Armenia, the Regional Powers, and the West

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Between History and Geopolitics

Alla Mirzoyan

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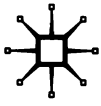

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To my parents

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INTRODUCTION

THIS STUDY OF ARMENIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS IS AN INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS that incorporates insights from history, anthropology, and security studies. It puts into practice a multidisciplinary and holistic methodology to illuminate the various relationships that have emerged between Armenia and the regional powers since independence in 1991. To an extent, this approach is dictated by the realities of Armenian foreign policy as a practice that had to meet several and often conflicting objectives. Among the most important ones involved mediating the effects of the Nagorno-Karabakh on Armenia's regional position by seeking alignments with the outside actors; enhancing Armenia's image on the international arena; serving as a vehicle for the diaspora's campaign for genocide recognition; synchronizing Armenia's diplomacy with Armenia's defense needs; defending elite's corporate interest.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been so consequential for Armenia's foreign policy that is it often difficult to extrapolate a policy that is not a response to the existing stalemate. Because of its crucial significance for Armenia's security environment, it refracts Armenia's own relationships with the outside world often becoming the most important single variable that defines Armenia's foreign policy trajectory. This highly charged emotional space that the conflict occupies urges the view of foreign policy making as a continuous exercise in identity making. In addition to being a direct consequence of a willful choice of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to pursue the cause of self-determination, the conflict is the filter through which all major foreign policy decisions go through. As will be demonstrated later in the book, it forces Armenia's leadership to constantly reshape and rearticulate the narrative of Armenian identity. This understanding of Armenian security identity rooted in history, both pre-Soviet and post-Soviet, and the regional dimensions of its foreign policy are paramount and can be revealed through the analysis of Yerevan's relations with Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the West.

By investigating the question of why Armenia has chosen certain strategies toward these four centers of power, my goal is to arrive at important conclusions about the change and continuity in Armenia's perception of

the world, about the collective interest formation, and, as a derivative, about how much of identity and emotion is carried over into the political space. Second, this study of Armenian foreign policy toward regional powers and the West helps to conceptually understand the foreign policies of small states such as Armenia in highly complex conditions, constituted by domestic sociopolitical challenges, a conflictive regional environment, and global instability. The study of four sets of relationships, placed within their historical context and narrated through the chronological unraveling of main events since Armenia's independence, allows a dissection of the most substantial challenges and opportunities facing Yerevan. The analysis of Turkish, Iranian, Russian, and the U.S. foreign policy toward the Southern Caucasus, and Armenia specifically, on the other hand, captures important shifts in the global politics and illustrates how the global informs the local and vice versa.

While I devote much place to the role of the formative events of Armenian pre-Soviet history, the post-Soviet phenomenon is no less important in accounting for the style and mentality of the principal decision-makers. As the name indicates, the term "post-Soviet" attempts to capture the elusive, the "in-between" stage of transition, in which the legacy of the old system has direct social and political effects on the current one. Unlike "post-Socialism" that marks more global, broader, and much more diverse experience, "post-Soviet" delineates a peculiar geographical and sociopolitical belonging.[1] Filtered through the Armenian postindependence context, this general "post-Soviet" reality assumes a unique complexity that is impossible to fit into one pattern, particularly when analyzing foreign policy. Some of the most significant elements of Armenia's political system are directly linked to its Soviet experience and the legacy of the collapse. Among them is the highly emotional issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, a highly militarized culture that has sprung in response to the conflict, social apathy resulting from the economic collapse at the end of the Soviet Union, a general sense of disorientation, and the subsequent concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few.

Despite the presence of such a strong mobilizing issue and a firm sense of national identity, the country's foreign policy has been continuously criticized for being "a-national," lacking substance and direction in the face of growing global challenges.[2] The foreign policy decision-making process was overtaken by a tightly knit group of individuals, which allows some to speak of the "privatization" of Armenian foreign policy on the issues of critical importance to the nation as a whole such as Armenian-Turkish relations and Nagorno-Karabakh.[3] It is argued that "Armenia and the Armenian people" find themselves in a "systemic crisis embracing the

political, economic, cultural, moral, ideological and socio-psychological spheres," in the conditions of the "de-facto absence of a national state."[4] Foreign policy comes to be seen as yet another demonstration of Armenia's impotence in the face of the regional and international realities.

Another important dimension of this study is regional geopolitics. Armenia is part of the greater game unraveling in the Southern Caucasus. Within their hierarchy of regional security complexes, Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver define the Southern Caucasus as a "complicated mini-complex" within a larger Russia-centered complex, the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). However, I would argue that the Southern Caucasus could be seen as a separate regional security complex because it has self-contained security dynamics based on enduring patterns of amity and enmity. Although the authors admit that "the relative robustness of the new states has surprised many and conflicts are now driven primarily by the regional actors themselves," they give it only a passing thought: "Still, Russian influence remains very strong, and CIS politics the primary arena, so the region continues to be a subcomplex within the post-Soviet RSC."[5] Considering that no other region within the CIS, with an exception of Central Asia, has such multiple security dynamics surrounding the core three countries, this study will look at the Southern Caucasus as a separate analytical unit not connected to the CIS. Its security dynamics are defined both by the internal conflicts and the alignments each country pursues with the outside players—Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the West (United States and Europe).

Within the context of the post-9/11 world, small states like Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have been transformed from being mere subjects of regional politics into objects capable of affecting the interests of global actors. The South Caucasus seems to be less remote now that the U.S. geopolitical focus has been zoomed in onto the Middle East and Afghanistan and any development in a previously marginal region becomes critical. It is a unique region with multiple security dynamics that has evolved from being Russia's "soft underbelly" in the early 1990s into an important component in the geopolitical mosaic of the "greater Middle East." This transformation signifies an important cognitive leap in the way the region is perceived externally.

