

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF RA
INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

REGIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND ARMENIA.
SECURITY RECALIBRATIONS

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



November 28, 2024

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**Yerevan
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OPENING SPEECH

Grigor Vardanyan

**Leading Researcher at the Department of Arab Studies,
IOS NAS RA**

On November 28, 2024, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of the RA, with the support of the All-Armenian Foundation Financing Armenian Studies, organized an international conference on the subject of “Regional Transformations and Armenia. Security Recalibrations.”

Since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, a new security environment continues to develop in the South Caucasus. The transformation processes and regional military-political changes occurring in the three South Caucasian countries have introduced several security issues, leading to the formation of new military-political alliances and shifts in geopolitical priorities for these states. On June 15, 2021, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed the Turkish-Azerbaijani agreement, the Shushi Declaration, which includes a collective security component. Meanwhile, Armenia signed military agreements with France and India in an effort to counterbalance the Azerbaijani-Turkish alliance. Despite its ambitions for Western integration, Georgia has begun a new phase of relations with Russia—an almost unthinkable scenario after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Notably, security dynamics in the South Caucasus are being influenced by the implementation of the North-South Corridor, linking the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea, and the Middle Corridor, connecting Central Asia to the West.

The discussion of current regional transformations, development trends, and the key issues facing the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, in the format of an international conference, holds scientific, political, and practical significance.

The conference aims to address the security issues and challenges facing the Republic of Armenia in the region currently undergoing transformation, with involvement from diplomatic and academic circles under the auspices of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

Today's reports will provide a variety of perspectives. The topics are multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional. The reports will include the Ethiopian and Moroccan views on African security issues, the Syrian perspective on the Syrian crisis itself, and the complex relationships between Russia and Azerbaijan, France and Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan, as well as Saudi Arabia and Azerbaijan. We will also analyze the regional interests of Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Gulf Arab countries. Additionally, the interests of China, the USA, India, Japan, and Russia in regional transformations will be discussed, along with trends shaping a new multipolar world order.

Leading researchers from Eutopia, the USA, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, Yerevan State University, Armenian-Russian University, Military Academy after Vazgen Sargsyan, etc. have also participated in the conference.

GREETING REMARKS

Gohar Iskandaryan

**Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National
Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia**

Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, and friends, It is a great honor to welcome you today on behalf of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia to our international conference “Regional Transformations and Armenia: Security Shifts.” This conference takes place at a time when regional and global orders are undergoing profound change. The dynamics shaping the South Caucasus and the broader Middle East shifting alliances, realignments of power, and new security dilemmas—remind us that knowledge and understanding are among our most vital strategic assets. The purpose of today’s gathering is not only to analyze these transformations but also to reflect on Armenia’s role within them how a small state, caught between competing geopolitical forces, can navigate uncertainty, adapt to rapid change, and turn vulnerability into agency. Our program brings together an impressive range of scholars and practitioners from Armenia and beyond, representing diverse institutions and perspectives. We are especially pleased to host experts from the Caucasus, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, whose collective expertise allows us to think comparatively, critically, and creatively about our region’s future. The upcoming panels will explore the various layers of transformation: from reconfiguring alliances in the South Caucasus and the Middle East to emerging trends in Armenia–Azerbaijan diplomacy, Armenia–Türkiye normalization, and the evolving intersections of security, identity, and economic connectivity. I want to take this opportunity to thank all our participants, moderators, and the organizational team for their contributions to this event, as well as the All Armenian Foundation for Financing Armenological Studies, whose support made this conference

possible. Let us approach this day not only as an academic exchange but also as an act of intellectual responsibility—to examine the regional order with clarity, empathy, and purpose, and to envision pathways toward stability and cooperation that go beyond immediate crises. I wish you a productive and thought-provoking conference and look forward to the insights that will emerge from our discussions.

Arman Yeghiazaryan

**Head of the All Armenian Foundation Financing Armenological
Studies**

It is a pleasure and an honor to greet you on behalf of the All Armenian Foundation for Financing Armenological Studies and to welcome you to this important international conference, “Regional Transformations and Armenia: Security Shifts.” Our Foundation has always believed that the strength of Armenian scholarship lies not only in preserving historical knowledge but also in developing the analytical tools needed to understand and interpret the changing realities of the modern world. In this sense, this conference exemplifies the kind of intellectual initiative we aim to support—one that connects Armenia’s academic community with regional and global research agendas. The Institute of Oriental Studies at the National Academy of Sciences has long been a center of excellence in exploring the complex intersections of culture, politics, and security across the Near and Middle East. We are proud that our collaboration with the Institute has helped facilitate this dialogue—a dialogue that brings together leading experts from Armenia and abroad to discuss how the forces shaping our region are redefining Armenia’s strategic environment. In a period of geopolitical uncertainty, academic institutions must remain spaces for reflection, exchange, and foresight. Through such scholarly collaboration, Armenia can better understand not only the external transformations affecting us but also the internal adaptations necessary to ensure resilience and continuity. On behalf of our Foundation, I want to thank all participants and contributors for their dedication to rigorous research and open dialogue.

Security Challenges of the Maghreb Countries in the Context of Regional Conflicts

Aram Gasparyan

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolving security dynamics in the Maghreb, with a focus on Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, in the context of growing regional unrest. It examines how the erosion of state institutions in Libya, the long-standing Western Sahara dispute, and chronic instability across the Sahel have jointly contributed to a fragile and unpredictable security environment. Drawing on a qualitative reading of recent events, the study sheds light on how cross border terrorism, arms and human trafficking, irregular migration flows, and geopolitical rivalries are deeply intertwined. It also highlights the increasingly prominent role of non-state actors particularly jihadist groups whose operations have thrived amid porous frontiers and weak governance. The cumulative impact of these overlapping challenges has placed considerable pressure on national security systems and shifted the dynamics of regional cooperation, resulting in growing militarization, heightened diplomatic friction, and intensified humanitarian pressures.

Keywords: *Maghreb Countries, Regional Conflicts, Algeria, Morocco, Tunis*

Introduction

The countries of the Maghreb Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia occupy a geopolitically sensitive zone that bridges Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Their location makes them essential players in the movement of goods, energy resources, and people between continents. Yet, their strategic value also exposes them to a host of vulnerabilities, especially when regional conflicts intensify.

In recent years, the region has grappled with an array of challenges: from transnational terrorism and civil unrest to forced migration and cross-border crime. These threats are not confined within national boundaries; they reverberate outward, affecting neighboring areas and feeding into broader instability in both Europe and the Middle East.

While the Maghreb possesses considerable economic potential and a deep cultural heritage, it remains under growing strain. Events such as the collapse of governance in Libya, the unresolved status of Western Sahara, and persistent instability in the Sahel have turned the region into a hotbed of insecurity. Extremist and terrorist organizations have found fertile ground here, exploiting power vacuums and navigating weak border controls with ease. As these crises multiply, the risk of broader destabilization increases—raising concerns over new waves of displacement, military escalation, and changing geopolitical alignments.

The Libyan Crisis

The 2011 uprising in Libya and the subsequent collapse of state institutions significantly altered the security architecture of North Africa. The power vacuum in Libya created favorable conditions for the emergence and expansion of armed groups, particularly jihadist organizations. These entities found a conducive environment for mobility, recruitment, armament, and the extension of their influence. Algeria, sharing over a thousand kilometers of border with Libya and serving as a cornerstone of regional stability, emerged as one of the most vulnerable states in this context.

The ongoing Libyan crisis introduced a range of new challenges to both Algeria and Tunisia, chief among them the rise of extremist Islamic groups. Organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Querine Hanlon and Matthew M. Herbert, 2015) (AQIM) and the so-called Islamic State (The Soufan Group, 2016) (IS), along with affiliated factions, have become major security threats in the border regions of Libya, Algeria, and Tunisia. These groups not only exert control over key

border zones but also attempt to infiltrate national territories through armed attacks, propaganda, and recruitment efforts.

A prominent example is the January 16, 2013, attack on the Tigantourine gas facility near In Amenas in southern Algeria, perpetrated by the "Signatories in Blood" brigade, linked to AQIM. The attack involved the hostage-taking of approximately 250 Algerian and 30 foreign workers, driven primarily by political demands. (Jalel Harchaoui, 2018)

Tunisia has also faced significant attacks, such as the 2015 assaults on the Bardo National Museum and the Sousse beach (BBC, 2015), as well as the 2016 Ben Guerdane attack (United States Department of State, 2017)—all orchestrated by IS operatives based in Libya. In response, both Algeria and Tunisia revised their national security doctrines, adopting more integrated and multilayered strategies (Mohammed El-Katiri, 2016). In 2014, the two countries formalized their cooperation by signing a bilateral agreement on border security aimed at combating terrorism and organized crime. (Mohammed El-Katiri, 2016) The agreement facilitated joint operations, intelligence sharing, training, and military exercises—strengthening the capacity of both states to confront transnational threats.

Alongside terrorist groups, smuggling networks have also expanded, often in cooperation with extremist organizations. These networks provide essential financial support to terrorist groups through trafficking in arms, fuel, drugs, and human beings. The erosion of border control and the proliferation of illicit networks have made the regional security architecture increasingly vulnerable.

To combat these threats, Algeria undertook unprecedented measures to reinforce border security. In 2014 alone, the Algerian army apprehended over 650 smugglers in the border areas with Libya, Mali, and Niger. (Lamine Chikhi, 2018) Tunisia, for its part, accelerated the construction of a 125-mile fortified barrier along its border with Libya (Anouar Boukhar, 2017). Border security became a matter of national

survival, prompting physical and institutional fortifications (Anouar Boukhar, 2018).

Together, these processes have created a complex, interconnected, and systemic threat to Algerian statehood, border integrity, and social cohesion. The expansion of terrorist-controlled territories, intensified smuggling flows, and the socioeconomic vulnerability of migrants have culminated in a compounded security crisis requiring a comprehensive policy response.

The Western Sahara Dispute

The Western Sahara conflict remains one of the most destabilizing factors in the region. The prolonged dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front continues to defy resolution despite multiple international mediation efforts. While Morocco considers Western Sahara an integral part of its territory, the Polisario Front demands full independence—an aspiration that Algeria supports both diplomatically and materially (Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy, 2010).

Tensions escalated in 2020 when Morocco conducted a military operation in the UN-monitored buffer zone of Guerguerat to disperse Sahrawi protesters allegedly blocking trade routes. This move led to the resumption of armed conflict between Morocco and the Polisario. (United Nations News, 2020) Further intensifying the situation was the decision by U.S. President Donald Trump to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara (The White House, 2020) a shift that Algeria viewed with concern, especially in light of the growing rapprochement between Morocco and Israel. Algeria perceives this alliance as a direct threat to its national security (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Bilateral relations deteriorated further when Morocco expressed support for the autonomy of Algeria's Kabyle region, in retaliation for Algeria's backing of the Polisario. This led Algeria to withdraw its ambassador in 2021 and sever diplomatic ties with Rabat (Middle East Eye, 2021). Algeria also accused Morocco and Israel of jointly supporting separatist movements within its territory. Subsequently, Algeria closed its

airspace to Moroccan aircraft and suspended natural gas exports through the Maghreb-Europe pipeline, which supplies approximately 10% of Morocco's electricity (Al Jazeera, 2021).

