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Armenian International Policy: Navigating Global Dynamics

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Introduction

Armenia, a nation with a rich history and complex geopolitical landscape, stands at the crossroads of regional and global dynamics. We examine Armenia's contemporary international policy and analyze its historical context, evolving strategies, external actors, regional roles, and future prospects.

Evolution of International Policy

Armenia's global policy is deeply rooted in its millennia-old records, marked by intervals of sovereignty, overseas dominations, and struggles for independence. Since gaining independence after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Armenia's global policy has undergone a significant transformation driven by a combination of domestic imperatives and external pressures. Initially targeted on nation-constructing and safety worries, Armenia's foreign coverage gradually shifted toward a multi-vector technique, in search of balanced relations with fundamental powers, neighboring states, and international businesses.

The Nagorno-Karabakh struggle with Azerbaijan has been a defining characteristic of Armenia's foreign policy, shaping its local alliances and safety posture. Armenia's steadfast help for the self-dedication of Nagorno-Karabakh, rooted in ancient grievances and territorial claims, has complicated its relations with Azerbaijan and different local actors.

One outstanding factor of Armenia's foreign policy is its aspiration for nearer integration with the European Union. Despite its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, Armenia has pursued deeper engagement with the EU via the Eastern Partnership initiative, signaling its commitment to democratic values, economic reforms, and European integration.

External Actors

Armenia's foreign policy is influenced by various external actors, each with its own interests and objectives. Russia is the primary security ally and strategic partner, with

defense cooperation and economic collaboration, including the presence of Russian military bases in Armenia. However, recent events in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the displacement of over 100,000 Armenians and ongoing border tensions with Azerbaijan, have shaken public confidence in Russia's ability to ensure Armenia's security, prompting Armenia to seek alternative security arrangements.

Despite Russia, Armenia maintains diplomatic ties with Iran, Georgia, Turkey, and the United States. Iran, sharing historical ties with Armenia, has become a key economic partner, particularly in energy. Iran has become a significant economic partner for Armenia, particularly in the energy sector. Although the United States has provided financial support to Armenia in the past, the level two countries' trade remains low and U.S. neutrality in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has strained relations, especially because of U.S. concerns about Armenia's economic ties with Russia.

Armenia has maintained a friendly relationship with China since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, cultural and military exchanges between the two countries remain minimal, despite significant economic ties. China's pragmatic approach to geopolitics is reflected in its neutrality on regional conflicts, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, aligning with Russia's peace efforts and recognizing Azerbaijan's territorial gains.

Armenia's alliance with Russia is shaken, and it faces challenges, particularly since Nikol Pashinyan's election in 2018. This election marked a shift towards diversifying Armenia's foreign policy, including developing closer ties with the European Union and the United States. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 strained relations further. Russia brokered a peace deal that solidified Azerbaijan's gains and raised questions about its role in resolving issues like the Lachin Corridor blockade. This led to the displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. After the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Azerbaijan's aggression against Armenian territory, Armenia's long-standing partnership with Russia has come under strain. As a response, Armenia has frozen its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). This decision highlights the significant changes in Armenia's geopolitical strategy and its attempts to reevaluate its security agreements in response to changing regional dynamics. These developments underscore the complexities of Armenia's geopolitical landscape.

Russia's "Special Military Operation" effects on Armenia

Since the start of Russia's so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine, it is estimated that more than 100,000 Russians have immigrated to Armenia, which makes up about 2% of the overall population. Most of those immigrants are young people and

many of them are entrepreneurs or skilled workers. Now Russians are most likely the largest single ethnic minority in Armenia, which is around 2.5–3%.

Although the flow of these immigrants has led to an increase in inflation, especially in Yerevan, they have also contributed to overcoming the emigration crisis and the problem of brain drain the country was facing. A lot of new businesses have been launched and the country's IT sector has been reinforced by new talent and capital. There are Russians in Armenia who have no border with Russia and have no ongoing conflict with Russia and they have integrated well.

