosperity in the arts, with some of the most distinguished Armenian writers, painters, and composers being a product of the Soviet era, but it also corroded elements of the robust Armenian national identity that was fundamental to the struggle of past decades. This corrosion would be detrimental upon independence, and created a vacuum in which national heritage would need to be redefined.

Meanwhile in the diaspora, preservation was largely dominant over creation. The first generation of Armenians born into the diaspora perceived their Armenian identity to be stateless,

¹⁵ Khalapyan, Hasmik. “The Soviet Experience in Armenia and its Legacy.” Columbia University Armenian Center, 31 October 2022, Columbia University. Panel Discussion.

with few regarding Soviet Armenia as a homeland. Political institutions were developed as a means to maintain legitimacy, and within their frameworks a greater effort to prevent assimilation. An essay by Yervant Pamboukian, a Lebanese-Armenian intellectual and first generation post-Genocide Armenian, defines his perspective of the Armenian experience at the time, underscoring the prevalent notion, “We lived our childhood in a period when we constantly heard about the sufferings and persecution [...] A great weight was put on us, to secure the rebirth of the nation. It gave us strength as the nation was going to be reconstructed by the children of the survivors of the Genocide, the generation of those whose lives were worn out in the orphanages.”¹⁶ The ‘rebirth of the nation’ however was not actualized in the ways imagined. A struggle was waged, and the 1960s to 1980s even saw political violence – mainly assassinations of Turkish diplomats and statesmen – by subgroups of the ARF and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), but with hardly any success. This shortcoming came with an ostensible curtailment of efforts, followed by Soviet independence, and the acceptance that there would be more or less two Armenias, that of Armenia itself, and that of the diaspora, the latter being sort of a time capsule of national and cultural heritage.

Case Studies

IV. Understanding Post-Imperial Grip: Russia’s Armenia

Part I: Independence and Economy

Following Armenia’s vassal divisions between Persia, imperial Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, and then rise and fall of the Soviet era, emerged something of a trichotomy in the standing of Armenianhood at the face of its 1991 independence.

There was, first and foremost, the some three and a half million Armenians who went to sleep in the Soviet Union, and woke up in the Republic of Armenia. Many of them saw

¹⁶Փանդուկեան, Երուանդ. «Իմ Կեանքն Որպէս Զինուորագրեալ Ապրած Եմ». Ազգակ, February 27, 2017.

independence as the start of a new era, and a chance to develop and pursue the interests of their finally independent country. Among them were the first to establish Armenia's new class of political elites.

Then, there were the many who were lining up to leave, with them went their skills and potential. They left for cities like Moscow, Los Angeles, Paris, or Berlin. Creating new lives, they seldom returned to Armenia in any substantial capacity. What they did create though, was the bulk of the 'new' Armenian diaspora. Much of this new diaspora would go on to generate substantial wealth, notably those who migrated to Russia; the result of this was a new and dynamic elite that – because of remaining in the Russosphere – would come to play a role in Armenia's future.

Lastly, there was the 'Old Diaspora,' the Armenians who – for multiple generations – have been living in communities removed from their homeland following the genocide. In 1991, they watched from the sidelines the birth of a new Armenian state. For decades, elements of this diaspora had fought and demanded for a 'free and independent Armenia.' Now there was one. Despite this, most Armenians in the diaspora kept their concerns for the reality of *Armenia* itself at an arm's length.

Perhaps the only saving grace for unity among these three inter-Armenian categories was the *Miatsum* (unification) movement – the unification of Nagorno Karabakh¹⁷ and Armenia – beginning in 1988, the last years of Soviet Armenia, and its progression into the Artsakh Liberation War against Azerbaijan. Armenia was not only winning the war, but in some respects conquering. The 'old' and the 'new' diaspora raised money, awareness, and support throughout

¹⁷ Nagorno Karabakh will be used interchangeably with Artsakh, both referring to the former Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, its surrounding contested regions, the current region populated by Armenians, as well as areas currently under Azerbaijan and Russian control following the 2020 war.

their respective domains, some even fought and led; and the Armenians of Artsakh and Armenia, stepped up to materialize victory.

The Artsakh Liberation War, or the Nagorno-Karabakh War as termed by most of the international community, was for Armenia an apparent demonstration of its ability to pursue its own interests. Conversely, it was arguably the beginning of a long spell which would seriously limit the future efforts of Armenia to function in its own best interests. Out of the Artsakh War came the foundation for the regional complications and political legacy in Armenia that would shape its maturation into the twenty first century.

All the while, as Armenians watched, supported, and participated in the liberation of Artsakh, the seeds of a political institution were being planted in Yerevan, and with it came the establishment of foreign relations. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia's first president from 1991 to 1998, was – prior to the escalation of full scale war in Artsakh – influential in the (then inter-Soviet) efforts for unification. Years later, it was his administration that oversaw – though was not wholly responsible for or supportive of – victory in Artsakh, as well as the development of the Armenian Armed Forces which was spearheaded by Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan.

Furthermore, and quite ironically, despite the effort for self-determination by Artsakh and Armenia, the war was the first cementation of the Russian Federation not only as Armenia's security guarantor, but a reminder to the rest of the world that Russia was prepared to keep its control over the South Caucasus. During and after the war, Russia supplied weapons to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, taking proactive measures to keep other global and regional powers out of the South Caucasus. This was the birth of the Russian dominated security era in Armenia.

Upon the Armenian military victory in 1994, unlike with most victors, it did not get to set its terms. Instead, it put its faith in the international community in hopes of a favorable but

legitimately mediated outcome. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was tasked with the mediation of the conflict. In 1992 the OSCE Minsk Group was created as the dedicated body; its co-chairs: France, Russia, and the United States. Early in the process, the efforts were balanced between the three co-chairs, but it was not after long that Russia asserted itself as primary mediator. Contradictory to a balanced mediation, this may have made the most sense, it is Russia that is most familiar with the region, once its southern borderland.

Beyond Russia's *de facto* domination within the OSCE framework, there lays a far more intricate network of interests – formal, and informal – that empowers Russia to remain at the helm in the South Caucasus, and, as proven more recently, to undermine legitimate efforts to resolve the 'Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.'