The entrenched rivalry between Algeria and Morocco, now deeply entangled with the Western Sahara conflict, has obstructed all prospects for a peaceful resolution. Neither party appears willing to make concessions or seek compromise. After four decades of armed conflict and unproductive negotiations under UN auspices, the conflict remains unresolved, with no immediate prospects for a stable settlement. The failure of international and regional efforts highlights the geopolitical complexity and the high stakes involved for all parties.

The Sahel Region

Another crucial dimension of the Maghreb's security landscape is the Sahel region. Located to the south of the Maghreb, the Sahel has become a breeding ground for instability due to ongoing armed conflicts between government forces and insurgent groups, including Tuareg rebels and Islamist factions.

Terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023) Boko Haram (also known as ISWAP) (Vision of Humanity, 2022), and others have entrenched themselves in the Sahel, posing existential threats to both regional and neighboring state security. This situation carries significant implications for geopolitical stability in North and West Africa.

The ongoing instability in the Sahel has triggered massive flows of refugees and migrants into neighboring Arab states. Countries like Algeria and Tunisia have become key transit zones for those seeking to reach Europe. At the same time, these countries are hosting increasing numbers of asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, placing significant pressure on national economies and exacerbating humanitarian challenges.

The influx of migrants has also generated social tensions and clashes with local populations, as migrants are often perceived as competitors in

strained labor markets. A particularly alarming aspect is the potential exploitation of migration routes by terrorist groups for cross-border infiltration. In this context, migration presents multidimensional risks to the security of Maghreb states, including increased social friction, economic strain, the proliferation of terrorist threats, and the escalation of humanitarian crises.

Conclusion

The Maghreb region today faces a web of interconnected and multidimensional security challenges that are both internal and external in nature. The protracted Libyan crisis, the unresolved Western Sahara dispute, the expansion of extremist networks in the Sahel, and the intensifying pressures of irregular migration have transformed national security issues into a broader regional security crisis.

Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are simultaneously targets of these threats and active responders, caught in a dynamic interplay of defense, diplomacy, and regional competition. The growing activity of terrorist and smuggling groups along the Libyan border and in the Sahel, the diplomatic rift between Algeria and Morocco over Western Sahara, and the humanitarian strain induced by irregular migration are reshaping both domestic security policies and the broader architecture of regional relations.

Despite various national efforts—ranging from border fortifications and military coordination to bilateral security agreements—these responses remain inadequate to address the root causes of the crisis. The evolving situation demands a multidimensional, integrated, and systemic approach that combines security, diplomacy, development, and humanitarian strategies.

Moreover, the constructive and balanced involvement of the international community is essential—not only for conflict mitigation but also for building a long-term framework for regional stability. Resolving the Western Sahara dispute and restoring trust between Algeria and

Morocco could serve as crucial steps toward achieving sustainable peace and security in the Maghreb.

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Azerbaijan–France Relations after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

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Abstract

This article presents the France-Azerbaijan relations after the 2020 war. The Nagorno-Karabakh war brought significant changes to the region and also affected the relations between various states, including France and Azerbaijan. In the post-war period, France's position tended to support Armenia, which was perceived by Azerbaijan as a display of partiality. The French Republic, as an OSCE Minsk Group co-chair, condemned Azerbaijan's actions, which in turn caused tensions in bilateral relations. As a result of this tension, the two countries began to criticize each other's foreign policy at the official level. These developments formed the basis for this study's focus on the foreign policy approaches, diplomatic steps, and official statements of both countries. The research also examines media publications that appeared during this period, which had a propagandistic character both in public and official discourse.

Introduction

France-Azerbaijan relations significantly deteriorated following the 2020 war, entering a phase of heightened tension. In the post-war period, bilateral relations were marked by notable strain, largely due to France's foreign policy statements and actions, which were perceived as unfavorable by Azerbaijan. The official statements made by France intensified tensions and concerns on the Azerbaijani side. The Republic of Azerbaijan accused the French side of bias, stating that France was interfering in the internal affairs of the South Caucasus region. This study examines the outcomes of bilateral statements and actions

within the context of post-war developments. The research aims to contribute to the body of studies on this period, which remains insufficiently explored. Several research institutions and media outlets have addressed this topic, including the Caucasus Institute in Armenia, the French newspaper *Le Monde*, the international news channel France 24, and the Center of Analysis of International Relations based in Baku, Azerbaijan. The work is based on a comparative analysis of official statements from both sides, as well as a contextual analysis of information published in the media.

France–Azerbaijan Relations after the 2020 44-Day War

Relations between France and Azerbaijan significantly declined after the 44-day war of 2020, as France positioned itself as an international supporter of Armenia. During the post-war period, the Republic of France expressed support for the self-determination of Artsakh. One of the notable actions was the French Senate's vote in favor of recognizing the independence of Artsakh, although it was not officially included in the agenda. As a result of the 2020 war, tensions in France–Azerbaijan relations escalated. The situation further worsened due to France's accusations against Azerbaijan regarding violations of the laws of war and humanitarian norms. Bilateral relations became even more strained when France, at an official level, called for the recognition of Artsakh's independence and openly criticized Azerbaijan's conduct during military operations. However, France had long been one of Azerbaijan's key Western partners. It was the first European country visited by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev in 1993. During the early 2000s, France–Azerbaijan relations were in a relatively constructive phase, with substantial developments in political, economic, and security sectors. A major milestone was the involvement of the French company Total, which operated in Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon exploration and production. Nevertheless, France's criticism of the 2020 war outcomes, its pro-Armenian stance, and its official accusations against Azerbaijan negatively impacted bilateral ties. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs stated that France could no longer serve as an 'honest broker.' This position further solidified after the French Senate adopted subsequent resolutions in 2022. In 2023, Azerbaijan's military operations and allegations of ethnic cleansing led to stronger French statements and further deterioration in relations. France was the first country to raise the issue of sanctions against Azerbaijan. Such declarations could not be ignored by Azerbaijan, especially after it was revealed that France was preparing to send 'Bastion' armored vehicles to Armenia—an act perceived by Baku as clear favoritism and interference. Despite strained diplomatic ties, economic and especially energy cooperation remained crucial. Azerbaijan is a significant supplier of energy resources to Europe, including France, which holds major economic interests in the region through TotalEnergies. Nonetheless, anti-French sentiment began to spread even beyond the region. Azerbaijani lobbying organizations criticized France's foreign policy, especially in its overseas territories.

As a result, in July 2023, Azerbaijan hosted an international conference titled 'Towards the Complete Elimination of Colonialism,' attended by representatives from France's overseas territories such as New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Martinique, and French Guiana. In November 2023, Azerbaijan openly supported New Caledonian protesters. These actions further strained bilateral ties. Following unrest in New Caledonia in May 2024, which resulted in casualties, a state of emergency was declared, and France accused Azerbaijan of interfering in its internal affairs and supporting the protests. French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin claimed that certain protest leaders had direct ties with Baku. However, a few days later, French Ambassador Anne Boillon visited Lachin to participate in an event dedicated to COP29, which was seen as a surprising gesture of potential rapprochement. Despite this, official Baku continued to issue accusations. The Lachin topic had long been a point of contention. Another cause of France–Azerbaijan tension can be attributed to President Macron's personal ambition to increase French influence in the South Caucasus and counterbalance Turkey's presence, which met with a strong response and diplomatic resistance

from Ilham Aliyev. Although the French media continued to portray the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as unresolved between Yerevan and Baku, Azerbaijan maintained that the issue was closed. Later on, even the traditionally pro-Armenian French newspaper **Le Figaro** began emphasizing France's peace-oriented role and approach in the region. Discussions over European Union-mediated border delimitation and the fading discourse on sanctions against Baku suggested the possibility of partial normalization of relations. At the same time, Turkey's role as Azerbaijan's strategic ally should not be overlooked. Paris, seeking to maintain delicate ties with Ankara, was compelled to adopt a balanced policy toward Baku. This dynamic explains why, despite strong rhetoric, France refrained from imposing harsh sanctions on Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

The presence of tension in France–Azerbaijan relations following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war was primarily due to France's adopted political stance. Official French statements were viewed by Azerbaijan as interference in its sovereignty and a threat not only to Azerbaijan but to regional stability. Azerbaijan asserted that France had adopted a unilateral and biased policy, particularly due to its statements regarding Artsakh's right to self-determination. France–Azerbaijan tensions became systemic when official statements escalated into mutual accusations and diplomatic hostilities. Subsequent Azerbaijani support for anti-French demonstrations deepened the crisis, which, however, was partially mitigated through continued economic cooperation. In summary, current relations are characterized by multilayered tensions but exhibit a softer tone due to mutual interests. Nevertheless, the future of France–Azerbaijan relations will depend not only on bilateral interactions but also on the regional strategies of external actors, particularly Turkey, the EU, and Russia.

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Saudi Arabia–Azerbaijan Relations and the Role of Armenia

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Abstract

After gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan prioritized strengthening its relations with the Arab Gulf monarchies, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This policy aimed not only to foster multilateral cooperation but also to secure political support on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to maintain a balanced foreign policy. For Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan was the only state in the South Caucasus with which Riyadh established close cooperation as a Muslim-majority country. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia actively supported the legitimization of Azerbaijani narratives regarding Armenia, positioning itself as a state committed to Islamic solidarity. The role of Iran was also a significant factor in Azerbaijan–Saudi Arabia bilateral relations, as both states’ interests intersected in this context. Examining this relationship highlights the depth and character of the bilateral ties, as well as the mutual interests and strategic considerations that have shaped them.

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Armenia, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), converging interests, Islamic solidarity, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict*

Introduction

This study examines the factors shaping Azerbaijan–Saudi Arabia relations, the main drivers influencing this process, the actual depth of their cooperation, and the converging and conflicting interests of both countries from a geopolitical perspective. The analysis shows that Azerbaijan has become the more proactive actor in strengthening bilateral ties and has secured comprehensive Saudi support regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, Saudi Arabia’s engagement with

Azerbaijan is also viewed through the lens of its Wahhabi orientation, considering Azerbaijan's predominantly Shiite identity and the intertwined strategic interests related to Iran and Saudi Arabia's broader goals in the South Caucasus.

According to Luiza Cerolin, following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Saudi Arabia sought to reduce its dependence on external allies and pursue greater autonomy in foreign policy. Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom achieved notable progress in modernization, opening up to the international arena, and implementing domestic reforms. Consequently, Azerbaijan–Saudi Arabia relations can be understood as a product of the pragmatic alignment of both states' strategic interests.

The study spans from 1993 to 2023, ending with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Armenia. This development followed Azerbaijan's military victories in the 2020 war, which allowed it to regain seven districts previously held by Armenia, capture Shushi—the cultural capital of Nagorno-Karabakh—and, after the 2023 conflict and regional demographic changes, effectively solidify control over the entire former Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

Establishment and Development of Bilateral Relations

After suffering defeat in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1991–1994), Azerbaijan shifted its focus toward foreign policy, aiming to strengthen its international standing in order to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in its favor and to generate international pressure on Armenia. During Heydar Aliyev's presidency—a period that can be rightfully regarded as the formative phase of Azerbaijan's national identity, state-building, and the establishment of “Azerbaijani Islam”—Azerbaijan took its first steps toward developing relations with the Arab and Islamic world. Among Arab countries, Azerbaijan established its deepest and most targeted cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Collaboration with Riyadh also promoted the Islamic dimension of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, which later proved decisive for Baku. Bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia deepened further under the presidency of Ilham Aliyev. Saudi Arabia was attractive to Azerbaijan as a state with significant regional and international influence. Riyadh played a key role in global and regional affairs, positioning itself as the homeland of Islam and a defender of the broader interests of the Ummah.