Trade between Armenia and Russia has increased by almost 450% since 2020. Despite being a relatively isolated country, a lot of this trade is the re-exported goods like electronics and vehicles which are affected by sanctions and companies leaving Russia in protest of "operation."

Azerbaijan

The relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been tense ever since the end of the USSR. They lack formal diplomatic relations and have sealed borders between them. The main bone of contention is Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian region that has governed itself since 1994. However, it is still internationally considered to be part of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has closed the Lachin Corridor that connects Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh thus all traffic including essential imports such as gas and food have been suspended. According to Azerbaijan's ruling regime, Armenia should finalize its part of a new road through the corridor as well as open up Nakhichevan via Zanzegur Corridor that passes through southern Armenia. Due to fear of losing control over its southern border and direct access to Iran, it is difficult for Armenia to agree on this proposal. There are also fears that making such concessions could reignite conflict, considering that Azerbaijan claims Armenian territory.

Turkey

Armenia's relationship with Turkey has been tense, but there are signs of improvement. For instance, in 1993, Turkey shut its border with Armenia as a sign of support for Azerbaijan which had always been its ally. For Armenia, this blockade brings back painful memories including the expulsion and killing of one and a half million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Armenia refers to this event as

genocide while Turkey maintains that it was not and does not accept that it organized a planned attack against them.

Since the conflict that took place in 2020, there have been moves to normalize relations such as an announcement made on resumption of air cargo links in 2022 and also possible opening of borders to other nationals. However, these areas have yet to see much progress so far with very few tangible results achieved up to date.

Georgia

Relations between Georgia and Armenia have historically been characterized by cultural and economic ties. Both countries share common historical legacies and cultural affinities, which have fostered a sense of mutual understanding and cooperation. Georgia and Armenia have also collaborated on various regional initiatives, particularly within the framework of the South Caucasus.

Armenia maintains close relations with Georgia, the only neighboring country with an open border and direct rail links. More than 70 percent of Armenia's supplies rely on Georgia, including important gas pipelines from Russia. In addition, more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians live in Georgia, mainly near the Armenian border or the capital, Tbilisi.

Discussions about the treatment of Armenians in Georgia and their minority political representatives arise from time to time but have not yet become a major issue.

EU Integration and Regional Challenges

Armenia's interest in closer ties with the European Union is motivated by its goal of bringing its values and norms in line with the West, increasing economic prospects, and strengthening democratic institutions. Nevertheless, Armenia's geopolitical limitations, such as its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and Azerbaijan's territorial claims, pose many problems for its European dreams.

The ongoing border conflict and the territorial claims from Azerbaijan are today the most important foreign policy issue for Armenia, which at the same time implies both security and diplomatic challenges. The recent escalation of hostilities in 2020 and the forcibly displaced 100,000 Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh showed the degree of the situation's fragility and the potential for renewed conflict. This underscored the need for the international mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms.

In addition, Armenia has to deal with many regional threats, such as energy insecurity, border disputes, and terrorism. The closure of Armenian borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan has impeded economic growth and regional connectivity, while the unresolved conflicts in the region keep the instability and insecurity.

Future Directions and Scenarios

The domestic factors, the dynamics of the region, and global trends will determine the future course of Armenia's foreign policy. The resolution of the purported "peace treaty" between Armenia and Azerbaijan will greatly influence regional stability, economic development, and Armenia's ties with neighboring countries.

The future may see Armenia pursue further integration with the European Union. Engagement with international organizations and regional initiatives will deepen even further thus strengthening Armenia's role on the world stage and ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the South Caucasus and beyond.

The foreign policy of Armenia will inevitably require a combination of pragmatism, diplomacy, and strategic vision. Using its historical legacy, cultural heritage, and geopolitical position Armenia can negotiate the intricacies of the international arena and pursue its national interests in the ever-changing world.

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