Making it more intricate is a virtual absence of a "region" as an internalized reality. The very term "Southern Caucasus," defined as consisting of three states, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, it could be argued, is an externally imposed, Western linguistic construct that was adopted by the elite of the regional states in their foreign policy rhetoric but that hardly reflects the reality of their views of their immediate environments. This term has mutated from the Soviet-originated "Transcaucasus," binding

together three republics with tumultuous pasts, full of mutual grievances, and unresolved conflicts. Once the structure of the Soviet order dissolved, these "cryogenically" preserved conflicts exploded with a new intensity bringing to the fore issues of historical memory and reckoning. Unsettled scores between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Georgia over Javakhetia—albeit of a lesser intensity—and Georgia's internal ethnic conundrum make the basic parameters of the regional environment very uncertain. The only instance when the three states *become* a region is when they are linked together by a grand geopolitical map put forth by the United States, the European Union, Turkey, or Iran. Russia is a different story, however, because it is used to perceiving the entire Caucasus, both Southern and Northern, as a single geographical and geopolitical construct that highlights its Russian historical legacy and belonging. Nonetheless, this study uses the term "Southern Caucasus" to demarcate it as a separate geopolitical unit, freed of its Russian affiliation.

RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Ironically, it is perhaps because of these complex political realities that the foreign policies of Soviet successor states are one of the lesser-explored issues in the discipline of post-Soviet/Eurasian studies. While a variety of domestic issues such as electoral politics, domestic social issues, and economic development have occupied the minds of Western scholars, little attention is given to the way these states perceive external challenges and adjust themselves to the outside world. Part of the problem lies in the unproblematized perception of the newly independent states as pawns of the interest of the regional and global power play unleashed as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. There seems to be no doubt in the minds of scholars assessing the behavior of Eurasian states that "the decisive factor is their position in the regional and global hierarchy of power."[6] This dominant paradigm contends that the former Soviet republics at large are engaged in reactive policies vis-à-vis Russia and the West, with some scholars going as far as to state that rather than having a foreign policy, they merely "engage in foreign relations."[7] In addition, smaller states such as Armenia are almost entirely bypassed in the analysis because their individual voices have been pronounced lost at the crossroads of regional geopolitics.

This bird's eye view is understandable considering the general preoccupation of the literature with mapping out the trajectories of postcommunist development and transition. For all too long, states like Armenia have been seen as a part of a larger formation, be it the Soviet Union,

the CIS, or included into a broad category of postcommunist states. Indigenous works on Armenia's relations with the outside do well in illuminating the Armenian perspective, however, they are either in Russian or Armenian and thus inaccessible to the American audience or cursory in their attempt to provide a general overview of the Armenian foreign policy.[8] A foundational review of early domestic debates surrounding Armenia's relations with Russia and Turkey can be found in the edited work by Gerard Libaridian, former national security adviser to Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan.[9] Although partially sympathetic to the president, a view not shared by many contemporary Armenian scholars, this account tellingly depicts the worldview of the Armenian elites and the core issues surrounding major foreign policy decisions at the dawn of independence. Most importantly, it illustrates a particular historical narrative of the Armenian history, from which most of Levon Ter-Petrosyan's actions on the international fronts were derived.

Because history was so essential in laying out the cognitive map of the world and in providing "instant" material and information about the neighbors and the West, this book taps into the existing interdisciplinary literature at the juncture of anthropology, nationalism studies, and historiography. As R. G. Suny suggests,

> Identity formation as a process of self-definition and definition of the Other is intimately connected to the generation of threat perception. "National Histories" may be investigated not so much to discover the "real" story behind the Serb-Albanian conflict in Kosovo or the Armenian-Azerbaijani hostility in Karabakh but rather to assess how particular conceptualizations of nationhood contribute to notions of national interest and threats to national security.[10]

Several rich works have been produced in the recent years namely Levon Abrahamian's *Armenian Identity in a Changing World* (2006) and Razmik Panossian's *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (2006). Both of these works address an important issue of the identity transformation in changing historical conditions and the fluidity of historical narratives but they do so from two different symbolic and geographical locales: Armenia and the diaspora. Abrahamian, an Eastern Armenian and a witness of the postindependence political turmoil provides insights into the anthropological aspects of the Armenian national movement, and identity dynamics in the post-Soviet period. He is preoccupied with the inner workings of "particularity" in Armenia's post-independence context and strives to outline the main characteristics of the Armenian identity.[11] Panossian, a diasporan Armenian, casts

a broader look at the modern Armenian history and the evolution of the Armenian nationalism within various unique socio-political, geographical, and historical contexts. He argues that in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century,

> [t]he political ideology behind Armenian nationalism was the product of various influences based on the western, eastern and central points of its source. All these influences had an impact on Armenian thinking and identity in different ways: the liberal constitutionalism of the west, the romantic social movements of the east, the indigenous land-based patriotism of Ottoman Armenia. In all three cases, collective identity was recast in terms of *nationality* rather than an ethno-religious community.[12]

Both of these works have served as starting points for those aspects of this book that pertain to the question of the Armenian nationalism and the Armenian identity. Abrahamian's dense anthropological research provides the necessary contextual ground that is uniquely post-Soviet and that is imperative for understanding of the shape and form of political authority in postindependent Armenia, attitudes toward Russia as well as the role of violence, sacrifice, and genocide in the fluid Armenian historical narrative.

These works vividly demonstrate that Armenia entered the post–Cold War world with a strong sense of national identity and preconceived notions about the neighbors rooted in history. The existence of Armenian independent statehood in the period preceding the Sovietization greatly contributed to the initial sense of familiarity with the experience of 1991 independence and the necessity to derive lessons from it. Such a past, along with the legacy of the genocide, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and an ethnically homogenous composition of the post-Soviet Armenia has demarcated a space that was highly symbolic and emotionally charged. Within such a space, smallness can turn into grandeur (big talk) and weakness transforms itself into strength.

This relational quality of power is emphasized by Papadakis and Starr, who describe it as "emanating from relationships between states instead of a comparison of their relatively fixed resources."[13] Physical size as an objective criterion cannot suffice for defining smallness as Robert Keohane and Robert Rothstein argue.[14] It is rather the perception of the state vis-à-vis the others, and the psychological dimension of the condition that makes a state small. To endow smallness with causal power would leave many questions unanswered.