As a leading oil-producing country, Saudi Arabia held considerable influence in several major supranational organizations, including the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Arab League, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Notably, Azerbaijan became the first post-Soviet republic to join the OIC in 1991 (Azerbaijan.az, 2025).

In the South Caucasus, Saudi Arabia's focus was on Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's Shiite orientation did not present any obstacles. Saudi Arabia officially recognized Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, and in February 1992, the two countries established diplomatic relations. The Azerbaijani embassy in Riyadh opened in April 1994, followed by the opening of the Saudi embassy in Baku five years later, in June 1999. In July 1994, after the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, President Heydar Aliyev made an official visit to Saudi Arabia. This visit created new opportunities for developing bilateral relations. During the trip, a key memorandum on cooperation in economy, trade, investment, technology, culture, youth, and sports was signed (Riyadh.mfa.gov.az, 2025).

Within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Saudi Arabia's support for Azerbaijan increased the kingdom's significance for Baku. Azerbaijan was actively engaged with the OIC, and the instrumentalization of Islamic discourse primarily aimed to garner support from the Muslim world and the global Ummah to legitimize Azerbaijani claims regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Another important aspect of Saudi Arabia–Azerbaijan cooperation is that, at

Azerbaijan's urging, Saudi Arabia refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with the Republic of Armenia, despite the fact that there had never been any obstructive issues or conflicts between Riyadh and Yerevan.

Upon assuming power in 2003, Ilham Aliyev actively pursued strengthening bilateral ties. Two years after coming to power, in March 2005, President Aliyev officially visited Riyadh. During this visit, Aliyev undertook a pilgrimage to the holy cities, accompanied by his family members. Considerable achievements were made in public diplomacy as well. Within the framework of bilateral cooperation, a notable event was President Ilham Aliyev's second official visit to Saudi Arabia in April 2015. The high level of Azerbaijan–Saudi relations was evident from the fact that King Salman personally welcomed Aliyev at Riyadh airport. The main guidelines for cooperation were reaffirmed. The Azerbaijani president met with the highest-ranking officials across various sectors and also undertook a small pilgrimage with his family to the holy sites. Additionally, he held meetings with the OIC leadership, including the heads of its various bodies, notably the most financially significant—the Islamic Development Bank—and the OIC Secretary-General (Trend.az, 2025).

In recent years, Azerbaijan's cooperation with Saudi Arabia has also begun to develop in the field of renewable energy. It was also a gesture toward Azerbaijan that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consistently refused to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Armenia, citing the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—a stance that Baku considered a diplomatic victory. From an international relations perspective, it is particularly interesting when a state—in this case, Saudi Arabia—chooses to refrain from diplomatic engagement with another country, without any deep-rooted conflict, for the sake of a third state. Azerbaijani presidents and high-ranking officials publicly expressed their gratitude to Saudi Arabia for this. In effect, Saudi Arabia–Azerbaijan relations were, in part, oriented against a third country—Armenia—which historically had established friendly and cooperative relations with the

Arab world. After Azerbaijan's defeat in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations with Armenia only in 2023. However, it will take a considerable amount of time for these relations to gain significant momentum.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia–Azerbaijan relations have served the geopolitical interests of both states. Azerbaijan sought to secure Saudi support on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue while preventing Riyadh from establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia. For Saudi Arabia, cooperation with Azerbaijan brought the kingdom closer to the South Caucasus. In this bilateral relationship, Armenia acted as a trigger, as Saudi Arabia established diplomatic ties with Yerevan only decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, motivated by the principle of supporting Azerbaijan within the framework of Islamic solidarity. Ultimately, Saudi Arabia acceded to Azerbaijan's interests and established diplomatic relations with Armenia only in 2023, following Azerbaijan's victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, highlighting the influence of a third-party factor in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

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The Features of the Development of RA-IRI Relations in the Context of Unblocking the Region

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Introduction

For the Third Republic of Armenia (hereinafter RA), establishing interstate relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereinafter IRI), which borders the RA, was important for stability and security during the collapse of the USSR.

Consequently, the current state of Armenian-Iranian relations is now being studied not only by Armenian, Iranian, and international researchers but also by numerous political leaders. Furthermore, the strengthening ties between official Tehran and Yerevan continue to be relevant at the highest levels of international organizations and remain in the focus of diplomatic figures.

Indeed, an analysis of the relations between RA and IRI at the end of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century shows that they have the potential and resources to address existing problems in the region constructively. For nearly 35 years, the relations between RA and IRI have experienced various international and regional military and political events while remaining viable.

Keywords: *RA-IRI relations, development, features, region, unblocking, military and political events, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders.*

Historical overview of the development of relations between RA and IRI

The common national interests of the two peoples were crucial in creating relations between the two countries (Khurshudyan 1999, 108). The least Turkish-Azerbaijani military success in the South Caucasus poses a definite threat to Armenia and Iran.

Back in 1919, on July 7, Persia¹ established diplomatic relations with the First Republic of Armenia (Bayburdyan 2012, 15). 1918-1920 Persia was the only neighboring country with which the Armenian government had almost no territorial or other disputes (Zohrabyan 1985, 12-13). In fact, the Armenian-Persian relations ended with the formation of the USSR.

It is noteworthy that on April 9, 1929, and January 23, 1932, agreements were signed to stabilize the Turkish-Iranian borders, according to which Turkey had a 12 km-long border with Nakhichevan (Simonyan 1991, 413; Begijanyan 2004, 212). In fact, in 1921, as a result of Turkish-Azerbaijani cooperation during the signing of the Moscow Treaty, the border was drawn in such a way that a narrow strip stretching from north to southeast in the eastern part of Surmalu province, between the Araks River and its right tributary, the Karasu, became a shared corridor between the formerly Armenian Nakhichevan and Turkey, which passed to Soviet Azerbaijan. As a result of this territorial reorganization, Armenia and Iran, located 2 to 4.5 km apart along an arc more than 25 km long, ranging from 2 to 4.5 km in width, were deprived of the opportunity to have a common border (Melkonyan 2022, 225).

In fact, the Armenian SSR found itself in the Turkish arc in the West of its border, where the Iranian counterweight to the Turkish was eliminated, and the Armenian SSR was deprived of a short and important way to establish communication with Persia through the south of the Ararat Valley, the consequences of which were felt in the post-Soviet years.

After the collapse of the USSR, the competition among Russia, Turkey, and Iran for dominance in the South Caucasus entered a new phase. According to Russian researcher Dmitry Trenin, the South Caucasus serves as a buffer zone between Russia and Turkey and Iran, with its strategic importance stemming from this role (Shirinyan 2006, 157). In this struggle, the West supported Turkey because it feared that

¹ Since 1935, the name of the state has been changed to Iran.

newly independent Islamic countries might come under the influence of the Iranian Islamic regime (Heinz 1996, 2). Furthermore, with the rise of a unipolar world led by the United States, international relations began to take shape (Hovhannisyan 2001, 85. Hovhannisyan 1999, 16-37. Hovhannisyan 1993, 4-6).

Given that the 2,250 km border between the USSR and Iran was abolished, some members of the Iranian political elite believed that several territories in the South Caucasus, which were previously part of Iran, should now be "returned." However, the Iranian leadership did not pursue this idea (Bayburdyan 2004, 143-148). The Iranian authorities demonstrated realism and were content with establishing relations with the newly independent states.

Thus, Iran avoids spreading its forces and tries to focus its capabilities in receptive regions, in Tajikistan and the Persian-speaking population of Uzbekistan, in Azerbaijan, which professes the Shiite religion, and in Armenia and Georgia, which have political interests. In the person of Iran, Armenia is dealing with a neighboring state that claims to be a leader in the region.

Through Iran, Armenia was given the opportunity to establish a connection with the world, and the historical continuity of the ancient Armenian-Iranian relations, which were interrupted during the 70 years of the USSR's existence, was restored (Mkrtchyan 2023, 11).

An attempt to give a historical and political assessment of the 1990s as for the Armenian-Iranian relations, which were founded and followed the path of development, it can be unequivocally stated that they included political, economic, scientific, educational and cultural capital for the Armenian side in the conditions of the blockade.

Undoubtedly, this was also based on the interests of the Iranian side, which established its presence in the post-Soviet South Caucasus. It was this important reality that turned the Armenian-Iranian relations into a definite factor in the region, which was somehow considered by both regional and non-regional political forces. In accordance with this, we believe that one of the features of the development of bilateral relations is

not only the implementation of mutual programs in various fields, but also the transformation into a political and economic factor in the region for more than a quarter of a century.

It is known that Armenia attaches importance to normal relations with neighboring states and strives to establish relations based on open borders and partnership in the region, being ready for a healthy and realistic dialogue (Natioanl..., 1). From this point of view, for Armenia, which has been under blockade for more than 30 years, Iran is primarily a country that balances the blockade of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the region.

In the context of the above, let's try to take a general look at some of the features of bilateral relations.

The problems existing in the Armenian-Iranian relations were also in the focus of the Iranian press. However, not in all cases, the Iranian press turned to the sharp sides. We believe that the most interesting and accurate accents were made by the economic weekly "*Asiaye Miyane*", published in Tehran, in its article titled "Republic of Armenia: Their green lights and the steps of our turtle" (April 10, 1999). The weekly magazine visionarily emphasizes: "By Armenia, we mean not only the Republic of Karabakh, located in the Caucasus and having disputes with its neighbor, but also a market in which Iran will have serious interests in the near future. Being pro-Iranian, Armenia still hopes to see a strong Iranian presence in various sectors of its economy" (Historico - ..., 1). In fact, the Iranian side stated that Armenia's expectations were higher than those of Iran, but the latter delayed and marked the 1990s with a weak investment policy.

In this weekly newspaper, the issue was raised not only economically, but also strategically. Obviously, by increasing its investments in Armenia, the Iranian side would have the opportunity to take a larger position in the region.

Thus, during the 20th century, Armenian-Iranian relations had different statuses, namely, firstly, as equal states in 1918-1920, it was interrupted for about 70 years and finds its logical continuation after the

collapse of the Soviet Union, the declaration of independence of the third Armenian Republic. In the last decade of the 20th century, Armenian-Iranian relations began to develop in a new way, as an important position enshrined in the Foreign Policy Concept of these sovereign states.

The features of the development of RA-IRI relations in the context of unblocking the region

Today, when there is open and uncompromising competition in the region regarding the clash of interests between various geopolitical poles and states, RA-IRI relations have acquired new qualitative characteristics, and the previously achieved results need to be further strengthened and new prospects for cooperation outlined in the current difficult conditions.

The next problem is closely related to the difficult situation when, "as a result" of the 44-day war, Turkey made a serious bid to act in the region not only as an ally of Azerbaijan, but also as one of the key players capable of determining the future vector of regional security (Melkonyan 2024, 139).

Obviously, in 2020, as a result of the Third, 44-day Artsakh War unleashed by Azerbaijan and Turkey, the Armenian factor along the northwestern borders of Iran was undermined, which was formed back in the 1990s. That's why the territories that are currently located north of the Araks river and were once under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Artsakh have become a definite threat to Iran.