“To be sure, Russia's national interests, rather than humanitarian benevolence, explain why Russia continues to patronize a country as small and poor as Armenia. In return for economic and military aid, Armenia hosts a Russian garrison and participates in the Kremlin's post-Soviet blocs, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Democratically elected Armenian leaders have dutifully paid these political fees of ensuring Armenia's survival in a sense that has a special meaning to a nation steeped in unacknowledged genocidal trauma.”¹⁸ The rapid accession of Armenia into Russia's sphere of influence came during an era of overtly Russian friendly domestic politicking and business. The outcome was not only security dependence, but practical economic absorption, and to a lesser extent, being labeled globally as a member of Russia's post-Soviet cohort.

In the mix of this all, what was at the heart of Armenia's interests as a sovereign nation? First and foremost was a favorable resolution to the situation in Artsakh, which still today

¹⁸ Riegg, Stephen Badalyan. “Perspectives: Don't Blame Armenia for its ties to Russia.” *Eurasianet*, 5 April 2022.

remains unresolved, costing the lives of soldiers and civilians during the frequent and violent flare ups. Secondly, and coupled with a resolution in Artsakh, was guaranteed protection along the border with Turkey, whose historic threat looms existentially over Armenia. Security aside, Armenia – with its Turkish and Azerbaijani borders closed – was desperate for economic stimulation. With the ‘new’ diaspora well established now, many of them in Russia, remittances from family members and migrant workers, were an immediate and informal start to economic ties – putting cash directly in the hands of a largely economically deprived population. In 2004 22.02 percent of Armenia’s GDP consisted of remittances, and has averaged at 14.04 percent from 1995 to 2020.¹⁹ Remittances alone, however, were inadequate to stimulate any serious economic development. Most all the productive assets that remained in Armenia were quickly privatized by small classes of elites who were inept in operating them. The skilled, educated middle class that had not already left was marginalized and ignored.

In an interview with Dr. Tatevik Poghosyan, she stated “The way privatization was implemented – with the corruption mechanisms in place – a small elite was able to own the majority of national property. Unlike other Eastern European countries, where better conditions were created for experienced businesses and investors to participate in the economic reforms, Armenia followed the Russian model and blocked the inclusion of foreign knowledgeable and experienced business people with their investments to participate. Instead, national property, including big factories, was privatized by a group with no experience or financial resources. This had a strong and long-lasting impact.”²⁰

Beyond the messy privatization that modeled the Russian system, Russia itself was quick to grip the Armenian economy as a means to further secure its dependence. In 1998, Robert

¹⁹ World Bank. “Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) - Armenia.” *World Bank*, 2020.

²⁰ Poghosyan, Tatevik. “Armenia’s Economic Missteps in Post-USSR Collapse.” Interview by Arus Karapetyan. *Keghart*, 26 September 2020.

Kocharyan became Armenia's second president, it was during his administration – through his policies – that Armenia grew increasingly economically dependent on Russia. Interestingly enough, Kocharyan began his tenure with the expressed intention of orienting Armenia towards Europe. In 2003, however, Kocharyan enacted an 'asset-for debt' deal with Russia which essentially gave Moscow control over almost all of Armenia's energy sector for pennies on the dollar.²¹ Russia wrote off \$100 million in debt "in return for obtaining control of five state-run Armenian enterprises. Among them was Armenia's largest thermal power plant located in the town of Hrazdan".²² Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that these arrangements were made with little to no consideration from Armenia's electorate, and hardly transparent. In fact, the negotiations were conducted almost entirely by then Defense Minister (and future president) Serzh Sargsyan. It should be no surprise that this closely coincided with Armenia's accession to the newly formed Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – Russia's 'counterbalance' to NATO, providing similar provisions in regard to mutual defense – with its formation in 2002.

In 2013, now under the administration of Serzh Sargsyan, the deepening of economic ties continued both voluntarily and through coercion. For example, in April 2013, at a time when Sargsyan was testing closer relationships with Europe, Russian energy giant Gazprom raised Armenia's natural gas prices by 50 percent, only to be alleviated by Armenia's subsequent decision to join the Russian led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).²³

Russia's economic grip on Armenia changed ever so slightly between 2015 and 2019, as the Russian firms running Armenian energy production began to sell them off. The Tashir Group, a business conglomerate founded by Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, first

²¹ Danielyan, Emil. "Russia Tightens Grip on Armenia With Debt Agreements." *Eurasianet*, 7 May 2003.

²² Danielyan. "Russia Tightens Grip on Armenia With Debt Agreements."

²³ Terzyan, Aram. "The anatomy of Russia's grip on Armenia: Bound to persist?" *Centre for European Studies, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 234-250.

bought “the country’s debt-ridden electricity distribution network and oldest thermal power plant”²⁴ in 2015 from Russian energy firm Inter RAO, then the Sevan-Hrazdan Cascade hydroelectric plant from RusHydro. The Russian companies’ decision to sell was cited as substantial losses, which Karapetyan has claimed to curtail. Subsequently, Gazprom remains the only Russian state controlled company operating in Armenia, controlling what is perhaps most vital: “Those include the national gas distribution network and a major thermal power plant. Gazprom is also the country’s principal supplier of natural gas.”²⁵ The sale of these assets to Tashir Group begins to make more sense upon getting to know Samvel Karapetyan and his history of doing business in both Russia and Armenia. The Tashir Group Conglomerate is, after all, a Russian firm.

As this remained the status quo, in 2018 Armenia experienced its Velvet Revolution which brought current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to power. It was speculated that Pashinyan – who led a peaceful ousting of Sargsyan on an anti-Corruption basis – would also try to distance Armenia from Russia. While he has served more dialogue with the European Union, this remains to be seen. Shortly after taking office, Pashinyan himself stated in regards to discussions with Putin, “We have things to discuss, but there are also things that do not need any discussion [...] That is the strategic relationship of allies between Armenia and Russia. [...] I can assure you that in Armenia there is a consensus and nobody has ever doubted the importance of the strategic nature of Armenian-Russian relations.”²⁶

Efforts by Armenia to take control of its own economy have developed incrementally since the late 2010s as a result of some domestic policies, but moreover as a natural consequence

²⁴ Danielyan, Emil. “Russian Energy Giant Sells Armenian Power Plants.” *Azatutyun*, 6 December 2019.

²⁵ Danielyan. “Russian Energy Giant Sells Armenian Power Plants.”