> What seem to be missing from these traditional theories are understandings of the motivation/willingness of small states—why are small states so active

> and aggressive when their environments would, at least superficially, indicate that they be otherwise.[15]

This statement points to a significant "omission" in the field of traditional foreign policy analysis: the disregard for the social context of interest formation. If according to the realist school pursuit of power constitutes the "currency" of the international system, then small states would be considered, due to the lack of resources and hence power, as "mini-versions" of larger states.[16] Shifting the focus from the attributive (material) to the relational quality of power would allow locating power in the process of interaction: "power comes out of this relation, not from the power holder alone."[17] This implies that small states can and do exert pressure on more powerful states. Much of the rhetoric of "greatness" is often expressed through the language of honor and national pride.[18] This defiance on the part of small states demonstrates the failure of the propagators of instrumental rationality to capture the complexity of the social world, in which states live in. Most importantly, it urges the foreign policy researchers to "contextualize" foreign policy. As Walter Carlsnaes suggests, "One must perforce jettison the practice of viewing foreign policy in terms of separate and distinct actors possessing discrete, divisible, and "comparable" properties, whose behavior can be encapsulated inductively in terms of discontinuous events-behavior proceeding serially in temporal increments."[19]

One of the avenues to escape the structure-versus-agency juxtaposition that often drives the analysis of smaller states' foreign policy is by examining the role of identity understood here as a "social practice" or forms of "narratives." This approach "draws attention to the role of the agent without making the subjectivist assumption that structural constraints are not equally significant in the reproduction."[20] Again, viewing identity as practice highlights its relational quality and the fact that it is mainly about the states' self-representation to others; it "does not reside in essential and readily identifiable cultural traits but in relations, and the question of where and how the borders towards the other should be drawn therefore becomes critical."[21] Identities are constructed through narrativity rooted in relationality, which is the principal condition of social order: "While there are many ways of representing identities—symbols, gestures, and so forth—narrative is the most fundamental."[22] Within the study of foreign policy, this is what one could also call "a story framework," following Sanjoy Banerjee's terminology.

> National identity can be reconstructed as a story with a certain plot structure. It is less like a traditional one-track story and more like an interactive story

> whose plot has more than one branch or track, and the one taken depends on the action of the reader/player. The story is invoked to interpret situations and to produce decisions and motivate actions in response. The favored track of the story is one of the unidirectional historical and moral progression. The disfavored track is one of regression and degeneration.[23]

Consequentially, the language of the narrative becomes the crucial "performer" or force for the meaningfulness of identity. Language drives policy and takes a life of its own; it is not merely an instrument of communication signifying the real world but rather a defining practice. Much has been said about the role of language in the process of securitization, which according to Ole Weaver is a "speech act." Attaching the label of security to a particular problem legitimizes the extraordinary measures used by the policy makers; thus, securitization is "an agent uttering security."[24] Constructivist approaches to security can be applied to the study of the interaction between the material and the ideational and the process of coconstitution of agency and structure. In terms of security, the notion of coconstitution has two implications: First, a definition of threat is framed in the discourse of security. As Peter Katzenstein argues in the *Culture of National Security,* a state's history, culture, and identity determine the discourse of security, which will be reflected in security conceptions and policy.[25] Second, fixed definitions of security ignore the fluidity of security, the extent to which security is constantly reconstituted through the changing interests and identities of actors.

How patterns of enmity and amity that form the basis of securitization are actualized through a state's foreign policy are best understood when looking at the regional level. This level is particularly important when analyzing a small state. As Efraim Karsh suggests, "[F]or the small states, subsystemic developments are an absolute."[26] Security is relational; "others" that constitute the "self" are most often geographically adjacent.

The complexity of the security dynamics and the necessity to include the regional level of analysis in the process of conceptualizing foreign policy can be addressed by using the analytical concept of regional security complex (RSC). Coined by Barry Buzan in 1983 in his *People, States and Fear,* it underwent modifications in the 1998 edition to broaden the scope of securitizing agents in response to the disciplinary trends. In *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* they maintained that regardless of reformulation, the idea remains the same, that "substantial parts of securitization and desecuritization processes in the international system will manifest themselves in regional clusters."[27] Security complexes are constituted by a group of states, whose security dynamics are tightly linked. The crucial element of this framework is

that it is not intended to demonstrate the regional states' subjective understanding of the constitution of their region qua region. It is not premised on a consensus by the local states as what constitutes a given region and who may be included in it. Rather, the authors explain, RSC is coined as an analytical concept that reflects the fact that regions are entities distinct from the global and local level and that they are "socially constructed in the sense that they are contingent on the *security practice* of the actors."[28]

> Just as in the social world individual psychology might be most influential in explaining behavior in one case, family structures in another, and national security in yet another, so in the international world, domestic factors might dominate some security constellations, regional ones others, and global ones yet others. The regional level may or may not dominate, but it will nearly always be in play in some significant sense, and cannot be dropped out of the analysis.[29]

As a methodological consideration for this book, Buzan and Weaver's own methodology for uncovering the concept of the RSC essentially captures the way, in which an analysis of Armenian foreign policy should proceed. Rather than attempting to fit this case study within a particular theoretical framework, the goal is, as was articulated above, a holistic approach that integrates history, anthropology, and geopolitics at various levels to form a narrative of Armenia's foreign policy since inception as an independent state.

BASIC PARAMETERS OF ARMENIA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Armenians have the dubious distinction of being the victims of what is widely recognized as the first genocide in modern history. Armenia is located in a neighborhood long shaped by great power machinations, ethnic conflict, and political turmoil. It falls at the critical juncture between three major regional powers—Iran, Turkey, and Russia, each of whom played a part in shaping Armenia's political destiny throughout its history. Iran, Turkey, and Russia each carry a strong imperial legacy that inevitably translates itself into assertive/possessive policies toward and certain expectations from a region that used to be part of their domain.