However, on the other hand, it should be noted that Iran's position regarding the borders between Armenia and Iran, that is, the internationally recognized borders of the states are not subject to change, is perceived in Azerbaijan as an obstacle to the implementation of the so-called "Zangezur corridor", which they require (Tonoyan 2024, 284).

Thus, one of the important features of the relations between Armenia and Iran is the value system of neighboring nations. Indeed, the 46 km-long RA-IRI interstate border should be considered as an intercivilizational border. It is obvious that Iran, first of all and in accordance with its interests, is interested in preserving this ancient or, as

the high-ranking Iranian leadership notes, "the millennial milestone," which in this case completely coincides with Armenian interests. From this point of view, Armenia and Iran are natural allies.

It should be noted that the study of the current relations between Armenia and Iran shows that they are entering a phase with new and complex challenges caused by emergency or military situations, where new features of development are emerging in the context of unblocking the region.

It is worth noting that in 2025. On January 8, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan stated that the Armenian side had submitted comprehensive proposals for unblocking the Armenia-Azerbaijan transport infrastructure, but no official response had been received from Azerbaijan (No official...2025).

It is noteworthy that the unchanged point of view of the Iranian side, expressed in the context of unblocking, is of great strategic and security importance. According to Mirzoyan "Of course, it is essential, and we have highlighted this at every opportunity that Iran's position on territorial integrity of Armenia and the inviolability of its borders is important for us - a position that is regularly voiced by high-ranking Iranian officials, as well as the position of Iran on the issue of unblocking the same transport infrastructure" (Introductory remarks 2025).

Thus, the issue of unblocking raised by the Armenian side is being speculated by the Azerbaijani side and an attempt is being made to damage the existence of the Armenia-Iran border itself. That is why in recent years the Iranian side has regularly and purposefully expressed its position on this issue. And it is almost only in the face of opposition from the Iranian side that the international community gets the opportunity to get an idea of the real goals of the project.

Unblocking is also determined by the so-called "Crossroads of the Peace" project presented by the Armenian authorities (Harutyunyan 2024). On this occasion Mahmoud Jafari Dehaghi, a lecturer at the Literature Faculty at Tehran State University and Director of the Center of Iranian Studies believes that *"The Iranian side hopes that the*

Crossroads of Peace initiative presented by Armenia will have success and will contribute to having a prosperous and peaceful region and especially the strengthening of the Armenian-Iranian ties” (Dehaghi 2024). Perhaps it is obvious that there is some legitimate concern on the Iranian side that the "Crossroads of the Peace" initiative, which has been launched, may overshadow economic relations between Armenia and Iran.

It is clear from the official news that such sensitive discussions are the focus of attention of Armenian and Iranian officials. This is evidenced by the data for 2025, on January 20, Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Vahan Kostanyan met in Tehran with Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Majid Takht Ravanchi, Adviser to the President of Iran on Political Issues Mehdi Sanayi and Adviser to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Head of the Strategic Council on International Relations Kamal Kharazi (The meeting of... 2025).

The next important feature that was noted in the bilateral relations is that in 2025 on April 9-10, the armed forces of Armenia and Iran conducted joint military exercises for the first time. Despite the fact that a unit of the Armenian Armed Forces conducted exercises on the territory of Armenia, and a unit of the Iranian Armed Forces conducted exercises on the territory of Iran, nevertheless, this can be assessed as an important landmark of cooperation. The exercises involve actions to neutralize attacks by conditional terrorist groups on border checkpoints located on the Armenia-Iran state border (Special Forces ... 2025). Regarding the exercises, the Iranian news agency "Mehrnews" notes: *"The main purpose of the simultaneous exercises was to strengthen border security, and these exercises were conducted in accordance with maintaining stable peace in the region"* (رزمایش).

However, we consider it necessary to note that these exercises were followed by the military exercises "Araz-2025" with Azerbaijan in the occupied territory of Artsakh on May 18-21, 2025. It is noteworthy that "in the statement of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Karabakh is called a "liberated region" (رزمایش). Thus, from a political point of view,

by participating in these exercises, the Iranian side demonstrates its balanced policy in the region.

When discussing the current relations between Armenia and Iran, they can also be considered in the light of the opinions of some international analysts who disagree with the official positions of the Iranian authorities. Arash Azizi, an author of "The Atlantic" magazine, writes that Israel's strikes against "Hamas" and "Hezbollah" in 2024 significantly weakened the so-called axis of resistance of Iran. The final nail in the coffin was the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria. Meanwhile, on January 8, 2025, Iran's spiritual leader Khamenei promised that Iran would continue to "support the resistance in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Yemen" (Azizi 2025). It is obvious that Iran's influence in these countries has decreased. And despite the fact that this author in his article showed a rather critical approach to Tehran, nevertheless, they also indicate the difficult geopolitical situation in Iran.

RA-IRI relations found themselves in difficult conditions as a result of Israel's surprise attack on Iran on June 13, 2025 (Israel 2025). In this case, the geopolitical situation in the region may change. It was in this environment that, since 1991, the political and diplomatic relations between Armenia and Iran were formed and developed along the path of development.

By the way, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Dr. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, also emphasizes in his book that today diplomacy at the level of world politics has two main properties: "complexity and confusion". This leads to the disappearance of concentration and the development of various narratives within the international system and, ultimately, globalization (Araghchi 2025). According to his other observation, diplomacy is no longer a process, but a tool for implementing foreign policy (Ibid). In fact, in accelerated processes and in a transforming region, it is necessary to develop RA-IRI relations with the help of this everyday tool, leaving even some laborious and protocol stereotypes in the past.

Thus, it becomes obvious that, well aware of the serious changes taking place in the region in Iran, they believe that they should also make the issues of changing the old tools in the United States, starting discussions of a new quality with the EU, and concluding new temporary alliances the subject of discussion (Iskandaryan 2024, 55).

Moreover, sharp and abrupt military and political transformations pose a definite threat to all regional states, including the development of relations between Armenia and Iran.

Conclusion

The analysis of RA-IRI relations shows that the succession and changes of independent political authorities, the preservation, development and deepening of RA-IRI relations are important for the two states. In the post-Soviet years, today and in the future, Iran and Armenia have attached and will continue to attach great importance to each other's stability and security.

The common interests of the states bordering Iran allow in the region to establish and develop effective and mutually beneficial interstate relations. Armenia, which is not a member of NATO, and vice versa, being a member state of the CIS and the CSTO, was recognized by the Iranian side in the 1990s as the most reliable enterprise and source of hope for Tehran, especially in terms of deepening relations with Russia.

The development of bilateral relations is currently largely related to the complex and difficult international military-political situation, which may have a direct impact on the Armenian-Iranian economic and other relations.

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Perspectives of Diversification of Armenian Foreign Economic Policy in Context of Arab World

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Introduction

Armenia, as a small and open economy, has historically been dependent on external markets. Since the middle ages, Armenians have acted as trade intermediaries, playing an active role in the markets of the Middle East, including the Arab world. These historical ties, however, were significantly weakened during the Soviet era, when Armenia's external economic relations were primarily concentrated within the Soviet Union, particularly with Russia and other Soviet republics. The Cold War and the isolated economic policies of Soviet Armenia led to a decline in relations with the Arab world, gradually excluding them from Armenia's external economic agenda. Consequently, after gaining independence, Armenia entered the global economy without sufficiently developed or robust connections with the Middle East, particularly the Arab countries. In recent years, amid rapid geopolitical changes, regional instability, and the emergence of new economic centers globally, diversifying Armenia's external economic policy has become increasingly urgent. In this context, the Arab world, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, represents a promising direction for promoting exports and fostering investment cooperation.

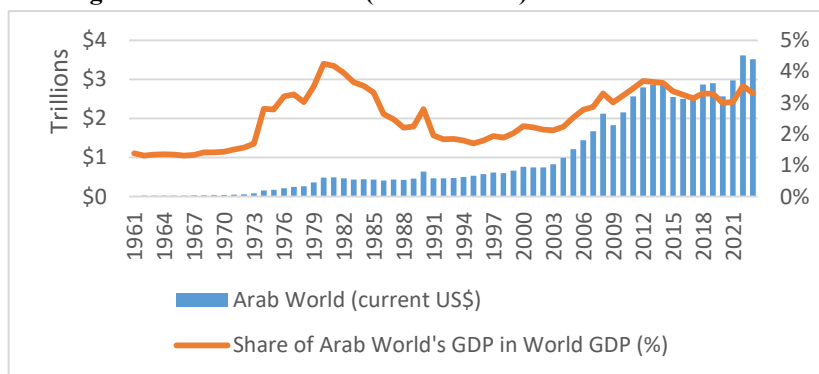
Keywords: *Armenia, Arab World, Trade Relations, Export and Import, GCC, Mashreq, Maghreb*

THE ECONOMIC ROLE AND TRADE POTENTIAL OF THE ARAB WORLD

Over the past few decades, the economic role of the Arab world within the global economy has grown significantly, driven by fluctuations in global oil prices, as well as efforts to restructure and diversify

economies. This trend is evident when examining the share of Arab countries in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 1965, the GDP of Arab countries accounted for only 1.34% of global GDP, but by 2023, this share had increased to 3.31%. Notably, in 1965, several Arab states had not yet gained independence, partially explaining the lower share during that period. By contrast, in 1980 and 1981, this share reached 4.26% and 4.2% (Fig 1), respectively, driven by the global oil crisis, which led to sharp increases in oil prices and significant GDP growth in oil-producing Arab countries. However, beyond numerical growth, the structure of GDP is critical. While oil extraction and exports dominated Arab economies in previous decades, recent years have seen active diversification efforts. A notable example is the Emirate of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where financial services, tourism, logistics, and new technologies have become key economic drivers. In this context, the share of oil rents in the GDP of Arab countries was 17.1% in 2021, significantly lower than the 57.6% recorded in 1979. The average share from 1970 to 2021 was approximately 24.7%, with a slight increase in 2021 attributed to economic measures implemented to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, foreign trade has shown consistent growth. In 1970, trade accounted for approximately 60% of Arab countries' GDP, rising to 91% by 2023. The peak was recorded in 2008 at 97%, driven by continuous trade growth since 1994. The subsequent decline was largely linked to the 2008–2009 global financial crisis.

Fig. 1 Arab World's GDP (current USD) and its share in World¹



The total volume of merchandise trade in Arab countries reached USD 1.198 trillion, reflecting a 9.7% increase compared to 2022. Additionally, intra-regional trade has clear potential for growth, particularly in non-oil goods and services exports. Arab countries are increasingly exporting not only oil and petroleum products but also metals, fertilizers, precious stones, and services, particularly in transport, tourism, and finance. Thus, the Arab world's economic role continues to grow globally, but more importantly, the region is gradually shifting away from an oil-dependent model toward diversified, innovative, and service-based economies. This dynamic is particularly significant for small economies like Armenia, which can consider the Arab world as a partner not only for exports but also for investment and technological cooperation.