²⁶ Osborne, Andrew, and Denis Pinchuk. “New Armenian PM Tells Putin He Wants Closer Ties With Russia.” *Reuters*, 14 May 2018.

of evolving global affairs. Primarily in the technology and services sectors, but as of now these developments are minor compared to the bedrock that supports Armenia's economic development. Still, it relies heavily on Russian energy. A noteworthy development is the prospect of Armenia being included in an Iranian proposed 'Persian Gulf-Black Sea' trade corridor as a means for Iranian exports to reach foreign markets. While still not materialized, such an opportunity for Armenia to become a transit state would offer desperately needed leverage.

V. Identity and Neighbors

Part I. Role of the Diaspora: Reconciling Reality and Having Skin in the Game

The role of the Armenian diaspora in the plight for an Armenia free from constraint and foreign domineering is multifaceted. The most influential sources of outside wealth that are directed to big business development in Armenia comes mainly from the class of Russian-Armenian ultra-rich and can be consolidated to a select few, namely Samvel Karapetyan and Ruben Vardanyan. While Karapetyan has established himself as an energy and commercial real estate kingpin in Armenia, Vardanyan has done so in the realm of finance and 'social entrepreneurship.'

Ruben Vardanyan is a particularly interesting figure and has garnered the reputation of something of a benevolent oligarch. Born in Armenia, Vardanyan moved to Moscow in 1985 to study at the Moscow State University's Faculty of Economics. In the early days of the Russian Federation he became a pioneer in its investment banking sector. He has led a successful career in international wealth management, and is the majority owner of Ameriabank, among the most popular financial institutions in Armenia. His role in Armenia and the diaspora was largely cultural and oriented around the Russian-Armenian diaspora, until in 2013 when he became a

founding partner of the international preparatory school UWC Dilijan. Additionally he took on initiatives with other influential diasporan Armenians such as the Armenia 2020 Project. In the Fall of 2022 Vardanyan renounced his Russian citizenship and announced he was moving to Artsakh. He has since assumed the second highest position in government there as Minister of State. While his business prowess speaks for itself, his ability to produce results in Artsakh remains to be seen.

The efforts by these figures are found to be equally – if not more – political than the other forces at play.

Those other forces can broadly be broken into two categories. Under the banner of the ‘old’ diaspora, there are those who identify with the political ideologies of the ARF, still the *de facto* figure of authority outside Armenia. Then there is a more ambiguous ‘Western sympathizer’ camp. Between these groups lay major ideological and political divisions; neither seem to bring anything of substance to the table when push comes to shove.

Beyond the array of institutionalized efforts to impact the situation in Armenia, independent actors – regardless of ideology – pose an underestimated impact. This is mainly embodied in the form of repatriation. For decades, the relationship between diasporan Armenians and Armenia has been largely limited to philanthropic contributions and vacationing. While these help maintain a surface level connection between the diaspora and Armenia, they do little to create a tangible bond that makes the average visiting diasporan feel truly attached to Armenia as a real place, not simply an idea.

Part II: The Politicization of Security: The 44 Day War - Russia & Turkey Digs in Their Heels on Armenian Incompetence

The failure to reach a final resolution in Artsakh following Armenia's victory in the 1990s – thanks to Armenian political-diplomatic incompetence as well as a confluence of Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Russian efforts to undermine the peace process – is arguably the most pressing detriment to Armenia's ability to succeed. Coupled with this was the 1999 Parliamentary Shooting which resulted in the assassination of Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan. Sargsyan served as defense minister during the first war in Artsakh, and was a fundamental decision maker in Armenian politics post-independence. The assassination of Sargsyan, which also resulted in the murder of Speaker Karen Demirchyan, has been widely speculated to be the work of then President Kocharyan, and future president Serzh Sargsyan. The death of both Sargsyan and Demirchyan greatly shifted the power balance in favor of Kocharyan who was threatened by growing opposition from Sargsyan. With far less resistance standing in his way Kocharyan was able now to take on his own approach to a resolution in Artsakh; the implications of this were spelled out in determining the role of Armenia as a representative of Artsakh.²⁷ It is important to remember that the basis of the struggle for independence in Artsakh was its own self-determination from Azerbaijan.

While it is clear that the primary factor deterring a resolution in Artsakh has been the continued unwillingness and rejection of all reasonable propositions by Azerbaijan, the delay of a resolution has been most lucrative for Russia. Conversely, a resolution favorable for Azerbaijan is in Turkey's greatest interest, as it would boost Turkey's role in the region; consequently, Russia is in no rush to permit a resolution that is favorable for either Armenia or Azerbaijan, but simply clinging on to the *status quo*.

²⁷ Initial efforts for Artsakh's political leadership to have a seat at the negotiating table in the wake of the first Artsakh war were immediately squashed by Baku, and even a point of contention among the Armenian delegation who was debating the question of unification – the question of is Artsakh a part of Armenia – fundamentally undermining basic principles of self-determination.

The failure of a quick and peaceful resolution in Artsakh immediately became a gash in the side of Armenia's foreign policy agenda in efforts for global integration, especially with the West. Largely thanks to Turkey, and its adamant support for Azerbaijan, physically blocking Armenia from access to Europe, it was able to leverage the 'unresolved conflict' as a precondition for Armenia's greater inclusion in economic opportunities for trade. Simultaneously, being drawn into the Russian security orbit, this was cause for alienation from other joint-international efforts.

The *status quo* remained largely unchanged from the late 1990s to 2020 following the first administration led by Ter-Petrosyan, through the three succeeding administrations (Robert Kocharyan's presidency from 1998 to 2008, Serzh Sargsyan's presidency from 2008 to 2018, and Nikol Pashinyan's premiership from 2018 to present). This *status quo* can be broken down into multiple facets. Increased security integration with Russia, unsuccessful negotiations with Azerbaijan, increased maximalism and military expenditure by Azerbaijan – complemented by frequent and violent flare ups along the line of contact in Artsakh as well as on the border with Armenia, and failure on part of Armenia to make desperately needed military reforms in the shadow of a rapidly strengthening Azerbaijan.

