



A young protester wearing the Armenian flag stands in front of Russian peacekeepers blocking the road outside Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, on December 24, 2022.
● DAVIT GHARAMANYAN/AFP

Armenia has to move to a 'diversification strategy'



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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The 44-day war in 2020 and the subsequent post-war realities — which evolved into a qualitatively new dimension following the Ukrainian crisis that began in February 2022 — significantly altered the geopolitical, security, and economic landscape of the region. The somewhat strengthened influence of Russia in the region due to the 44-day war very quickly began to be revised and shaken by the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance, which ceaselessly continued to develop the success achieved with the military-political tools.

On the way to achieving their strategic goal, the primary target of the Ankara-Baku alliance was, of course, the scope of Russia's influence and obligations, which geographically included the sovereign territory of Armenia, as well as a part of Nagorno-Karabakh — which, according to the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020, was assigned to the Russian peacekeeping troops for an initial period of 5 years. Shortly after the cease-fire on December 12, 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces attacked the villages of Hin Tagher and Khatsaberd of the Hadrut region of Nagorno-Karabakh, seizing them and taking 62 people captive. Azerbaijan's aggressive and revisionist tactics in

the political and military spheres within the zone of activity of Russian peacekeepers continued until September–October of 2023, when Baku completely occupied and depopulated the historically Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh. Throughout the various developments in Nagorno-Karabakh after the cease-fire — including military aggression, the humanitarian crisis in the face of the illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor, and political pressures — Russia did not activate the entire toolkit of the peacekeeping mission, not being able to adequately ensure the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to live safely and prosperously in the historical homeland.

Besides Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, with Turkey's support, created serious problems for the security of Armenia from May 2021 to April 2023, occupying around 140 square kilometers of the territory of the Republic of Armenia through various scale military provocations and aggression. One of the derivative consequences of the implementation of Azerbaijan's aggressive policy against Armenia was the failure of Russia and its security structure (the CSTO) to fulfill their obligations to Armenia. Instead of recording the occupation carried out against Armenia and carrying out targeted actions aimed at its elimination, which is the key logic of the obligations of any alliance format, Russia and other CSTO allies only came up with proposals for mediation and the implementation of an observation mission. They justified such a response format by the fact that the Armenia-Azerbaijan bor-

der is not demarcated. The above-mentioned realities, as well as Moscow's strategic choice in favor of Russia-Azerbaijan-Turkey relations due to the Ukrainian crisis — which was also proceeding with a periodic increase of geopolitical confrontation in the region — and the ever-deepening crisis in Russia-Armenia relations, made Yerevan undergo a comprehensive review of its security and therefore its foreign policy. The point is that for decades since independence, Yerevan had built a single-center security system based on multi-layered cooperation with Moscow and various structures formed by it (CIS, EAEU, CSTO). This is while the current system is not working sufficiently for many objective reasons, as a result of which Armenia and the Armenian people suffered and may continue to suffer strategic losses. Therefore, in such conditions, the main principle of the substantive change of Armenia's foreign and security policy was not the formation of mechanisms that are maximally harmonized with one center, as before, but the "diversification strategy" based on a multi-factor logic. This logic was formed as a result of the combination of the interests of different actors in different directions. It should be emphasized that many actors from various regions responded to the declaration of such a policy by Yerevan, including India, Iran, the EU, France, Greece, the US, many Arab countries, and even Russia itself, which is trying to save the format of allied relations with Armenia at any cost. Accordingly, among the different

important but essential separate components of the emerging system of new relations are, for example:

1. Continued multi-vector cooperation with Russia but in a more realistic, clearly measurable, and feasible dimension of bilateral interests, rights, and responsibilities.
2. New opportunities for deepening relations with the EU in the political and economic spheres, as well as the launch of the EU civil observation mission at the security level, which are quite important directions.
3. The prospect of deepening the multi-vector policy, which includes military and security policy with France and Greece and was based especially in historical, cultural, political, and economic "privileged" relations with these nations.
4. Several factors in the context of the regionalization policy, the most important of which are as follows:
 - A. New formats and programs for interaction with Iran in the political, economic, infrastructural, and security spheres.
 - B. The full realization of a new "strategic partnership" level of relations with Georgia.
 - C. The resolution of problems with other neighboring countries, which implies the signing of the bilateral agreement, called "On the establishment of peace and interstate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan," being negotiated with Azerbaijan, as well as the regulation of relations with Turkey.
5. Deepening of cooperation with India in the political and military-industrial sphere.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (L) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) during the welcoming ceremony of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit on November 23, 2022, in Yerevan, Armenia.
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6. New opportunities for the development of political and economic cooperation with the US and many Arab countries. Generally, the political guidelines for the moment listed above — which against the background of the propaganda confrontation typical of today's world, are very often deliberately presented by Armenia's non-friends as Yerevan's policy to change the geopolitical vector — are naturally a provocation, a lie, and nothing more. The "diversification strategy" is only a roadmap aimed at ensuring Yerevan's own sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and necessary alternatives in the food, energy, and other vital sectors in the face of new and predicted security, political, and economic challenges; nothing more. It is within the primary functions of every independent, sovereign state. As for Yerevan's new coopera-

tions, which have caused misperceptions among some friends, especially in the security, military, and military-industrial fields, they are only aimed at restoring the disturbed military balance in the region, which is an extremely important prerequisite for creating an environment of peace, stability, and universal development in the region. Those cooperations cannot be directed against any neighboring country in any way because Armenia officially recognizes the territorial integrity and strategic interests of all its neighbors without any dispute. As mentioned above, the key idea of Armenia's security policy is the resolution of all problematic relations and the formation of a cooperative environment in the region. The "Crossroads of Peace" project proposed by Armenia is one of the important infrastructure projects aimed at the realization of this idea.