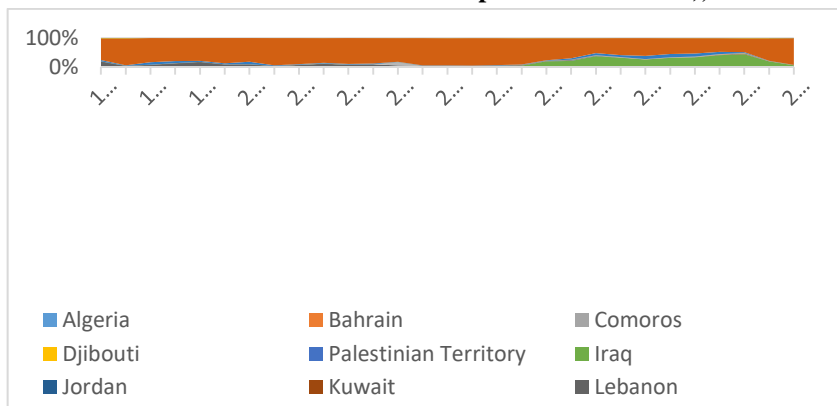
CURRENT TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMENIA AND ARAB STATES

Armenia's economic relations with Arab countries are characterized by growing trade with some nations and uneven, slow development with others. From 1995 to 2023, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been

¹ Compiled by the author based on World Bank data,
URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

Armenia's primary trading partner in the Arab world. Trade with the UAE has seen steady growth since the mid-2000s, particularly in recent years. In 2023, bilateral trade reached a historical peak of USD 2.846 billion, a 187.8% increase over the previous year. Since 2010, Iraq and Syria have also increased their share in Armenia's foreign trade structure, driven by regional geopolitical developments and the economic involvement of Armenian diaspora communities in these countries. However, this trend has shifted in recent years. Trade with Iraq, for instance, declined from USD 249.9 million in 2022 to USD 181.3 million in 2023, a 27.4% drop (Fig. 2), due to structural issues in Iraq's market and relatively slower growth, as well as the more rapid development of relations with the UAE. Trade relations with Syria and Lebanon, reliant on the Armenian diaspora, have been affected by prolonged socio-economic crises and military conflicts in these countries, leading to instability in trade relations despite efforts to maintain consistent ties. Egypt, while maintaining a relatively low share, demonstrates steady trade growth, reflecting gradually increasing interest and potential for long-term cooperation. Relations with other Arab countries, such as Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Morocco, remain inconsistent, with trade volumes fluctuating without sustained growth trends, indicating a lack of institutionalized foundations or stable investment and trade agendas. Overall, Armenia's trade with Arab countries is currently focused on key partners: the UAE, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. The next phase of economic policy could prioritize strengthening positions in these markets while expanding ties with new markets, particularly GCC countries.

Fig. 2 Trade turnover between Armenia and Arab states by country (% from all export to Arab states), 1995-2023¹

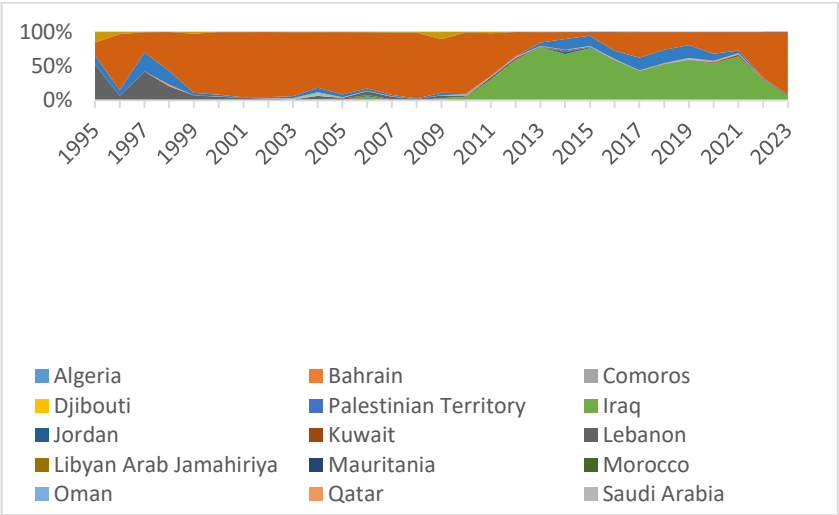


Armenia's export relations with Arab countries took shape in the early years of independence. In the early years of independence, the primary export destinations in the Arab world were Lebanon and Syria, driven by the presence of large, organized Armenian diaspora communities that created natural demand for Armenian goods (e.g., food products, light industry products, and beverages), historical and cultural ties, and low trade barriers in these countries. Exports to these markets were small in volume but stable, serving as Armenia's initial external markets post-independence. However, after 1995, Armenia's export structure underwent significant realignment. A new economic environment emerged in the region, driven by economic activity in parts of Iraq and the growing investment, construction, and consumer opportunities in GCC countries. Since the early 2010s, Armenia's exports have increasingly shifted toward Iraq, which became one of the leading export destinations in the Arab world for several years, driven by exports of construction materials, food products, and tobacco. In 2022, exports to Iraq reached USD 249.7 million, reflecting its role as a key export partner. However, in 2023, this figure dropped to USD 181.3 million, a

¹ Compiled by the author based on data from the Statistical Service of Armenia, URL: <https://armstat.am/en/>

27.4% decline, due to security and logistical challenges. Concurrently, the UAE has become the dominant destination in Armenia’s export structure. While exports to the UAE were negligible before 2010, they reached USD 2.84 billion in 2023, a 187.8% increase in a single year (Fig. 3), driven by the UAE’s open market, investment-friendly environment, and role as a financial hub facilitating re-exports. Export relations with Egypt and other Arab countries remain limited but show modest growth trends, linked to enhanced bilateral diplomatic efforts and the introduction of new product categories. Exports to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia remain irregular, lacking a stable partnership framework. Overall, Armenia’s export structure to Arab countries has undergone a phased transformation over the past decade, shifting from diaspora-driven markets to more open, high-demand economies, serving as a critical driver for market diversification and the redefinition of Armenia’s external economic strategy.

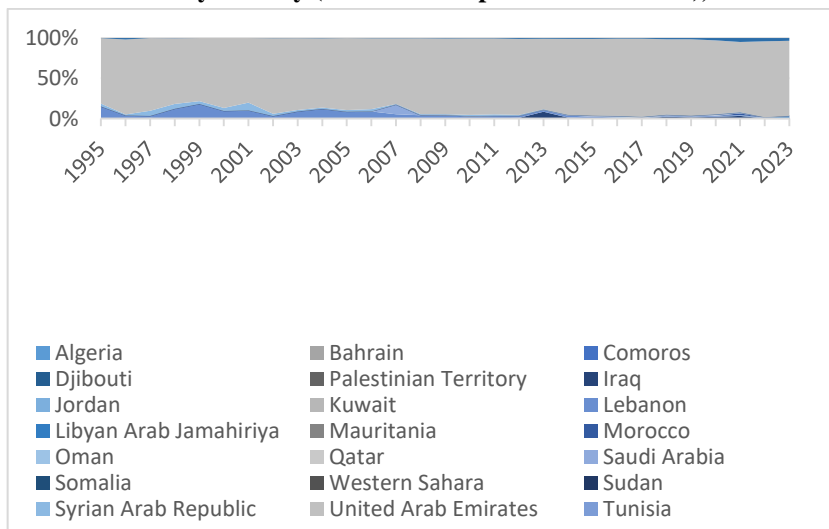
Fig. 3 Export from Armenia to Arab states by country (% from all export to Arab states), 1995-2023¹



¹ Compiled by the author based on data from the Statistical Service of Armenia, URL: <https://armstat.am/en/>

From 1995 to 2010, Armenia's import structure from Arab countries was characterized by high concentration and limited partner diversification. Analysis of bilateral import data highlights the dominant role of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In 1995, the UAE accounted for 81.3% of imports from Arab countries, reaching up to 94.9% in 2009 in some years (Fig.4). This trend reflects Armenia's heavy reliance on a single import source, which poses risks to economic stability. Other Arab countries had significantly limited involvement in Armenia's import structure. Egypt maintained consistent but modest import shares, ranging from 0.2% to 1.8% annually. Lebanon showed some activity in the late 1990s, peaking at 18.2% in 1999, but its share declined significantly thereafter. Syria maintained low import levels (up to 3.4%) between 2000 and 2006, after which it nearly disappeared from Armenia's import map. Iraq's involvement began in 2001 but never exceeded 0.5% at its peak. Notably, several Arab countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Western Sahara, and Libya (until 2009), were absent from import data, indicating either a lack of trade relations or negligible import volumes. These findings underscore the need for diversification of Armenia's trade partners in the Arab region to enhance economic stability and mitigate risks associated with over-reliance on a single source.

Fig. 4 Import by country of consignment to Armenia from Arab states by country (% from all export to Arab states), 1995-2023¹

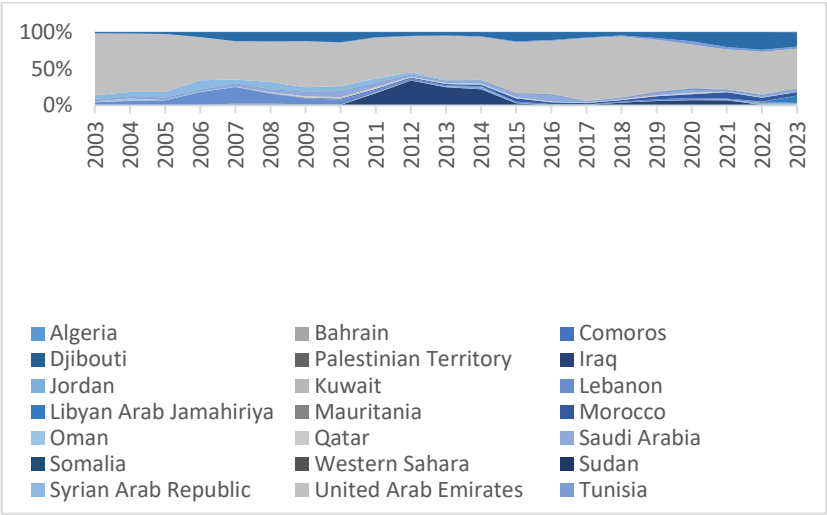


When assessing Armenia's imports from the Arab world by country of origin, a more nuanced and diversified picture emerges compared to the structure of imports based on the immediate exporting (trading) country. While the United Arab Emirates continues to dominate, its share is less overwhelming when measured by actual origin rather than by the trading intermediary. In 2023, imports originating from the UAE accounted for 54% of Armenia's total imports from Arab countries, a significant yet notably lower figure than in trade partner-based assessments. Egypt emerges as the second-largest country of origin, contributing 19.7% (Fig 5) of Arab-origin imports, followed by Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Tunisia, each with more modest but noteworthy shares. This distribution highlights a critical structural feature of Armenia's trade with the Arab world: a substantial portion of imports is not conducted through direct bilateral channels but rather reaches

¹ Compiled by the author based on data from the Statistical Service of Armenia, URL: <https://armstat.am/en/>

Armenia via intermediary third countries. Such a pattern suggests that formal trade relationships with many Arab states remain underdeveloped or indirect, often routed through logistics and re-export hubs such as the UAE. This reliance on intermediary trade creates inefficiencies, increases transaction costs, and limits opportunities for the establishment of stable, mutually beneficial bilateral trade frameworks. Moreover, the lack of direct import flows from a broader range of Arab countries presents a significant constraint for Armenia’s foreign economic policy, as it impedes the deepening of strategic ties and the formation of long-term economic partnerships. Addressing this issue requires targeted policy interventions aimed at institutionalizing trade relations, improving logistics connectivity, and fostering diplomatic engagement to facilitate more direct commercial exchanges. By overcoming these structural barriers, Armenia could enhance the resilience, efficiency, and geopolitical balance of its trade relations with the Arab world.