On 27 September 2020, thirty years of stagnancy was disrupted and the balance of power shifted dramatically. Azerbaijan launched a large-scale attack on Artsakh, and after forty four days of intense warfare Artsakh's territory was diminished to approximately one third of what it was following the 1990s war. The fighting was brought to a hasty ceasefire dictated by Russia in a trilateral agreement between Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. As a result, some 5,000 Russian Peacekeepers would be deployed to the conflict zone to enforce the agreement – Russia became the *de jure* security guarantor for the people of Artsakh. Furthermore, as a result of the war,

much of Armenia's military infrastructure was devastated, and an entire new line of contact was born out of the territory that once was Artsakh.

Azerbaijan's attack was not carried out alone. Turkey was fundamental in its planning and execution. Furthermore, it saw the war as an opportunity to challenge Russia's hegemony in the South Caucasus. "Turkey's direct military support in the war caught the surprise of many parties. Turkey not only used its Bayraktar TB2 drones, but also the F-16 warplanes stationed in Ganja and transferred hundreds of Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside the Azerbaijani army. These two factors were a threat to Russia's national security in the region."²⁸ The result however – despite Turkey being instrumental to Azerbaijan's victory – may not have been the long term strategic victory Ankara hoped for.

Turkey was in effect challenging Russia, a formal ally of Armenia through the CSTO; but it miscalculated how Russia often undermines its own partners. "Russia's alliances are asymmetric in nature and provide Russia with a bigger regional role where Moscow can speak on behalf of its allies (CSTO). For this reason, Russia does not engage in formal alliances with rising international and regional powers such as China and Turkey."²⁹ For Turkey, Azerbaijan's victory may not have reaped the fullest strategic benefits it had hoped for, but succeeded in the fundamental aim of a weaker and more vulnerable Armenia. Moreover, it played well into Ankara's newfound Ottoman irredentism, "in particular the aspiration to influence developments in the post-Ottoman space of the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, and to position Turkey as an independent center of power."³⁰

For Azerbaijan, its crushing defeat of the Armenians in Artsakh was not only a legitimization of more than two decades of state sponsored anti-Armenian policy, but also the

²⁸ Tashjian, Yeghia. "The Russian-Turkish 'Co-opetition' in Eurasia and Beyond."

²⁹ Tashjian, Yeghia. "The Russian-Turkish 'Co-opetition' in Eurasia and Beyond."

³⁰ Mankoff. *Empires of Eurasia: How Imperial Legacies Shape International Security*, 99.

cause for furthering its maximalist agenda towards Armenia. Since the official ceasefire, Azerbaijan has continued its blatant aggression in both Artsakh and Armenia where it actively seeks to marginalize and slowly expel the vulnerable Armenian populations through intimidation and takes measures to make life less sustainable.³¹

Discussion and Analysis

VI. Prolonging Peace: Azerbaijan's Maximalism and Armenian Political Swelling

'Achieving peace in the South Caucasus' is among the most typical phrases repeated when the matter of Armenia and Azerbaijan is brought up by Western leaders and diplomats in statements and discourse regarding the issue of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Artsakh. So, despite countless meetings at international forums between Armenia and Azerbaijan, facilitated by Russia, the EU, France, and even the United States, why is said peace nowhere to be found?

The most basic answer is because the overtly authoritarian political establishment within Azerbaijan – starting with President Ilham Aliyev – is dependent on prolonging this 'frozen conflict,' and policies of state sponsored hatred toward Armenians as a means to consolidate its power domestically. If President Aliyev was to one day approach the international community and say "Azerbaijan recognizes Nagorno Karabakh's right to self-determination, and will respect the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia," not only would there likely be lasting peace, but the entire national-political narrative of Azerbaijan from the past 30 years would be derailed and its population may start to be more introspective about the blatant corruption and authoritarianism it has been subjected to, let alone question why two generations of Azeris have been sent to fight and die over this territory.

³¹ These efforts include but are not limited to the restriction of water and natural gas to Stepanakert through the Winter and Spring of 2022, as well as direct and indirect small arms fire targeting civilian and agricultural infrastructure that has resulted in at least two civilian deaths (not to include casualties incurred on civilians in Armenia proper).

The exact rhetoric within Azerbaijan that reinforces the animosity toward Armenians is wide ranging but is based mostly in historical revisionism (in a broad scale) and dehumanization (on an individual scale). The examples are abundant but can be emphasized briefly in the erasure of Armenian cultural and historical sites,³² the ‘Military Trophy Park’ in Baku,³³ and the indifference and even celebration of war crimes carried out by members of the Azerbaijani armed forces against Armenian civilians and prisoners of war.³⁴

The source of Azerbaijan’s immunity to continuously inflame the situation is rooted in its ability to exploit European demand for oil and natural gas, and as a byproduct, underscores European hypocrisy in who it will do business with. As a result of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, in July the European Union made a deal with Azerbaijan to double gas imports by 2027 as a substitute for Russian natural gas.³⁵ This dubious play will not only bolster Azerbaijan’s ability to act with impunity toward Armenia, but it has since been revealed that a deal between Gazprom and SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) will move one billion cubic meters of Russian gas to Azerbaijan, speculatively this will be laundered into European markets, effectively defeating the EU’s efforts to cut out Russian energy.³⁶

The relentlessness of Azerbaijan in denying opportunities for a peace settlement has resulted in extreme polarization domestically within Armenia regarding how it ought to be handled. While most Armenians simply want to be able to live without fear of another war, the current administration has been under intense scrutiny from its opponents. Immediately upon

³² Nutt, David. “Report shows near-total erasure of Armenian heritage sites.” *Cornell Chronicle*, 12 September 2022.

³³ BBC. “In pictures: Azerbaijan’s controversial war park.” *BBC*, 26 April 2021.

³⁴ Gonzales, Carlos. “An Execution Near Sev Lake.” *Bellingcat*, 20 October 2022.

³⁵ Reuters. “EU Signs Deal with Azerbaijan to Double Gas Imports by 2027.” *Reuters*, 18 July 2022.

³⁶ News.am. “‘Gazprom’ begins supplying gas to Azerbaijan under new contract with SOCAR.” *News.am*, 18 November 2022.

signing the trilateral agreement in November 2020, a formal opposition coalition was formed, unsuccessfully attempting to oust Pashinyan's government from power.

Coinciding with the intense security dilemma at Armenia's borders and the fallout of a lost war, this marked the beginning of a new domestic political crisis. The opposition movement, however, began to look like an attempt at Armenia's former political establishment to make a comeback, and it largely has been. Protests and demands on the basis of Pashinyan being a 'traitor' were echoed throughout the political arena, and the blame game has been underway to no end.