Historical Armenia's division between the Russian and the Ottoman Empire determined a particular kind of nationalism that was founded on the idea of liberation of Turkish Armenia from Muslim rule. The most

significant impact of this geopolitical reality on the underlying principles of the Armenian nationalism expressed itself in the fact that from the second half of the nineteenth century until the Sovietization of Armenia in 1920, Armenia's destiny was continuously seen as dependent on external support. Originally, given that the issue of political reforms and the protection of non-Muslim minorities by the Sublime Porte was included into the "Eastern Question," an expectation that the "European (imperial) forces ought to—and therefore will—liberate Armenia(ns) from the Ottoman yoke had become an ingrained element in Armenian collective consciousness."[30] Dependence on Russia as a natural Orthodox ally was the most vivid example of this reliance on great powers. An anticipation of external support continued even after the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century and subsequently the genocide of 1915.

A power vacuum in the Southern Caucasus caused by Russia's abandonment of the Ottoman front in early 1918, and with the Ottoman decline, was temporarily filled by the independent Transcaucasian Federative Republic, comprised of Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis. This political federation fell apart after lasting slightly over one month because of the conflicting loyalties among the three ethnic groups. Each group was reaching for external powers for support: the Georgians wished to ally themselves with Germany, Azerbaijanis with the Ottoman Empire, and Armenians with the United Kingdom, France, and the United States.

The leading Armenian party, Dashnaktsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation [ARF]), formally announced Armenia's independence on May 28, 1918. This new Armenian state situated on a truncated portion of Russian Armenia was a "mangled bit of land that, for a lack of a better term [was] called a republic."[31] Filled with refugees fleeing from the genocide, under the threat of mass starvation, and under the Damocles sword of Turkish military offensive, the republic was nevertheless able to survive until 1920. The Armenian leadership at the time was hopeful that its neutrality and lack of ties with the Russian Bolsheviks would allow for the possibility of Western support. It became clear soon thereafter, however, that the emotional proclamations of the Allied governments would not be supported with concrete military and economic assistance.

> The Armenian government consistently followed a Western orientation, not out of any particular trust in the Allied Powers but because of the realization that the cherished goal of freedom could be achieved only with external support. The West alone had espoused that cause, at least in words. Yet the Western orientation came with great risk and cost, as

it limited Armenia's options and intensified the antagonism of both the Turkish nationalists and the Russian Bolsheviks.[32]

Armenian territories became the bargaining chip between Ataturk's Turkey and Lenin's Russia, both driven by a similar objective of breaking away from their international isolation and consolidating their new regimes. Turkey was progressively expanding its military offensive and under the pretense of protecting Armenia, the Bolshevik army moved to occupy it. Pressured into signing an agreement with the Soviet government on December 2, 1920, Dashnak leaders effectively transferred their powers to the new state of Soviet Armenia. A few days later, the Treaty of Alexandrapol (December 5, 1920) formally ended hostilities between Armenian and Turkey. With formal peace established at its eastern borders, Turkey could now press the young Soviet government to give up territories conquered during the Russian offensive of Anatolia in 1916. The Soviet-Turkish Treaty signed in March 1921 drew new borders between the Bolshevik Armenia and Turkey, which left portions of Anatolia assigned to Armenia by the Treaty of Serves within Turkish territory. In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne solidified these new borders by effectively putting to rest the Treat of Serves and the aspirations of the Armenian nationalism. Armenian question ceased to exist as a subject of international law and, with it, vanished from the international radar.[33]

Internally, the Bolshevik government was reshuffling its alliances with different ethnic groups in the quest to divide and conquer. In July of 1921, in order to appease both the Turkish government and Azerbaijan's Soviet leadership, the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party—following Stalin's directives—reversed its original decision of including the Armenian-populated enclaves of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan regions into Armenia and attached them to Azerbaijan. Thus, the infamous Nagorono-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast became yet another time bomb created by the Soviet nationalities policies. Throughout the following sixty-six years, the Armenian population of the oblast never got accustomed to the Azerbaijani rule. This was the case not only because of the various forms of discrimination but also because the Armenian population considered themselves to be distinct from and culturally superior to the Azerbaijanis. Woven together, the loss Nagorno-Karabakh and the territories of the Turkish Armenia fueled the dissident nationalism in Armenia in 1960s and 1970s. So it is not surprising that when in 1987 Gorbachev began a process of liberalization, the fate of the oblast was articulated as one of the most significant grievances of the Armenian population both in Stepanakert and Yerevan.

The rebirth of the "Armenian question" in its "Karabakh" form was in essence a peaceful movement. However, it could not coexist with the inherent contradiction of Gorbachev's reforms that "opened up" the system without providing space and means for articulating national aspirations. Anti-Armenian pogroms reverberating throughout Azerbaijani cities in February of 1988 were one of the expressions of dormant intolerance and ethnic tensions hidden behind the façade of orderliness and transparency. This, combined with Moscow's anti-Armenian propaganda, fueled frustration, but also reorganized and remobilized the movement through creating a political organization known as the "Karabakh Committee" led by a young orientalist Levon Ter-Petrosyan. On July 12, 1988, in the session of the NKAO (the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast) Soviet declared its decision to secede from Azerbaijan and to join Armenia. A year and a half later, on December 1, 1989, the Armenian Supreme Soviet proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh's de jure reunification with Armenia, a legal point which makes it difficult for Armenia to insist that it has no territorial claims over Azerbaijan. However, this legal ruling uneasily coexists with Nagorno-Karabakh's later de facto declaration of independence on December 10, 1991. This declaration became the basis of Levon Ter-Petrosyan position over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Elected as Armenia's president in the fall of 1990 and in fear of international isolation, he continuously insisted that the issue was between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan and not between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This position was complicated by the massive participation of irregular units, so-called *fedayins,* from Armenia proper and the Diaspora alongside the regular Nagorno-Karabakh army during military actions.[34] The fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh, officially ending in 1994 through a Russia-brokered ceasefire, resulted in the Armenian capture of the entire oblast and surrounding six regions inside Azerbaijani territory, including the crucially important Lachin corridor, constituting the only land link between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Since 1994, the status quo remains unaltered despite series of negotiations and initiatives aimed at a permanent settlement. The main body responsible for the negotiation process is the Minsk Group of the OSCE (Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe) represented by Russia, France, and the United States.