Fig. 5 Import by country of origin to Armenia from Arab states by country (% from all export to Arab states), 1995-2023¹



¹ Compiled by the author based on data from the Statistical Service of Armenia, URL: <https://armstat.am/en/>

Sub-Regional Approach to Economic Cooperation

In this context, it is essential to emphasize that the establishment of effective economic cooperation with the Arab world—as well as the formulation of a targeted and well-founded foreign economic policy—requires the application of a subregional approach. This approach should be based on the geographical, economic, political, and diaspora-related structural characteristics of Arab countries. From the perspective of effective analysis and policy development, four subregional groupings can be conditionally distinguished: the Mashreq (Eastern Arab countries), the Maghreb (Arab countries of Northwest Africa), the Gulf States (characterized by oil-based economies and substantial immigrant populations), and a group of other countries (e.g., Djibouti, Comoros, Mauritania) that fall outside the core strategic logic of the first three clusters. **The Mashreq region**—which includes Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt—has distinctive features relevant to Armenia’s foreign economic engagement. Armenia’s cooperation with several countries of this group, especially Iraq and Syria, is largely shaped by the presence of a traditional Armenian diaspora and the existence of direct economic ties with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These connections create a specific axis of strategic partnership for Armenia. The diaspora factor is also significant for facilitating trade and investment with Lebanon and Egypt, where historically rooted Armenian communities can serve as economic and cultural bridges. **The Gulf countries (GCC)**—comprising the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman—represent the most active and promising region for Armenia’s foreign trade cooperation within the Arab world. A considerable share of Armenia’s imports from Arab countries originates from the Gulf, a trend driven by several factors: the economic stability and high growth rates of these countries, the advanced development of their institutional governance systems, and their ongoing efforts toward economic diversification. It is also worth noting that a well-established Armenian diaspora exists in the Gulf, whose links with diasporic networks in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt could further catalyze

economic and investment cooperation. **The Maghreb region**—which includes Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania—currently holds a lower priority on Armenia’s economic agenda. However, there is growing interest in expanding trade and economic ties, particularly with Morocco and Tunisia. The potential of this subregion is of particular interest in terms of industrial cooperation and the development of linkages in the manufacturing sector. Other Arab countries outside the aforementioned sub regional clusters currently occupy a marginal share in Armenia’s import structure and cooperation programs. Nonetheless, under specific conditions—such as shifts in foreign policy or regional developments—some of these countries may become strategically relevant for Armenia’s economic diplomacy. In conclusion, sub regional classification not only allows for a more targeted formulation of Armenia’s foreign economic policy toward the Arab world but also facilitates the identification of realistic pathways for deepening cooperation. These pathways are grounded in the mobilization of diaspora networks and the adaptation to existing economic and institutional realities in each sub region.

Conclusion

The analysis of Armenia’s trade and economic relations with the Arab world reveals fundamental structural imbalances and a lack of strategic coherence, which hinder the realization of the full potential of these partnerships. Despite the growing importance of Arab countries in global economic and geopolitical processes, Armenia's engagement with the region remains limited, fragmented, and often reactive rather than proactive. These relations do not adequately reflect either the diverse economic opportunities presented by the Arab world or Armenia’s long-term development and security interests. In this regard, the adoption of a sub-regional analytical and policy approach is not only methodologically sound but also strategically necessary. Conceptualizing the Arab world as a constellation of relatively homogeneous economic sub-zones—such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Mashreq, the

Maghreb, and other Arab states—provides a more accurate and differentiated framework for external economic policy formulation. This framework enables Armenian policymakers to take into account the significant differences across sub-regions in terms of economic structures, levels of development, institutional capacity, political stability, and the presence and influence of the Armenian diaspora. As such, it lays the groundwork for more targeted, context-sensitive, and sustainable forms of cooperation. A regionally calibrated foreign economic policy would allow Armenia to prioritize key strategic objectives such as export promotion, the diversification of trade and investment partners, technological modernization, and the attraction of foreign direct investment. Within this framework, engagement with Arab countries should not be seen in isolation but rather as a crucial component of a broader strategy to enhance Armenia's economic security and resilience. This strategic orientation would support Armenia's efforts to stabilize its position within the shifting architecture of the global economy and to more effectively respond to regional and international economic disruptions. A notable feature of Armenia's current relations with the Arab world is their heavy concentration around the GCC, and particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In recent years, trade between Armenia and the UAE has grown rapidly, positioning the UAE as Armenia's dominant partner within the Arab region. However, this growth has been largely shaped by external geopolitical and economic dynamics, most notably the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia, which have led to a re-routing of trade flows and investment patterns through third-party countries, including the UAE. While this reconfiguration has created short-term opportunities for Armenia, it is also fraught with significant risks. These include over-dependence on a single partner, vulnerability to geopolitical shifts and policy changes in third countries, and exposure to regulatory uncertainty surrounding international sanctions regimes. Therefore, for Armenia to develop a stable, secure, and forward-looking economic relationship with the Arab world, it is imperative to move beyond ad hoc responses to external shocks. Instead, a comprehensive, diversified, and

sub-regionally informed economic diplomacy is required—one that aligns with Armenia’s broader national development strategy and supports long-term regional partnerships grounded in mutual benefit, institutional trust, and economic sustainability.

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Transformations in Turkey's Kurdish policy in 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The “Arab Spring” that began in 2011 contained both threats and new opportunities for Turkey. If before that the Kurdish uprising, which began in Turkey in 1984, was controlled by the Turkish authorities, now the Kurdish liberation movement in Syria had led to the creation of their national autonomy, Rojava, which, with the deepening of the Syrian civil war, was becoming more and more independent and militarily powerful. For Turkey, this autonomy was a threat, because unlike the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, where the pro-Turkish Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Nechirvan Barzani was in power, then in Syrian Kurdistan the power belonged to the military-political forces created by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, under whose influence separatist aspirations are growing year by year in the Kurdish-populated provinces of Turkey. The measures taken by the Turkish authorities are unable to stop this process, and in the fall of 2024, R.T. Erdogan and the political forces supporting him were forced to retreat from their hardline positions and look for ways to peacefully stop the Kurdish movement, promising in that case to allow A. Ocalan to speak remotely at the session of the Democratic Party fraction in the Turkish Parliament. But at the same time, the Turkish authorities were secretly preparing the military formations of the Syrian opposition under their command for a general attack against the Syrian government forces, which began on November 27, 2024 and ended with the defeatness of Bashar al-Assad and his flight from the country. Power in Syria passed to Erdogan's proxies, which will allow him to completely conquer Syrian Kurdistan and close the Kurdish issue. However, the

United States and Israel are against this, which poses new challenges to the Turkish authorities.

Keywords: *Turkey, Rojava, Syria, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Öcalan, Devlet Bahçeli, Kurdistan, Israel, USA, Iran, Russia.*

2024 was very difficult for the Republic of Turkey from the point of view of the Kurdish issue, and it included both threats and new opportunities. On October 1 of this year, in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, approached the deputies of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Party and shook their hands. He explained this step to his party colleagues by saying that it was very important for the unity and equality of Turkey's 85 million citizens. In turn, referring to this event, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also considered it very important for the unity and equality of all citizens of Turkey (Ruslan Bashirli, 2024). It is clear that the simultaneous speeches of these two experienced politicians were not accidental, but were coordinated with each other. This is also proven by the fact that a few days later both Bahçeli and Erdogan made threats to the Democratic Party if their proposal was not accepted. covert and overt threats. In particular, R. Erdogan "reminded" the Democratic Party deputies of the "Kobani lesson" 10 years ago and called on them to stop terrorist activities and return to clean politics. And D. Bahçeli directly said that this peace-loving step of theirs should not be confused with weakness. He specifically noted that Abdullah Öcalan would be allowed to speak at the Democratic Party faction meeting in the Turkish Parliament from Imrali if he called on the PKK to stop the 40-year-long war against Turkey and to dissolve itself.

On the same days, a Kurd close to Erdogan arrives in Ankara for an unscheduled one-day visit. The head of the Iraqi Kurdish Autonomous Region, Nechirvan Barzani (Aram Sayiyan, 2024). He has been meeting with Erdogan, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, and the head of the National Intelligence Organization, Ibrahim Kalin, which gives reason to assume that reconciliation with the Kurds has become a top priority for

the Turkish authorities. It has gained greater importance in connection with the Arab-Israeli and Iran-Israel conflicts, when Erdogan expressed his open support for the Palestinians, threatening to one day suddenly enter Israel, just as he entered Karabakh and Libya, and his Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan threatened that Benjamin Netanyahu would end his days like A. Hitler (Times.am, 2024). However, these "bold" statements were intended mostly for the Arab world and domestic audiences, and In reality, both Erdogan and the former head of the special services for many years are certainly well aware of Israel's real potential and capabilities. It is obvious that Israel , in addition to using its military power (which has several times more advanced weapons than Turkey), will definitely use Turkey's numerous problems, the most important of which is, of course, the Kurdish problem.

Turkey's Kurdish issue

The Kurdish uprising that began in 1984 until the Gulf War (1991) was mainly an internal Turkish agenda. Realizing that it was completely manageable and the initiative was in their hands, the Turkish authorities repeatedly violated the ceasefire agreements reached with the Kurds during election campaigns, winning the majority of the votes of the Turkish population under the appeals of the fight against terrorism. However, on the one hand, the creation of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, and on the other hand, the political freedoms of the early years of Erdogan's rule further activated the Kurdish movement. In addition to the military path, the Kurds, taking advantage of these temporary freedoms, created political forces and public movements that began to play an active role in Turkish political life. The PKK is creating its political wing, the Democratic Regions Party, which in 2018 and 2023 The results of the elections have passed the Turkish People's Assembly, and the representation of Kurdish political forces in the Turkish People's Assembly is increasing from election to election. The number of Kurdish mayors is also increasing according to the results of the local government elections. It is true that Erdogan is resorting to repression, arresting

Kurdish deputies and mayors under fabricated pretexts, but he is powerless to fight the overall process. And the most important reason for this is that the natural growth of the Kurds is greater than that of the Turks, and according to rough estimates, by 2100. Kurds will make up half of Turkey's population. Another reason is the increase in the level of education and, accordingly, national self-awareness of the Kurds.

The Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq and Turkey

As a result of the Persian Gulf War, a Kurdish autonomy was created in Northern Iraq, which seriously worried the Turkish authorities of the time, especially since some of the PKK detachments fighting against them in Turkey crossed into the territory of the Kurdish autonomy and launched attacks on Turkish troops from there. The Turkish authorities responded to this both with direct military incursions and by arming various Kurdish groups in the autonomy and inciting them against each other. During the time of President Turgut Ozal, the Turkish special services supplied 100,000 weapons to Jalal Talabani (Today's Zaman), but at the same time they also cooperated with the Barzanis. In the end, already R. Erdogan managed to gain a reliable ally in the person of Nechirvan Barzani, thanks to which the forces of the Kurdistan Democratic Party , the Peshmerga, not only do not fight against the Turks, but on the contrary, they fight together with the latter against the PKK detachments. In other words, Turkey currently does not see a threat from the Iraqi Kurdish autonomy.