All sides of the political establishment have demonstrated shortsightedness and little to no introspection in addressing the country's divisions. For example, the current government has recently launched an effort to pursue the normalization of relations with Turkey; meanwhile the opposition uses that as a point to attack the current governments 'treasonous' policies.

Withholding views on the current rationale for normalizing relations with Turkey (it should be noted that insignificant progress has been made), it is an indisputable fact that Pashinyan is not the first to have embarked on this effort; in 2009, then President Sargsyan and Turkish President Abdullah Gul made their short lived effort to normalize relations between the two countries.

The core of the political swelling in Armenia as it relates to the issue of Azerbaijan and Turkey is one mostly of traditional national ideology versus concession. The national ideology side warrants that Armenian national identity is sacred, and at its core is the suffering and struggle endured to create modern Armenia can spare no compromise, especially to Turkey, whose predecessors not only committed a genocide against the Armenians but deny it to this day. The opposing side – concession – falls short in that it inherently comes off as weak; it embraces

the notion of over-imposing globalism and accepts compromise as a means to maintain only temporary and uncertain security.

To face reality the approach must meet somewhere in the middle. Armenian national identity is fundamental to its modern statehood, to undermine it would be a legitimate risk to complete economic and even military domination from not only Turkey and Azerbaijan, but as was demonstrated earlier, continued by Russia. Perhaps one of the greatest failures of the Pashinyan administration in generally weakening its negotiatory posture has been allowing for the issue of ‘delimitation and demarcation’ on the Armenian-Azerbaijan border to become a matter of question. Doing so inherently undermines Armenia’s assertion of sovereignty and allows for both Russia and the West to make it a soft point when Azerbaijan acts in military aggression at the border. Nevertheless, the reality is Armenia is in no current position to strongman a position against Turkey or Azerbaijan, let alone Russia. The state must learn to play a balancing act of non-compromising discourse with its neighbors, while implementing growth oriented domestic policies – prioritizing border security, economic development and bolstering human capital in provincial areas, creating opportunities that incentivize diaspora engagement – and a vigorous foreign policy agenda that seeks not only advocacy on the international stage, but to also attract FDI and find new partners for defense acquisition. Ideally this results in a nearly apolitical doctrine prioritizing the rebuilding of the military as a prerequisite discourse with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the relentless effort to act in its own economic interests, able to set terms with the partners of its choosing.

VII. Where to Go From Here? Reconciling Russia and New Partnerships

Armenia’s foreign policy currently has the opportunity to redefine itself. Between challenging the role of the CSTO, the interests of other states to capitalize on Russia’s waning

influence, and the application of diaspora communities as a decentralized representative body, there are arguably more options now than ever before. Armenia must act decisively and use its geopolitical capital to compel Russia and the CSTO to step up and legitimize its support, or show that it will not tolerate such inaction. However, it still faces the great deficiency of not having anything substantial to offer to potential partners.

Navigating geopolitical constraints in Armenia has historically come at a cost. Beyond the consequences of challenging Russia's control in the South Caucasus, the state's capacity for foreign policy has long been without clear direction. So, what should be the priorities of a diplomatically savvy Armenia? Armenia's foreign policy has to consider three primary fronts: transnational and security issues, developing partnerships on the basis of shared values, and economic maneuvering to increase trade and attract FDI. Achievement of the latter must also incorporate actors from the diaspora, who in a non-state capacity are among Armenia's most valuable business ambassadors and diplomatic assets.

In the face of an increasingly marginalized Russia, what sort of diplomatic capital can Armenia gain? The efforts of the West to stop Putin's war in Ukraine comes with the task of dismantling Russia's influence elsewhere beyond its borders. A key area for that is the South Caucasus. Russia is quite aware of this effort, again making Armenia the subject of global power bargaining. Following European and American mediated Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations in the Fall of 2022, Moscow conveyed its displeasure. Spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova stated, "the true goals of Washington and Brussels are by no means the development of compromise and balanced solutions, but self-promotion and squeezing Russia out of the Transcaucasus."³⁷ Armenia should be as aware as Zakharova that 'self-promotion and squeezing Russia out' is largely the name of the game as it pertains to Western foreign policy.

³⁷ Hayrapetyan, Tatevik. "Who Can Prevent a New War in the South Caucasus?" *EVNReport*, 9 November 2022.

But how can it capitalize on it? The easy – perhaps shortsighted – but pragmatic step would be to approach Russia with the pretext that the West is offering its hand, and for Russia to offer more or else lose Armenia. At a CSTO meeting in November, it appears Pashinyan attempted this. The meeting was to draft a document regarding CSTO assistance for Armenia, at the moment of its finalization Pashinyan refused to sign and ended the meeting due to its inadequate provisions. Pashinyan went as far to call out the CSTO’s inaction stating it “may be interpreted by Azerbaijan as a green light to continue its aggression against Armenia.”³⁸ Whether this posturing will help or hurt Armenia’s case against Azerbaijan remains to be seen, but it is a clear indication that either out of frustration or confidence, Yerevan is ready to start calling out its traditional allies in their shortcomings.

The increasingly begrudging post-Soviet security partnerships have resulted in Armenia taking actionable steps for alternatives, most notably, a recent sizable weapons deal with India. The deal – at an estimated value of approximately \$260 million – included an array of multiple rocket launching systems, artillery and counter artillery systems, as well as drones.³⁹ This move aligns with India’s efforts to increase weapons exports, but also falls along the lines of geopolitical values and interests. In an article reporting the deal from *The Economic Times of India*, it cites India’s concerns about Pakistani-Turkish-Azerbaijani defense cooperation, going as far to say it is “a warning signal India can no longer ignore.”⁴⁰ While this is an apparent move by India to expand global influence on the heels of rapid domestic growth, it is another opportunity for Armenia to send a message to Moscow: fail to provide us arms and we will shop elsewhere.

³⁸ JAMNews. “‘CSTO Fiasco’: Military bloc decided not to assist Armenia.” *JAMNews*, 24 November 2022.

³⁹ Asatryan, Georgi. “Armenia and India: Shared Values and Threats.” *EVNReport*, 27 October 2022.