HISTORICAL MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND ARMENIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

> The idea shared by many Western and Soviet historians alike of a single purpose in Armenian history, whatever it might be in various accounts—survival, freedom, keeping the faith, independence—is closely tied to another unexamined assumption, that there has been through all time

> an Armenian "spirit", an immutable essence that has always characterized the Armenians. The very constancy that makes up the Armenian nature in such accounts is a reading back of the present national existence or consciousness into the whole past.[35]

Armenia's security perceptions cannot be analyzed without the intersubjective understanding of the Armenian nationalism, its causes and aspirations. Armenian nationalism is an eclectic phenomenon, combining both primordialism and modernism. It stresses the ancientness of the Armenian ethnicity as well as the establishment of the Armenian state as its ultimate goal. It represents the "root-oriented" model that describes a nation constantly moving forward to the past reenacting essentially the same story.[36]

At the heart of nationalism is a never-ending process of nation-building and maintaining of boundaries based on the maintenance of national idea and demarcation of the other: "central to nationalisms everywhere is the metaphor of nation-as-journey, as something that is ever in-the-making, but never quite reached."[37] As William Bloom suggests, "[T]here is that other political reality—that, in the face of continuously changing political and socio-economic realities (which is the nature of the contemporary life), nation-building is an on-going necessity."[38] Therefore, the boundary construction of the political discourse and bracketing of what is an appropriate reading of the past is a prerogative of the state discourse, particularly expressed through its foreign and security policy. The key to creating a narrative successful at legitimization and mobilization is the rearrangement of time into a continuous progressive line. For instance, the contemporary celebration of the independence day of the First Republic of Armenia on May 28 accomplishes the mental integration of 1918 and 1991 into an uninterrupted experience of independence through the collective "forgetting" of the Soviet time. The adoption of the national anthem of the First Republic in 1991 reflects the same trend. An Armenian historian, who contends that history is a strategic resource, assigns strategic thinking a leading role in the Armenian position on Nagorno-Karabakh by stripping history of its "pastness." Armenia's most significant foe, present-day Turkey is perceived as identical to the Turkey of the past:

> When we compare the preset situation with the historical record in the region, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict emerges as an organic extension of Armenian-Turkish conflict of the 1894–1923 period rather than an isolated historical phenomenon. Among the striking similarities between these periods are the same Turkish geostrategic objectives and state policies of establishing and controlling directly and fully land

> communication among the Turkophone peoples from the Bosphorus through Baku to Central Asia.[39]

This statement reveals what E. Zerubavel describes as "homogenization" of history. Armenians relive history in the present day, hence the permanence of Armenia's surroundings is essential:

> Historical analogies can, of course, be consciously used to influence outcomes. This is the usual task of propaganda. But historical analogies do more. They suggest patterns of understanding and consequently conduct which can elude the conscious control of the decision-maker ... What can be said is that the capacity to have a particular event inscribed within a script of a historical analogy is a forceful device for legitimating that action which is thought to be the lesson of this historical event.[40]

On the other hand, the stereotype of a perpetual victim has been transformed to inform not only the individual but also collective identities. L. Abrahamian reflects that on the outset of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis had to transform "their national stereotypes, both external and internal."[41] Armenian "revisionism" over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is an expression of such a transformation. Creating watersheds or dividing lines between various historical periods helps to articulate distinct identities, transform continuity into discontinuity to internalize change. As any story, collective memory has its punctuation or "periodization":

> Such rites of separation are specifically designed to dramatize the symbolic transformations of identity involved in establishing new beginnings, especially implying that it is indeed quite possible to turn over a new leaf and be somehow reborn.[42]

This parallel existence of mental "periodization" and "homogenization" of history illuminates the dynamic nature of identity and the methodological usefulness of approaching identity as a narrative, mainly in order to understand identity transformation. Whether attempting to break away from the historical burden or to draw parallels with earlier periods, Armenian foreign policy thinking is "handcuffed to history," continuously engaging with the past to articulate the new national roadmap. A newspaper columnist finely captures this collective sense of continuous reliving of history as nothing beyond ordinary:

> One of the characteristic features of the Armenian history (perhaps not only Armenian), most vividly expressed in the last fifteen years is that

> it does not have a past—not a single process and not a single event of national scale receives completion, and today we feel the impact—direct or indirect—from seemingly far removed events whether it is the adoption of the Christianity in the fourth century or the loss of the independent statehood in the fifth.[43]

It may be argued that the Armenian case is rooted in a more profound condition, to which J. Galtung refers as a "syndrome." Speaking of ex-Yugoslavia and South Asia, he suggests that the construction of the "Self" and the "Other" in these cases is "more compelling," rooted "in such higher authorities as God and History, as told and experienced by people, not by professional theologians and historians."[44] The building blocks of the "syndrome" are: collective self; collective other; a history (of the future—time, myths); a geography (of the future—space, land); a transcendental principle of Good (God); a transcendental principle of Evil (Satan). These are primordial archetypes, "relating to basic categories of thought and action."[45] While not so evident in the official historiography, and largely dormant, these archetypes are subconsciously present in the public reading of the past, in the popular debates resurfacing more prominently, particularly at the times of crisis, transition, and reevaluation. They supply the rhetoric, the language, the psychological maps, and the time frames within which the nation operates. As in the Armenian case, the syndrome very often involves a trauma, which is defines the category and the characteristics of the "collective other," and shapes the group's relation toward its immediate neighbors.