Turkey's policy of conquest

However, the situation changed after the “Arab Spring”, when the Kurds living in northern Syria established a de facto independent state entity, dominated not by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of the Barzanis, Erdogan's ally, but by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The situation became even more complicated for Turkey in 2014, when the influence of the PKK in the battles against the “Islamic State” organization in northern Iraq increased significantly, capturing the Dohuk

region on the border with Turkey from the Barzanis. There was a real danger that the Kurds in Turkey could rebel and join the already existing Kurdish state entities in Syria and Iraq. That is why Erdogan initiated several military operations in Syria and Iraq from 2016, aiming to destroy the influence of the PKK. It should be noted that for Erdogan, the Kurds were just an opportunity to implement his larger The expansionist plan to carry out a military invasion of Syria and Iraq under the guise of fighting Kurdish terrorists, bringing his henchmen to power in those countries, and in reality, to actually carry out their conquest.

However, he was unable to implement his expansionist plan due to the opposition of Russia, the USA, France, Israel and Iran. Contrary to his expectations, the Arab countries also reacted negatively to these invasions. In other words, his policies of pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism failed: the Arab countries, which were former Ottoman colonies, had no desire to come under Turkish influence again.

As a result, the Turkish army has been at war with the Kurds in Syria and Iraq for 8 years, draining billions of dollars from the country's meager resources, causing inflation of the Turkish currency and rising prices for goods. The number of Turkish soldiers killed is increasing, which leads to growing dissatisfaction among Turkish society. The logical solution would be for Turkish troops to withdraw from these countries and end the war, but for Erdogan this would be tantamount to a death sentence, since in that case an independent Kurdish state would immediately be created in the Syrian provinces bordering Turkey, which would increase separatist aspirations in its Kurdish-populated provinces. In other words, the Turkish authorities have found themselves in a dead end, since maintaining the current situation is very difficult for Turkey, and withdrawing troops would bring even greater problems.

Erdogan's steps towards extinguishing the Kurdish movement

Thus, it is obvious that Erdogan's Middle East policy has completely failed. Realizing this and foreseeing the possibility of a major war at this stage of the Iran-Israel conflict, he wants to improve his

relations with the countries of the region or at least ensure their neutrality. In July 2023, he visits Saudi Arabia and Qatar, signing about 50 billion dollars in economic and defense agreements (Mariam Mkhitarian, 2023). And in February 2024, he visits Egypt, where he is received by the country's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, with whom he had hostile relations due to the military coup and the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power. In September of the same year, al-Sisi visits Ankara on a return visit (Mariam Mkhitarian, 2024). Erdogan also expressed his willingness to meet with Bashar Assad and smooth over the thorny issues in Turkish-Syrian relations (Azatutyun, 2024).

The Turkish president understands that in a possible major war in the Middle East, in which Iran and its Arab allies will participate on one side, and Israel and the United States on the other, the possibility of the creation of a Kurdish state in Syria is increasing. That is why, through D. Bahçeli, he is proposing to Abdullah Öcalan, through whom the 40-year-long Kurdish uprising should end and enter the political arena, promising to allow the latter to speak at the Turkish People's Assembly.

However, one important question in all this is: will the PKK and other rebel Kurdish forces submit to Ocalan? Democratic Party Co-Chairman Tulay Hatimoghullarin responded to Bahçeli's proposal that they are ready to continue this initiative in order to achieve an honorable peace. Similarly, the Kurds of Turkey, who note that the Turkish authorities must definitely conduct these negotiations with A. Ocalan, as the real leader of the Kurdish people. However, there is an important peculiarity here: the reality is that although A. Ocalan is accepted as the leader of the PKK, but the party is led by other people who now have real influence in making decisions. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that, especially in Syria, the PKK and other military-political forces surrounding it are under the influence of the United States and are guided by them. Summing up these two circumstances, as well as similar agreements that have been repeatedly violated by Erdogan in the past, we can confidently say that the Kurds will not fulfill Ocalan's request. As evidence, we can cite an interview with one of the PKK leaders, Besseh

Khozat, in which he notes that the current Arab-Israeli conflict opens up a new opportunity for the Kurds, and they intend to take advantage of it (Ruslan Bashirli, 2024). That is, the Kurds understand that in the event of a major war, Syria will receive such a blow from Israel that it will no longer be able to prevent the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of the country. And in this case, it would be strange to agree to Erdogan's proposals. Erdogan, in turn, also understands this very well and is trying to show that the Kurds in Turkey stand with the Turkish authorities. In particular, an anti-Israeli demonstration of thousands was organized in Diyarbakir on his instructions, where the demonstrators not only "nailed" Israel to the pillar of disrespect, but also sharply opposed the words of Bese Khozat. It is understandable that no one abroad took that demonstration seriously. However, the reality is that the Islamist-nationalist Erdogan and his allied political forces cannot give the Kurds political freedoms, but are only able to talk to them from a position of force (Keskin Bayindir, 2024), which means that reconciliation with the Kurds is a tactical ploy for them to get through the current difficult military-political and socio-economic period, after which, as has happened many times, they will again switch to a policy of repression. As evidence of this, it should be noted that the re-election of Donald Trump as US president has inspired hope Erdogan to convince him to end American cooperation with the Syrian Kurds, which would allow them to crush the latter under the guise of fighting terrorism and finally create the buffer zone Turkey so desperately needs along the entire Turkish-Syrian border.

And as proof of this claim, on November 27, 2024, pro-Turkish Syrian forces launched a general offensive, seizing power in Syria in about 10 days. It is clear that this attack was carefully developed and carried out by the General Staff of the Turkish Army, the National Intelligence Organization, and the command of the army's special forces, under the orders of R. T. Erdogan. And it should be noted that the Turkish side chose the best military-political moment: there was a change of government in the United States, the Russian Federation was completely

"immersed" in the Ukrainian war, and even the majority of Russian troops in Syria were taken there. The same situation was with Iran, whose attention was completely focused on the conflict with Israel, and most of both its troops in Syria and the detachments of the Lebanese Hezbollah organization under its influence were transferred to the Israeli front.

The new military-political situation created gives R. T. Erdogan new opportunities to resolve the issue of Syrian Kurdish autonomy by military force, especially since the forces that fought against Assad now have the opportunity to fully engage in military operations against the Kurds. However, the final defeat of the Kurds is not part of the plans of the United States and Israel, which want to create a Kurdistan state in the Kurdish-populated territories of these countries in the center of the Middle East as a means of deterring Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey itself. The issue may become even more acute if the new US President Donald Trump starts a new conflict against Israel, where the Kurds will understandably be assigned not the last role. Will R. T. Erdogan manage to convince the US president to allow him to eliminate the Syrian Kurdish autonomy, Rojava? So far, no.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Kurdish uprising that began in Turkey in 1984 has not been suppressed by the Turkish authorities, and it will continue as the Kurdish national consciousness grows. And if we take into account the fact that the natural growth of the Kurds in Turkey is greater than that of the Turks, then the Kurdish problem will grow even more over time.

2. Erdogan is in a difficult situation, as the war against the Kurds in Syria and Iraq is having a very serious impact on the socio-economic situation of the country, which in turn is leading to a decline in the authority of his government. However, on the other hand, he will not voluntarily withdraw troops from Syria and Iraq, because this would lead to the creation of a Kurdish state, which would be followed by the intensification of the independence movement in the Kurdish-populated regions of Turkey.

3. It should be noted that the peace-loving calls and proposals of Erdogan and his allied political forces are a tactical retreat and do not reflect the real policy of the Turkish authorities towards the Kurds. After receiving permission from Donald Trump, Erdogan will resume military operations in Northern Syria, aiming to finally resolve the Kurdish issue, as in Afrin and Sarekani, where the number of Kurds has decreased several times.

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Dynamics of the South Caucasus Security Environment after the 44-day war. Regional Military Drills as a Tool for Political-military Reconsiderations

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Introduction

The 44-day war of 2020 significantly reshaped the security landscape in the South Caucasus, fundamentally altering the military-political structure and power dynamics of the region. Following the war, the area entered a new phase of security restructuring, marked by rapidly evolving developments, the introduction of new actors, and conflicting multipolar interests. A unified regional security system is virtually absent in the South Caucasus; instead, it is a complex, multi-layered platform where power relations and strategic priorities are continually redefined due to shifting geopolitical conditions. The reasons for the lack of a comprehensive system in the region are numerous, especially issues related to the balance of power and the low level of trust among the parties.

“After the 2020 war, the Karabakh conflict caused a profound shift in the security system of the South Caucasus, intensifying competition, most notably the perception of threats, and the realignment of forces between regional countries.” (Grigoryan, M. (2024).)

The first part of the article examines the shifts in the security balance of the South Caucasus region after the 44-day war in 2020. This war not only disrupted the regional security environment but also fundamentally changed the entire security logic, impacting not just the military aspect but also infrastructure systems, energy networks, foreign policy directions, and geopolitical interests.

The second part of the article focuses on the military exercises held in the region over the past five years, examining their nature, military-

political significance, and target orientation. These exercises are considered in the study as new strategic platforms where the states involved present their agenda of interests and form new factors of interaction.

The analysis shows that new forms of military cooperation have emerged in the South Caucasus, contributing to an increased military presence and greater involvement of individual states in the region. The 44-day war created a need to develop a new regional security agenda, influenced by new military-political partnerships, military exercises, the emergence of new actors, and shifts in power. The evolving military-political situation provided opportunities for various centers of power to establish a more active presence and redefine their interests in the region. By comparing the security environment, changes in the balance of power, and military exercises, the article outlines the new security chronology of the South Caucasus, highlighting the rise of new actors and the exclusion of some states from the regional military-political agenda.

“Realignment of regional players and military-political reshaping after the 2020 war”

The 44-day war that broke out in the South Caucasus region in 2020 brought fundamental changes to the security system of the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan’s victory in the war undoubtedly affected the regional balance of power, allowing Azerbaijan to strengthen its positions, while creating a new security crisis and many new post-war challenges for Armenia. In essence, the situation also opened the door for new involvement of external actors present in the region (Turkey, EU, USA, Iran, China, Israel). In the context of this process, the three countries of the South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, set their security policies on new starting points, aimed at strengthening their sovereignty and searching for new opportunities for military allies. In the case of Georgia, this was achieved by strengthening existing alliances, and in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, by searching for new military-political allies.

In this way, the 2020 war brought about not only a territorial but also a structural shift in the balance of power in the region (Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group, 2024)

The South Caucasus has long been a region of power competition, dynamic interaction, shaped by a complex history of shifting alliances and territorial disputes. The change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus was conditioned not only by the 44-day war, but also by the Russo-Ukrainian war. Historically, a significant influence on the region has been exerted by Russia, which has considered the South Caucasus as its “zone of core interests”. However, the alignment of forces due to the Russo-Ukrainian war has changed considerably. At the same time, the three countries of the South Caucasus - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - are striving to position themselves in new geopolitical conditions to strengthen their national interests, increase independence, and redefine their strategic place. These developments indicate the tendencies of the formation of a new security system in the region, which requires in-depth analysis and assessment, considering future geopolitical prospects (Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War, 2023)

The 44-day war of 2020 and the Russian-brokered ceasefire that marked its end created a significant rift in the conflict settlement process within the context of the OSCE Minsk Group format, which has long been considered the main international platform for a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These events highlighted the decline in the influence and effectiveness of the Minsk Group, in particular, when Western powers, including the EU and the US, failed to maintain their former role and authority in the region. The OSCE Minsk Group also ceased to be a player in the South Caucasus, losing its geopolitical and regional significance. After the 44-day war of 2020, the OSCE Minsk Group, as the main mediator in the conflicts in the South Caucasus, lost its corporate role in the region. The war showed that the Minsk Group, with its traditional mandate and mechanisms, is unable to effectively regulate the trajectory of large-scale military operations and regulate the

new security conditions. Russia, as the main influential actor, assumed the role of sole mediator and introduced its peacekeeping forces, while other power centers and new players in the region (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran's involvement) increased competition in the mediation process. As a result, the Minsk Group was left out of the new security architecture of the South Caucasus, losing global and regional influence and widening the gap that other countries are exploiting to form new political and military alliances. (Cornell S. E., 2021).