⁴⁰ Pubby, Manu. “Arming Armenia: India to export missiles, rockets, and ammunition.” *Economic Times of India*, 6 October 2022.

The case for comprehensive partnerships between Armenia and western European states is far more complex and, frankly, the prospect for meaningful cooperation is currently out of reach. Most of Armenia's interactions with European states take place either within the framework of the European Union, and with France. The only overt European interest is serving as a platform for a resolution with Azerbaijan; even so, until the most recent military offensive in September 2022, the European dialogue is largely aimed at 'both sides,' wary to place explicit blame on Azerbaijan. This should not dismiss (increasingly successful) efforts to internationalize the Artsakh and border crises, simultaneously seeking to alienate Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, one cannot realistically expect defense deals between Armenia and EU states any time soon.

France is a uniquely vocal advocate for Armenia on the world stage, but its efforts still end at mediation and symbolic legislation. This is in part due to the large diaspora population living in France. A realistic and effective step to cement a pro-Armenian position would be, for instance, to place sanctions on Azerbaijan. Still, the conciliatory approach has been leveraged by President Macron as a means to callout Russia on prolonging peace and exploiting its monopoly as the on the ground mediator.

Realistically, Armenia cannot count on Europe to be its partners in either defense or development, however, it can and should continue to push narratives against Azerbaijan in the EU sphere, and more quietly demonstrate its willingness to distance itself from Russia in return for meaningful cooperation with European powers.

The area with perhaps the most potential for bilateral cooperation in development, trade, and defense is Iran – both a neighbor and regional superpower. Armenia's relationship with Iran is built partly on shared interests to consolidate Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as mutually beneficial economic opportunities. In terms of the geopolitical and security aspects, Iran has

been explicit in denouncing Azerbaijan's attempts to challenge Armenia's territorial integrity, and particularly against the proposed Zangezur Corridor.⁴¹ If the corridor were to be established, Iran would no longer be the thoroughfare for goods moving from Azerbaijan to Turkey and Nakhichevan, and vice versa. Furthermore, it is rooted in Iran's interest to retain its status as a regional superpower, seeking to curb any expansion of Turkish influence.

In order for Armenia to further assert control over its own economic levers, economic relations with Iran are a crucial step in circumventing Russia's domination in the South Caucasus. One approach is via the actualization of the previously mentioned 'Person Gulf-Black Sea' transit corridor. The land route, running from Iran, through Armenia, into Georgia, then across the Black Sea to Bulgaria would not only give Armenia a hand in controlling the movement of goods in and out of the region, but could also lead to the prioritization of Armenia's security on a wider regional scale.

Outside of the prospects for a transportation corridor, progress has been achieved in other realms of cooperation between Armenia and Iran. The first eight months of 2022 saw a 43.4% increase compared to the previous year, at a value of \$427.4 million. Tehran released an encouraging statement expressing the intention to increase the volume to three billion dollars. Furthermore, the two countries plan to expand on a gas-for-electricity program, as well as to use Armenia as a base for Iranian exports to Eurasian Economic Union countries.⁴²

Despite Iran's position as somewhat of a global pariah, Armenia has an array of practical opportunities to capitalize on its role as a regional player. A strong Iran is critical for limiting Turkish-Azerbaijani cooperation and is even capable of competing with Russia over trade and

⁴¹ A conceptual transport corridor through southern Armenia that would allow access from mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan, effectively providing a direct land route to Turkey.

⁴² Financial Tribune. "Iran, Armenia to Pursue Joint Exports to Third Countries." *Financial Tribune*, 4 November 2022.

energy. The most obvious downside, however, is the backlash Armenia could face from Western states, especially if it acquires Iranian weapons. Regardless, Armenia must weigh the benefits of approval on the international stage versus practical regional relationships that yield tangible results.

When looking to the Middle East for potential partnerships, the scope is relatively limited mostly due to the instability faced by many countries in the region, however there has been some progress made in attracting investment from the Gulf, particularly the United Arab Emirates. In 2019, a deal between Armenia and Masdar, a subsidiary of a state owned Abu Dhabi investment company, was made to invest more than \$300 million into solar renewable energy in Armenia.⁴³ Not only do instances of FDI such as this set an example that can open the doors for further engagement, but the nature of this particular investment in renewables is strategic in its byproduct of edging closer to energy independence. Yerevan should be adamantly pursuing opportunities such as this not only from Gulf states and firms but from European firms and initiatives that are surely eager to expand renewable energy production.

Mechanistically, ventures such as the Masdar deal have been facilitated in part by the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF), a sovereign wealth fund created in 2019.⁴⁴

Future and current prospects for Yerevan's transnational cooperation are far wider than what is currently being pursued. A prerequisite should be seeking to establish relationships with Europe that go beyond it being a platform for negotiations with Azerbaijan, and evolve into offering itself as a base for businesses looking to set up shop in the region; this is particularly timely as firms pull out of Russia. This process demands diplomatic prowess as it requires delegitimizing Azerbaijan as a reliable energy partner. Until the EU sees past Azerbaijan as an

⁴³ Hetq. "Armenia Signs Renewable Energy Deal with UAE Investment Company." *Hetq*, 1 December 2019.

⁴⁴ مصدر أخبار. "توقع اتفاقية لتطوير أكبر محطة طاقة شمسية في أرمينيا." مصدر، 26 نوفمبر 2021.

energy asset, there will be little success in having Europe truly ‘on the same side’ of Armenia. Furthermore, once a strong case can be made for Armenia as an integral part of the power balance in the South Caucasus, it can begin to consider a balanced process for normalization with Turkey as the risk for complete Turkish one-sidedness will be curbed with outside interests, particularly Iran, at play.

VII. Diaspora: Charity Case or Business Sandbox?

Since Armenia’s independence, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as philanthropic actors have played a serious role in bridging the gaps in Armenia to provide humanitarian aid, basic services, as well as stimulation to promote human and economic development. Most of these individuals and organizations have roots in the diaspora and have become embedded into Armenian civil society. The effectiveness of these efforts fall on a broad spectrum. Moreover, their application and impact pose questions about the long term efficacy of NGOs and philanthropists versus those who come ready to put skin in the game with money to invest. In other words, when the diaspora is looking to help out, is it better for them to simply give, or to invest with the interest in a return? The ideal end for both should be to contribute to the creation of an environment offering more opportunities for locals to capitalize on.