This is articulated through a highly militaristic discourse surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and is embedded in Armenia's geostrategic thinking. Nagorno-Karabakh is not a mere symbol of an independent and rebellious Armenian spirit but is also a part and parcel of the Armenian defense establishments' geostrategic calculations. Nagorno-Karabakh serves as a buffer protecting Armenia's extremely vulnerable southern region of Siuinik. Armen Aivazian articulates the Armenian vision of its strategic predicament in the following passage:

> The borders of Soviet Armenia, drawn in 1920–23, precluded any possibility of Armenia to be a geopolitically viable state in the event of any future repetition of the collapse of the Russian Empire. Siuinik represents a case of extreme strategic vulnerability. This region is totally lacking in any strategic depth. Its territory extends for some 50 km between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan, in the two narrowest parts of Meghri and Jermuk, it shrinks to only about 40 km. The threat to Siuinik becomes clear when we consider the ferocity of combined Azerbaijani-Turkish attempts to conquer Siunik

by force in 1918–21 with the aim of providing a direct territorial link from Turkey to Azerbaijan and from there to Turkophone Central Asia.[46]

Nagorno-Karabakh signifies the first precedent in modern Armenian history when, instead of relying on external support, Armenians were able to single-handedly resolve their geopolitical predicament, at least for the time being. This fundamentally explains the role of Nagorno-Karabakh in the Armenian postindependence political thinking and the existential meaning it carries for the Armenian defense establishment. This is an issue that is more than the sum of its two parts—independence for Karabakh and security for Armenia.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This book consists of four chapters, each dealing with a set of relationships. Each chapter lays out the historical background and then moves into the chronology and analysis of the main events affecting the relationship since 1991. Chapter 1 addresses Armenian-Russian relations since independence. Armenia's strategic alliance with Russia is generally presented to be as the essential condition of Armenia's security. It is characterized by the Armenian elite and majority of public as "natural" and "organic." This chapter seeks to understand what it means for Armenia to be a "pro-Russian" or "Russophile" state as it has been referred to by Western observers, and what it entails. It has even been called a "stepchild" or the "wild card" of the Southern Caucasus region because of its close relations with Russia.[47] This is an oversimplified conclusion. There has always been a history of mistrust in Armenian expectations of Russia after 1921 because of the historical circumstances. This chapter discovers three parallel strands within the Armenian perception of Russia: extreme skepticism resurfaced, particularly in the last few years, because of Russia's "imperial"-style policies in the Southern Caucasus; acknowledgment of the necessity to remain tied to Russia because of Armenia's security needs; and acceptance of Russia as a "natural" ally because of historico-cultural and religious links. All of these three positions are used by the Armenian leadership to describe and assess the relationship depending on the circumstances and political demands of the day. While from the defense perspective, the elite continues to insist that this alliance is the only available security guarantee for Armenia, after 1998 a new doctrine emerges: labeled as a policy of complementarity, it is aimed at diversifying Armenia's political choices. This policy implies developing mutually positive relations with all partners, such as Iran, the United States, and the European Union. The chapter pays particular attention to

Russia's policies toward the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and in the Caspian region in the context of the evolution of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Soviet Union.

Armenia's military dependence on Russia is impossible to understand without considering the issue of Armenian-Turkish relations. Chapter 2 analyzes the existing diplomatic deadlock between Turkey and Armenia. Aside from the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, this is the most sensitive, normative, and complex issue on the Armenia's foreign policy agenda: how does one go about building a relationship with a country that is the political successor of a regime responsible for the genocide and that consistently denies its responsibility for the past? How should a possibility of such a relationship be conceptualized considering that Turkey's open support of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and subsequent Turkish embargo of the Armenian border accentuated historical grievances and brought to the forefront of the relations the issue of the 1915 genocide? The chapter analyzes numerous failed attempts by the first Armenian president to establish a dialogue at the cost of sidelining the genocide issue and subsequent president, Robert Kocharyan's careful maneuvering between diaspora's growing pressure for the genocide recognition, Turkish preconditions and the geopolitical and economic necessity to have an open border with Turkey. One of the key methods of grasping the dilemma facing the Armenian leadership lies in addressing their understanding of what constitutes the concept of "normalcy." For Levon Ter-Petrosyan, it meant transcending historical dependencies and stereotypes, or what he called "false ideology." Armenia's historical dependence on Russia could only be avoided through reconciliation with Turkey, whose threat, he argued, was over exaggerated. For Robert Kocharyan, the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, "normalcy" for Armenia is its ability to withstand international pressure and safeguard its physical survival through preserving Nagorno-Karabakh's independence. The Turkish continuous policy of linking its relations with Armenia with Yerevan's compromise on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue sabotages any possibility of this relationship to improve in the nearest future. This chapter gives much space to the discussion of Turkish geostrategic perceptions of the Southern Caucasus and its domestic debates around Armenia.

Chapter 3 addresses Armenian-Iranian relations. As I argue, this is one of the areas of Armenia's foreign policy, upon which the entire spectrum of the political forces agrees. Iran is an important geopolitical partner, which provides a channel for escaping Armenia's regional isolation. Despite the recurring American pressure, the Armenian leadership has been firm on its insistence on the necessity to maintain good neighborly relations with the Islamic Republic. Armenia's foreign policy toward

Iran should be considered bilaterally and also within the larger picture of Armenia's relations with the Middle East, most importantly with Syria and Lebanon. It is, as I argue, one of the foundations of the policy of complementarity and an important semantic tool used to illustrate Armenia's ability to build positive relations with two antagonists simultaneously, Iran and the United States. The Iranian policies toward Armenia are as always careful and pragmatic. There is much to consider, including its tense relations with Azerbaijan, increasing U.S. presence in the Southern Caucasus, and Russian-Iranian relations in the context of the Caspian Sea. Although Iran has maintained a neutral position throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as some sources argue, Iran has been supportive of the idea of preserving the status quo on the ground and even aiding the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh to prevent a two-way settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan that would immediately invite the United States into the region. Iran shares Russian position to an extent that it does not allow for the hostilities to resume at the same time postponing the final settlement of the conflict indefinitely.

Chapter 4 deals with Armenia's relations with a relatively new geopolitical partner labeled here as "the West." The reason for such generic term is Armenian leadership's perception of the West as a monolith partner that is composed of two main players, the United States and the European structures. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into two sections dealing with Armenia-U.S. and Armenia-Europe relations (Europe being represented by the European Union and the Council of Europe).