The rearranged power relations and the activation of new military-political players changed the landscape of the security field, which created the need for the formation of new formats and regional partnerships. These changes clearly showed that a comprehensive and sustainable solution to security problems is possible only through multilateral formats that are adapted to the current geopolitical realities and the balance of interests.

In fact, after the 44-day war, the situation in the region remained tense and unstable. The Azerbaijani armed forces carried out offensive operations not only in Nagorno-Karabakh, but also in 2021-2022 they activated border incidents in Syunik region, in certain parts of Vayots Dzor region, in particular with the incidents in April and November, during which armed clashes and certain concessions of Armenian positions were recorded. The border tension in Syunik, associated with the unclear demarcation of the border and Azerbaijani military pressure, became a new threat to security and an impetus for reviewing Armenia's strategic attitude and assessing new security realities. (Statement by the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia)

In 2023, the Azerbaijani armed forces carried out new sharp military operations in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to the mass forced displacement of tens of thousands of Armenians from Armenia, which necessitated the immediate departure of tens of thousands of them. These operations coincided with the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping contingent from the region, which, on the one hand, undermined the existing security mechanisms, and on the other hand,

clearly demonstrated the decline of Russia's political position in the South Caucasus. The process of forced displacement of the Armenian population from the territory of Artsakh not only created a major human crisis, but also changed the demographic and military-political balance of the region. Russia's withdrawal from the region effectively meant a significant loss of its important strategic bridgehead – control and security guaranteeing powers over Nagorno-Karabakh, which also had a direct impact on the level of Russia's regional influence.

This circumstance opened the field for Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey to completely reorganize the security architecture of the South Caucasus, and the complete transition of Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control confirmed Azerbaijan's military-political hegemony in the South Caucasus. This event not only changed the regional balance of power, but also strengthened Azerbaijan's position as the number one player, controlling vital geographical areas and important security nodes. As a result, the security architecture of the South Caucasus was reorganized, focusing on the Azerbaijani security agenda, which was decisive in the influence opportunities of other external actors in the region and set a new dynamic in the field of security and military presence. Azerbaijan, with the support of Turkey and other allies, became the main leader in the process of shaping regional security, defining new military-political rules and tactics. The significant decline in the influence and position of the CSTO in the South Caucasus since the 44-day war of 2020 and since then has deepened new security crises in the region. The limitations of Russia's regional policy and military interventions, combined with its economic and political difficulties in the region, have contributed to the deepening of the CSTO's unreliability and influence. (Cornell S. E., 2021)

This unavoidable gap in the region has been filled by new powers: the United States and NATO, which have expanded their military, political, and diplomatic presence in response to the activity of Russia and Turkey. The situation has established new regional roles for players such as Iran and China, both of which are increasing their interest in the

economic and strategic areas, especially with Iran strengthening its position on its southern borders and China deepening its involvement through the “One Belt, One Road” initiative. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Israel’s security cooperation with regional states, especially Azerbaijan, which we will examine more closely in the second part of the article, adds new dimensions to the military balance. The European Union is also working to engage more actively in the South Caucasus with new diplomatic efforts aimed at supporting peace and stability. These developments highlight the complex and layered nature of regional security, where the dominance of the CSTO faces significant challenges, and the security framework is being reshaped with active participation from new international forces.

The 44-day war marked a crucial turning point in the security landscape of the South Caucasus, making Azerbaijan the leading actor in the region. Azerbaijan’s military victory and the active involvement of new players, especially Turkey, resulted in the emergence of a hegemonic position that replaced traditional centers of power, notably Russia’s regional influence. Meanwhile, Armenia faced significant post-war challenges across political, military, and social spheres, prompting it to rethink its strategic choices and security alliances. Redefining positions within the new regional security framework is closely tied to the strengthening of multilateral power and diplomatic relations, clearly showing that the South Caucasus is undergoing its most significant period of realignment since the Soviet era.

Military exercises as new regional military-political platforms and a new tool for military presence in the region

After the 44-day war of 2020, Azerbaijan actively used military exercises as a strategic tool for redeploying forces and establishing regional influence. Military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey began to be expressed more often in the form of very active military exercises. The last five years were also rich for Azerbaijan in terms of

organizing not only local, but also international military exercises. Azerbaijan, as the victorious party in the war, began to build its position and influence with strategic clarity through new formats and partners, turning military exercises into a concentrated platform for political, diplomatic and military impulses.

From September 12 to 20, 2021, the strategic military exercise “Three Brothers – 2021” was held in Baku with the participation of special forces units from Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan. (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

This was the first joint military exercise in this format between three Islamic but different regional systems, and it took place at a significantly important geopolitical turning point, just a year after the end of the 2020 Artsakh war and the reshuffle of regional forces.

The main objectives of the exercise were to increase combat coordination of units within the framework of counter-terrorism operations, develop joint operation scenarios, as well as exchange information and experience. However, this exercise had not only a military, but also a clear political message: it demonstrated Azerbaijan’s efforts to form a new military-political alliance that goes beyond the traditional pro-Russian or Western security platforms.

“Three Brothers – 2021” practically demonstrated Azerbaijan’s growing confidence in close cooperation with its own armed forces and allies. It simultaneously strengthened Turkey’s role as a strategic partner and confirmed Pakistan’s willingness to provide political support in regional issues. In this context, the exercise can also be considered a precedent for a newly emerging trilateral security platform, through which Baku is trying to consolidate not only military forces, but also political levers of influence in order to strengthen its own positions in the post-war South Caucasus. (Caspian News, 2021)

In addition, the format of the exercise and the pronounced publicity testify to Azerbaijan’s strategy of security diversification. Baku demonstrates that it can orient itself and cooperate with different power centers without focusing on just one axis. This maneuver policy is also

seen as a response to the vulnerable status quo established by Russia and a balancing act against possible one-sided solutions.

The close military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey was expressed through a number of bilateral exercises. In this context, the “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk 2023” exercises held in 2023 were distinguished by their scope, including aviation, missile and special forces. They were aimed not only at combining combat capabilities, but also at the gradual introduction of elements of the Turkish military doctrine into the Azerbaijani armed forces. The deepening of integration and the development of interoperability skills were visible: with the support of Turkey, Azerbaijan began to more actively position itself as an organizing actor in regional security. (Caucasus Watch, 2025)

It was noteworthy that Azerbaijan held military exercises with the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2024. The military leaderships of Iran and Azerbaijan began practical cooperation steps in 2024, which grew into joint military exercises. The “Araz 2024” exercises brought together Azerbaijani and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) units on Iran’s northern border. Despite the deepening geopolitical differences between the sides, these exercises sent a clear message: Iran is capable of cooperating if security interests coincide, and Azerbaijan is open to new models of border cooperation. (Iran International, 2024)

In the fall of 2024, Azerbaijani soldiers were involved in multinational military exercises in Pakistan as observers, in cooperation with China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and other countries. (The Express Tribune, 2024).

In the summer of 2025, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan held the Tarlan-2025 military exercises, focusing on the joint use of unmanned aerial vehicles. These exercises highlighted a new stage in the development of Azerbaijani defense capabilities based on technological superiority. Politically, this demonstrated that Azerbaijan is seeking to diversify its military partners and strengthen ties with Central Asia, while moving away from Russia’s dominant military mechanisms, such as the CSTO. (Caspian News, 2025).

Participation in the observer status, at the same time, allows Azerbaijan to gain a platform for the exchange of international military experience and the deepening of diplomatic ties without the risks of direct military involvement. These exercises testify to Azerbaijan's tendency to strengthen its role and influence not only in the South Caucasus, but also in the broader Eurasian and Middle Eastern security systems.

After the 44-day war, Georgia, while maintaining its previous military-political orientation, continued to participate intensively in NATO joint military exercises, focusing mainly on improving defense capabilities and deepening Euro-Atlantic integration. At the same time, Tbilisi has managed to avoid the pressures of a new polarization, maintaining relatively balanced relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the European Union and the United States. This has allowed Georgia to maintain its diplomatic and strategic maneuvering ability in the region without engaging in direct confrontation.

Armenia, for its part, has sought new external partners in the post-war period, especially after a sharp decline in trust in the CSTO and Russia. Strategic partnerships have deepened, especially with France and India, including arms purchases and military-technical cooperation. The "Eagle Partner 2023" military exercises between Armenia and the United States demonstrated Armenia's experience in strengthening defense sovereignty without direct involvement of the CSTO. (Armenpress, 2023). This process records Yerevan's political will to move away from a system of unilateral dependence and towards a multi-vector security model. Armenia is moving towards a search for new directions of military-political rearmament, when the resistance of Russian security and the mediation of the CSTO negotiation process led to a reassessment of defense independence. In this context, France (Reuters, 2024) and India (The Geopolitics, 2024) became Armenia's new strategic partners.

This military-technical diversification was a new stage in Armenia's military-political relations, the measurability of which raises the need for new professional research.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, such large-scale multinational strategic cooperation implemented by Azerbaijan was a new start in terms of enriching the diplomatic repertoire of the Azerbaijani side, since in this way new strategic alliance groups are formed that can act as balancing factors against both Russian and Western influence. In addition, these exercises allow Azerbaijan to use new platforms of regional influence, attracting new partners and expanding the sphere of its security interests.

However, the activation of such cooperation also stimulates the process of polycentralization of the security field of the South Caucasus, where, in the conditions of the retreat of the influence of traditional dominant actors, new players and allies are trying to take their place. This situation complicates the picture of regional security management, making it more unpredictable and competitive.

Ultimately, the dynamics of Azerbaijan's multinational military exercises and the formation of multilateral military-political partnerships reflect the peculiarities of the beginning of a new era of regional security, where the realignment of forces is taking place not only on military, but also on diplomatic and geopolitical platforms. In this context, Azerbaijan stands out as a new and active player that is changing the rules of the security game in the South Caucasus and shaping the regional strategic landscape.

The exercises are a replacement of traditional security mechanisms with new platforms involving new international partnerships.

The exercises are also becoming a form of expression of "soft power", where security is shaped by concerted diplomatic and military-political impulses. In this sense, they simultaneously serve the purposes of military readiness, strengthening allied mutual trust, and sending regional messages, making the multi-layered military-political reality of the South Caucasus more visible.

In general, military exercises, sometimes viewed as technical events, have in fact become a means of conveying deep military-political messages. They serve both as an expression of military sovereignty and

as an indicator of new positioning in multilateral alliances. Azerbaijan, by re-equipping its army and actively engaging in multinational exercises, has established its position as a new axis of regional security. This process has been accompanied by complex post-war strategic challenges for Armenia and shifts in the regional hierarchy. In general, military exercises have become not only a tool for ensuring security, but also a platform for transmitting political signals against the backdrop of the restructuring of the military-political architecture of the South Caucasus.

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