Given the emphasis on the need for increased engagement from the diaspora, I will first attempt to convey the stratification of NGOs and individual actors from the diaspora by looking at two particular cases.

All for Armenia is an Armenia based NGO founded in 2020 by a group of repatriated and diasporan Armenians at the onset of the 2020 war in Artsakh. Since then it has grown rapidly, implementing a variety of projects focused on providing immediate humanitarian aid, as well as launching multiple long term projects to bolster vulnerable communities along the

Armenia-Azerbaijan border. These projects are centered around after-school education centers for village youth, as well as craft based social entrepreneurship ventures to provide jobs, specifically for women. In order to operate, All for Armenia depends on volunteers and crowd funding.⁴⁵

Krikor C.⁴⁶ is an Armenian born and raised in California. In 2020 he moved to the post-war frontier in Artsakh and has built a life there with the mission of providing direct aid and stimulus to local populations. His platform – as an individual actor – is solely dependent on his personal social media (having become something of a persona, offering often blunt and critical remarks about the situation, he also politicizes the matter, frequently blaming the Armenian government for its shortcomings and emphasizing that solutions are dependant on motivated and patriotic individuals). Through his Instagram and Facebook he has successfully fundraised and implemented projects such as the construction of greenhouses, the distribution of poultry livestock to families, and most recently, an initiative to install solar panels on the homes of seventy-five families with over five children. These efforts are highly targeted, and as with All for Armenia, largely circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to actionable results, but how effective are they at long term impact, and more critically, deeper integration and shared interests among locals and the diaspora?

On diaspora involvement, former Artsakh Minister of State Artak Beglaryan emphasized “there is no room for ‘giving fish, but [instead we must] teach fishing.’”⁴⁷ Efforts such as those undertaken by All for Armenia and Krikor C. have an indispensable role in Armenia when it comes to addressing immediate deficiencies, and dozens of other organizations also work to the

⁴⁵ “Our Story.” *All for Armenia*, 2021.

⁴⁶ Name changed.

⁴⁷ English, Chester. “Artsakh, the Diaspora, and the Need for Reality-Based Action.” *Armenian Weekly*, 16 November 2021.

same effect, but it may be that entrepreneurial initiatives are better equipped to deliver long term prospective results. Philanthropy targets a specific cause or issue, while broader investment and business ventures – coming from the diaspora – not only can result in the broader circulation of capital and creation of jobs, but, for better or worse, put Armenians from the diaspora in a position that more tightly binds their interest to Armenia's future.

The issue of aid versus investment is arguably the most important issue to be addressed regarding Armenia-Diaspora relations, but can not be catalyzed without proper bridges in place to connect the two. Foundational to these bridges is answering the question of why should individuals in the diaspora look to Armenia as the place for them to bring business. In reality, most well established individuals will not hurdle over the impracticalities of reorienting their ventures to a new country, especially when well established and integrated into their current host countries. Nevertheless, there are real prospects for capitalizing on such a shift, namely with the masses of Armenians living in the Middle Eastern diaspora, as well as the causally committed Armenians throughout the world.

In the past decade Armenia experienced a relatively high volume of migration of Armenians from the Middle Eastern diaspora, particularly those from Syria and Lebanon in light of war and economic disaster. Their case demonstrates two sides of the diasporan experience in repatriation. The vast majority of Syrian and Lebanese Armenians who sought refuge in Armenia from 2012 through the present have not remained over the long term. Of the more than 25,000 Syrian Armenians who came to Armenia following the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2012, less than 10,000 remain. This is largely due to failures on part of the Armenian government to facilitate their economic integration, specifically in the realm of housing. There was no comprehensive plan or legal framework for their integration. This resulted in landlords gouging

prices, and legal barriers for those interested in purchasing homes. Furthermore, many faced discrimination from locals when seeking employment, particularly in entry level positions; those who did get jobs were often overworked and underpaid.⁴⁸ Currently, they risk being further outpriced by the influx of Russians (to include Russian Armenians) who have fled to Armenia to avoid the consequences of the sanctions or mobilization due to the Russo-Ukrainian War. Nevertheless, those who have stayed have made a significant business and cultural impact that sets a precedent for repatriation for those with the means to come to Armenia.

The issue at the core of repatriation – or even living with ‘one foot in’ Armenia and the other in their host country – is that any individual who repatriates (specifically from the ‘old’ diaspora) is likely to be one who is already deeply committed to Armenia on some sort of patriotic or ideological level, who needs little convincing. In reality this is a slim number compared to those who are content living out their Armenian identity in their local communities and through donations to Armenian NGOs of their choosing. The Armenians who do repatriate, however, are mostly those who are there to participate in the strengthening of the country. Moreover, their presence can serve as a conduit for less motivated diasporans outside of Armenia who are willing to make investments. Repatriates offer a sense of trust and familiarity that may be absent if engaging with local firms, where there is bound to be less established credibility perceived by the investor.

The power of individual actors from the diaspora coming to Armenia – either to fully repatriate or the ‘one foot in’ model – is valuable not only in the skills and capital that are brought by those who make the move, but it also has the power to pull others into Armenia’s orbit, be it family and friends, colleagues, or business partners. While currently underexploited,

⁴⁸ Hovhannissian, Eviya. “‘They Paid Me 1,000 AMD for 12 Hours of Work:’ Syrian Workers’ Rights Violated in Armenia.” *Aleppo-NGO*, 25 December 2019.

though some structures exist seeking to promote further integration, the prospect of repatriation is an invaluable asset that Yerevan should be devoting more attention to. Challenges have been raised about this in practice. Diasporans who have repatriated will sometimes cite difficulties in penetrating local markets, yet how much of this stems from cultural and societal differences, as well as lingering corruption in the process of putting up ventures is a legitimate question.

Alexandr Gevorkyan poses compelling models for deepening economic integration between diaspora groups and home countries. Namely, “micro-loans to rural areas or diaspora business-funded basic income programs,” as well as what he terms the establishment of a Migration Development Bank (MDB), “a financial conduit for a more streamlined (in contrast to *ad hoc*) transfer of remittance income.”⁴⁹ Through the MDB, funds would be directed to a central entity before being put to use for development purposes and being made available for loans. Transparency can be achieved by including oversight from entities of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ diaspora. This model would lower the barriers for hesitant investors from both the diaspora and foreign outsiders.