This vector of foreign policy has been presented by the foreign policy elite as part and parcel of policy of complementarity, aimed at transcending East-West antagonism and achieving "diversification" of Armenia's relations with the world. The rise of this doctrine can be traced in this particular chapter because it coincides with the growing Western understanding of the Southern Caucasus not simply as an extension of Russia's sphere of influence but as a separately standing region with its own security dynamics and with a potentiality of important geopolitical dividends. This realization has resulted in more assertive policies toward Armenia by the United States and Euro-Atlantic structures. Armenia is constantly challenged to adjust its alliance with Russia to the changing global environment. Yet, the key to the existing balance in the region lies not in the logic of Russian-American relations, extensively discussed in this chapter but in the internal dynamics of the region, particularly that of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A very interesting aspect of this dimension of Yerevan's foreign policy is the illustration of the process of the elite learning. While the American pressure whether in the area of Armenian-Iranian

relations or the resolution processes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict occasionally causes anxiety among the Armenian elite, they have nevertheless remained defiant. The reasons for this are two-fold: one, the "West" is not ready to provide to Armenia with the security guarantees, hence the Armenian elite understands that the pressure is only of a limited nature; two, the Nagorno-Karabakh is a source of strength as much as it is a cause of vulnerability because it gives the Armenian elite a sense of certainty about the boundaries that it cannot transgress. An important role in this confidence is the existence of large Armenian diaspora in the United States and Europe that from the dawn of independence gave Armenia a comparative advantage over its adversaries in the region, both in terms of diplomatic clout and actual policy results.

CHAPTER 1

RUSSIA: "THE INDISPENSABLE ALLY?"

> I am speaking of mistakes that may have catastrophic, and if you will, tragic consequences ... I am speaking of a great misfortune, happening to us—the wild anti-Russian campaign started by certain circles. The fact in itself is outrageous, and moreover, politically fruitless since there is nothing behind it but a savage desire to instill feelings that are uncharacteristic of Armenians, that are *unnatural*, and never experienced before—the feeling of animosity and antipathy towards Russians.[1]
>
> Our ties with Russia are something innate and *natural* for all Armenians, particularly those residing on the territory of the republic and the CIS. Its components are common cultural-spiritual values and traditional perception of Russia as the most significant regional ally and protector of Armenia's security.[2]
>
> Armenian defense doctrine would have to satisfy two essential requirements: 1) the capacity of Armenia to independently confront and win wars with Azerbaijan, and 2) a defense with at least one external player which would neutralize the Turkish threat. In the foreseeable future, only Russia is interested and willing to assume such a role.[3]

INTRODUCTION

The most striking aspect of the Armenian foreign policy toward Russia after the end of the Soviet Union has been the disparity between the official language used to characterize it and the substantive normative changes that have occurred since independence. This chapter argues that by placing it in the realm of "natural," the Armenian ruling elite disguises the necessity to address Yerevan's current strategic dependence on Russia despite the erosion of its normative foundations and legitimacy. The discursive nature of Armenian-Russian relations in the context of the Armenian post-Soviet political identity is most evident

in its embeddedness in hierarchical relations of power institutionalized by the Soviet system and in a sense that the "discourses 'naturalize' representations of self and other. They normalize identities."[4] One of the major hidden elements in this language of "normalcy" is the role of the Armenian ruling elite, which utilizes its relationship with Russia to assure its political longevity. This is conducted in various ways and with varying success. As the story of Levon Ter-Petrosyan's presidency demonstrates, Russia's withdrawal of political support may have been an important factor in his eventual fall, while Robert Kocharyan has used this relationship to consolidate his positions and to ensure the status quo in the Nagorno-Karabakh stalemate. This merger between elite's strategic and political interests against the background of Russia's imperial-like policies toward smaller states in the Southern Caucasus has accelerated the process of the erosion of Russia's legitimacy as an indispensable ally among the Armenian political forces and the public. Yet, the Armenian-Russian strategic alliance that constitutes the crux of this relationship continues to define and dominate Armenia's foreign policy in the context of what its leadership perceives as a clear lack of other alternatives. The discursive context, against which these two considerations interplay, is very reflective of the dynamics of the Armenian political identity since the independence that has been centered upon the question whether Armenians have been able to finally break away from history or they continuously reenact their past in the present by repeating "old political mistakes."

HISTORY AND PERCEPTIONS

Although Russia began to play a principal role in Armenia's destiny fairly recently, compared to Iran and Turkey, from the early nineteenth century onward, its impact on the Armenian political thinking is unparalleled. Relations with Russia have occupied a central place in the writings of the nineteenth century Armenian public intellectuals who coined national self-consciousness such as Mikael Nalbandian, Hovhannes Tumanyan, and Khachatur Abovyan. The genocide, the resulting influx of the Armenians to the Russian Transcaucasus and subsequently the establishment of the Bolshevik rule, has reaffirmed the role of Russia as a guarantor of physical survival of the nation.

Reliance on Russia occupied a central place in the Armenian national liberation struggle in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, which came to be known as "the Armenian question." The cornerstone of the struggle was the conception of dependence on the outside powers, particularly Russia for achieving the liberation of the Western Armenian

provinces from the Ottoman yoke. Unlike the Ottoman Armenians, Armenians in the Transcaucasus were more secure, socially more mobile, more urbanized, and more exposed to the outside world.[5] Their contact with the Western culture occurred through the Russian intellectual circles and was instrumental in the emergence of modern Armenian national idea. Nineteenth-century Tiflis and Baku became the centers of Armenian intellectual renaissance and a birthplace of major Armenian political parties such as Dashnaktsutyun and Hnchak.

Benevolence toward Russia to a large degree was premised upon shared Christian heritage and juxtaposition of the images of barbaric Asiatic Turk and enlightened Europeanized Russian. In his 1858 novel, *Wounds of Armenia*, the founder of modern Eastern Armenian literature Khachatur Abovyan wrote, "Blessed is the day when Russians stepped onto Armenian land."[6] These attitudes were reinforced by Russian victory in the Turkish-Russian war of 1877–1878 and the inclusion of Kars and Ardagan into the Russian Empire. Traditionally, although eastern Armenian political parties were more radical than western ones, their radicalism extended only to embrace the cause of the liberation of the Turkish Armenia. Armenian contacts with the Russian populism paradoxically strengthened their social consciousness and political awareness only as it pertained to the conditions of their brethren in the Ottoman Empire.