Ultimately, the need for investment over aid is paramount in Armenia. Too often the efforts carried out by the humanitarian sector result in a model where ‘the buck stops here,’ here being wherever said organization focuses its efforts. While there certainly was a time when the urgency and despair demanded aid (and still can be, as in the fallout of the 2020 war), Armenia has matured. Mature Armenia needs capital that can enter and flow widely through its economy. It needs innovation and skills brought by its largely educated and wealthy diaspora, skills that can be offered at a low cost and with opportunity for returns. The government and NGO sector

⁴⁹ Gevorkyan, Alexandr. *Transition Economies: Transformation, Development, and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Routledge, 2018, 181-182.

has taken steps to actualize this,⁵⁰ but real potential is gained through momentum. It is not far-fetched to postulate that for every one Armenian who chooses to repatriate, another may follow. At the least, programs ought to be in place to incentivize Armenians from around the world to open bank accounts in Armenia; not only would this result in them now having more skin in the game, but legislative changes could be made to make it an attractive place for people to keep their money.

As it pertains to Armenia in its effort to hurdle over the economic and geopolitical challenges posed by Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Russia, fully realizing the potential of diaspora engagement, at a minimum through non-profit and humanitarian engagement, and at best through repatriation and investment, is perhaps Armenia's greatest resource outside of attaining military might. Beyond that, it serves as an effective platform for the advocacy of pro-Armenian policy in respective host countries. The diaspora's international reach and influence has the potential to bring entrepreneurship and investment that is otherwise lacking into the orbit of Armenia, and can conversely serve as a platform for Armenia to expand its influence internationally.⁵¹ Ultimately it is a matter of what institutional measures Armenia will take to encourage such integration, and identifying incentives for diasporans to take engagement upon themselves.

Conclusion and Roadmap

To again quote Armenian political thinker and revolutionary Monte Melkonian, "Change, of course, is constant, and new and frequently unexpected circumstances come to the fore."⁵² Melkonian wrote these words in 1984, only four years before Armenia would begin its slow and arduous transition into independence. Since the war in 2020, Armenia – its government, its elites,

⁵⁰ See iGorts Program, pathway to special residency and citizenship, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, and Repat Armenia.

⁵¹ See Tumo Center.

⁵² Melkonian. *The Right to Struggle: Selected Writings of Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question*, 53.

even swaths of its citizens and diaspora – has been entrenched in turbulence, unable to adapt and move forward in the face of great change. While this turbulence is proliferated by the continuous aggression of Azerbaijan, there is no consensus among policymakers, citizens, or the diaspora about where to go.

The root of this thesis has been to identify the obstacles faced by Armenia in its overall economic and geopolitical confinement, and to put forth potential solutions. If the aim then is for Armenia to break free of its confinements, assert its own contemporary identity, and pursue its distinct interests as a nation among nations it should at the least make an effort to clearly define its identity and interests – this is no easy task in a nation of diametrically opposed idealists and realists.

Through the case studies and analysis in this paper I have attempted to arrive at possible avenues that safeguard idealistic notions deriving from national identity while still being realistic in foreign relations and business. The reality is that Armenia – with its land, culture, history, friends, and enemies – does not exist in a vacuum. Like most all countries outside of the few commanding superpowers, it is largely at the will of competing interests. Instead of being a lame subject to interests, it ought to begin to decisively align with specific interests that work to make the country secure, wealthy, and incrementally more powerful.

At present, Armenia lacks the geopolitical and economic wherewithal to be at the fore of great strides without a devastating concession that would not only be a gamble, but would most certainly divide Armenians irreconcilably – that being to give up on Artsakh and move on. To do so would not only mean the exodus of more than 100,000 Armenians from their ancestral lands, but to open the door for further maximalist actions and rhetoric from Azerbaijan.

With so few options, Armenia has little choice but to focus on what it can control and wait for change. In the interim period it should firstly accept the unfortunate reality that peace with Azerbaijan should not be expected anytime soon, nor complete disengagement from Russian security and economic relations. All the while Yerevan must subtly but ambitiously pursue the outward oriented ventures it has been: broadening its vendors in the defense sector, pursuing the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor, and seeking out diverse FDI in sectors such as renewable energy and technology. In parallel, a comprehensive reform in the doctrine, standards, and operating procedures of the military is the most necessary and immediate domestic priority, budgeting explicitly for contracts with defense consultants and willing foreign military advisors. Then, practical and measurable policies must be drawn to invest in demographics below the age of 35; be it educational reforms, increased grant funding for research and development in fields such as data science and defense, as well as incentives to limit out migration and increase birth rates. Coupled with this is of course the encouragement of repatriation and deeper diaspora integration.

These measures are in preparation for the likelihood of structural changes in regional power over the years to come. Quoting Melkonian yet again, “Most historical change has been unintended, of course, but there are always identifiable *causes* of historical change. This is why a *scientific* political line can be drawn up, and why we can speak of a realistic and systematic political strategy.”⁵³ For the better part of the last two decades Turkey, Iran, and Russia have held steady on their autocratic tracks, pursuing ambitious and nefarious agendas in the context of their respective and sometimes intersecting interests.

Analysis in international relations often tends to find itself caught in the present, but it is critical to be mindful that the governments in Ankara, Tehran, and Moscow will inevitably

⁵³ Melkonian. *The Right to Struggle: Selected Writings of Monte Melkonian on the Armenian National Question*, 53.

change for better or worse. For Yerevan, it is not entirely worth speculating how they will change, rather being prepared for the likelihood that when they do, every power in the world will be rushing to impose themselves on the next chapter of these governments. Armenian political strategy must make every effort to take advantage of the malleability that will come with these changes. The caveat is versatility, as one cannot predict or assume that these eventual changes will be singular in the direction of reform, let alone favorable to Armenia; in fact certain outcomes could be more damaging than the current status.

This is not a grandiose supposition that regime change will come sweeping through all at once; instead it is a recognition that the old system propped up throughout the twentieth century is dying. In order to make the most of it, Armenia must put its best foot forward to be an actor in guiding the new system and coming out of it a well-developed and versatile nation in command of its security and economy beside the discombobulation of its neighbors.

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