At the onset of World War I, it was widely held that the fate of the Armenians in the eastern provinces could only be tied to the Allied, specifically Russian, victory. With the worst massacres of 1915 behind them, Armenians greeted the 1916 Russian advance into Anatolia and the capture of Erzerum, Trabizond, Erzinjan, and the Lake Van region with great exhilaration and hope. In an article published in December 1917, Armenian intellectual A. Chopanian argued that Russia was Armenians' "primary protector." Its victory in the war would reward Armenia with self-rule.[7] What Armenians did not expect was Lenin's premature Russian withdrawal from war and the abandonment of the eastern front. The ensuing short-term withdrawal of Russia from the Transcaucasus (1918–1921) meant that Armenians would face the Turkish march on Transcaucasus alone.[8]

The forced Sovietization of Armenia, achieved as a result of the concert between the Turkish nationalists and the Bolsheviks, finalized Armenia's new and much smaller boundaries. It is this critical juncture of history that gave rise to two distinct narratives and political perceptions of Russia. On the one hand, the physical preservation of a portion of its historical lands in the small corner of Transcaucasus was imperative for the development of the nation given its prior experiences at the beginning of the century. As one of the leaders of the Dashnak government, Hovhannes Kajaznuni wrote later: "From the first day of our statehood we well understood that

such a small, poor, deprived, and isolated country as Armenia cannot become truly independent and autonomous ... We should be grateful to Bolsheviks. By deposing us, they—if not saved—have put on a reliable path whatever they have inherited."[9] In 1921, after the Sovietization of Armenia, independent Armenia's former ambassador to the United States, Armen Garo still maintained:

> Without Russia's active assistance, we will not have the opportunity to half-way realize our national ideal: to have our own homeland, independent or even semi-independent, where our people will have the chance to live and work, away from the Turkish sword. From this perspective our "red brothers" in Yerevan are standing on more realistic ground.[10]

This pro-Russian stance remained to be the cornerstone of the Armenian nationalist idea in the diaspora throughout the Soviet period. After World War II, the Dashnaks were exhilarated by Stalin's plans to create a cordon sanitaire around the southern border, which included the revision of the Turkish-Soviet treaty in the area of Kars and Ardahan.[11] This episode as well as the entire history of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic demonstrates that the Armenian nationalism continued to center itself on the opposition to the Turks and benevolence toward the Russians. As R. G. Suny notes, "[T]he Armenian nationalism was less threatening to the Soviet state, especially since it is the Soviet army that stood between Armenia and the ever-present potential threat from Turkey."[12] This perceived threat and the gratitude for the nation's ultimate security resulted in the loyalty to the Soviet state both on the level of official and dissident nationalism. The discriminatory practices of the Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh were blamed on the Azerbaijani nationalist policies rather than the larger Soviet nationalities policy.

In fact, the relative autonomy in the "practice" of ethnicity, be it in education or popular culture, allowed by Moscow, served as a major legitimizing factor for the local communists. Moscow's ethnic policies designed to secure popular consent and eventual arrival of the new "Soviet" identity gave Armenians as well as other titular nationalities an opportunity for material and symbolic reproduction of ethnicity. Historiography became the backbone of this process and the initial battles between different ethnic groups over the questions of origins, territory, and legitimacy were waged in the republican Academies of Sciences. Hence, the first stage of the impending conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Nagorno-Karabakh was "the war of memories."[13] In the context of perestroika, this symbolic "war," waged on the pages of the textbooks and academic journals, became increasingly politicized and heated.

Among the Armenians, the politicization of the discourse set within the larger context of weakening legitimacy of the Soviet propaganda triggered the "myth of unjust treatment" by Russia.[14] A samizdat pamphlet published in Yerevan in 1991 resurrects the voice of a prominent Dashnak Ruben Darbinian, who wrote in April 1920, months before Armenia's Sovietization: "Russia is our friend as long as we are its slaves; but it became our enemy, perhaps our most dangerous enemy, when we sought freedom and self-rule.[15] This transformation of the narrative, from portraying Russia as the main guarantor of Armenia's security to its most serious obstacle, was internalized through that "myth of unjust treatment." This transformation occurred gradually and painfully in the later stages of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement, and became finalized, as I argue during Robert Kocharyan's presidency.

THE BATTLE OF THE NARRATIVES

Eastern Armenia's administrative affiliation with the Russian empire, an earlier exposure to the Russian language and culture (compared to other titular nationalities in the Soviet Union) as well as the existence of a highly educated Russanized intelligentsia guaranteed that the Armenian integration into the Soviet system would be more successful than in other republics. More significantly for such process, Armenia's pre-Soviet tumultuous history and the narrative of the Bolshevik's timely intervention was engraved in the public awareness and officialdom. "Forgetting" that Armenian interests were "sacrificial lambs" offered to foster Turkish-Soviet relations in 1920s, the Armenians valued the advantages of peaceful development under the Soviet security umbrella. In general, although the "Russophiles" recognized the "big brother's" traditional imperial ambitions, coexistence with Russia was deemed as the only viable alternative. For some members of the Soviet Armenian intelligentsia, the relationship carried almost a metaphysical, highly idealized meaning as an organic union of two Christian nations amid the hostile Turkic world. Some members of the early Karabakh movement, such as Zori Balayan invariably stressed the religious and cultural affinity of two peoples. In an open letter to B. Yeltsin he wrote: "Now when Russia is making a choice towards her salvation, Christian Karabakh ... will continue its struggle for its survival as a part of the historic Armenia, included into Russia, and as its reliable outpost. Karabakh issue as a separate issue no longer exists. It has been long resolved and sealed with the blood of Russians and Armenians."[16]

This traditional Armenian loyalty partly explains why the leaders of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement at its initial changes sought a resolution within the Soviet legal framework. Despite the growing anger