

**SMALL-STATE POLITICS AND ALLIANCES: AN ANALYSIS OF ARMENIA-NATO PARTNERSHIP
UNTIL THE VELVET REVOLUTION***

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine small states' politics of alliances in the case of Armenia-NATO relations. In this context, this article also identifies several approaches for explaining the foreign policies of small states within the framework of International Relations (IR) literature, with a specific focus on the case of Armenia. The initial sections of this article delve into the definition and characterization of small states, as well as evaluate the theoretical discussions that highlight the significance of both domestic and international factors in the decision-making process. This study scrutinizes the foreign policy of Armenia, thereby shedding light on the processes that pave the way for the Armenia-NATO partnership. Subsequently, this study argues that the Armenian way of alliances can only be understood by analyzing both internal and external factors combined. While the paper indicates that Armenia-NATO relations have not fundamentally transformed the entire context of Armenian foreign policy, it reveals that this growing partnership has created certain opportunities and constraints for both parties involved.

Keywords: *Small-state, foreign policy, alliances, Armenia, NATO*

**KÜÇÜK DEVLET POLİTİKALARI VE İTTİFAKLAR: KADİFE DEVRİM ÖNCESİ DÖNEMDE
ERMENİSTAN-NATO İLİŞKİLERİNİN ANALİZİ**

Öz

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, küçük devlet kavramı içerisinde değerlendirilen uluslararası aktörlerin ittifak politikaları ile karar verme süreçlerini Ermenistan örneğinde incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale aynı zamanda Uluslararası İlişkiler literatürü çerçevesinde küçük devletlerin dış politikalarını açıklama amacındaki çeşitli yaklaşımları ele almakta ve

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- Bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan "Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler" başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

değerlendirmektedir. Bu makalenin ilk bölümleri, küçük devletlerin tanımını ve özelliklerini ele alırken, sonraki bölümler karar verme sürecinde hem ulusal hem de uluslararası ölçekteki faktörlerin önemini vurgulayan bir çerçeve oluşturmakta ve Ermenistan'ın ittifak politikalarının anlaşılması açısından hem iç hem de dış faktörlerin birlikte analiz edilmesi gerekliliğini savunmaktadır. Bu çerçevenin anlamlandırılması amacıyla ampirik bir örnek olarak Güney Kafkasya'ya odaklanan bu çalışma, Ermenistan'ın dış politikasını incelemekte ve böylece çoğunlukla göz ardı edilen bir ilişki modeli olarak Ermenistan-NATO ortaklığına ışık tutmaktadır. Tarihsel süreçteki ittifak arayışlarını değerlendiren bu makale Ermenistan-NATO ilişkilerinin Ermeni dış politikasının temel olarak değiştirmedeğini gösterirken, bu gelişen ortaklığın her iki taraf için de bazı fırsatlar ve kısıtlamalar sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Küçük-devlet, dış politika, ittifaklar, Ermenistan, NATO*

Introduction

The study of small states is a relatively young but important subfield of International Relations (IR), especially when it comes to describing how the international system works. Traditionally, the international relations discipline overlooked the importance of small actors in global politics, with great power politics dominating the literature. Following the Cold War, there has been a shift in international politics from a bipolar system to a unipolar one, leading to a recognition of the increasing importance of small-state studies. Steinmetz and Wivel (2010) identify three factors that contribute to the growing importance of small-state studies. First, the post-Cold War period witnessed the emergence of a unique hegemony led by the United States, which has rendered other states relatively ineffective and small in comparison. Second, in contrast to the Cold War era, small states now play a much more significant role in IR, particularly in economic and bilateral diplomatic affairs, while also possessing the capacity to ensure their own national security. Finally, small states constitute the majority of states within the international system and are active participants in international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, OECD, and the European Union (Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010, pp. 8-9).

Armenia serves as a compelling case study exemplifying the characteristics of a small state. In both external and internal contexts, the state has grappled with vulnerabilities. As a post-Soviet country, Armenia holds significant geopolitical importance within the Caucasus region. Primarily, Armenia finds itself located in a region marked by conflicts. Since its independence, Armenia has been confronted with border disputes with Azerbaijan, another post-Soviet state. Additionally, historical enmity with Turkey persists due to various reasons. Notably, Russia has emerged as an indispensable ally for Armenia, exerting a dual impact on Armenian foreign policy. Armenia also provides valuable insights into the systemic constraints experienced by small states in the post-Cold War era. During the Cold War, states were compelled to align themselves militarily with one of the global superpowers. In the post-Cold War period, Armenia has maintained close ties with Russian military establishments, primarily due to regional realities. Meanwhile, NATO has initiated an enlargement project targeting Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Armenia engaged in negotiations with NATO and participated in the organization's international peacekeeping operations while refraining from pursuing permanent membership. NATO has also served as a tool to enhance Armenia's relations with the European Union, although Russia remains its principal partner.

By undertaking this endeavour, the paper seeks to present a compelling argument that elucidates the primary motivation behind Armenia-NATO relations. Within this framework, the central objective of this study can be defined as an examination of Armenia's decision-making

process regarding alliance formations and an analysis of its deepening partnership with NATO. To achieve these objectives, this article draws upon the secondary data provided in the IR and regional studies literature on small states, and Armenian studies. To shed light on the factors influencing foreign policy and decision-making processes, official documents and reports are gathered, specifically targeting the tendencies of the Armenian Diaspora and domestic bureaucratic-military elites who have the power to shape the direction of Armenian foreign policy.

What is a small state and why are they important?

The classification of states within the realm of international relations poses certain challenges, primarily stemming from the definition and identification of states deemed 'small' in the international system. The difficulties lie in measuring the dimensions of power and the ongoing debates surrounding the conceptualization and interpretation of relevant data. Moreover, different theoretical perspectives offer conflicting explanations regarding the dimensions of the definition and the nature of the international system.

Another crucial aspect of this classification pertains to the identification of factors that should be considered, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative elements. The qualitative elements involve a state's material resources. According to Steinmetz and Wivel (2010), small states are delineated in terms of their capabilities, encompassing the possession or lack of power resources in absolute or relative terms. These capabilities are typically gauged through factors such as population size, GDP, military expenditure, and so forth (Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010, p.5). In general, small states are believed to have a population of around 10 to 15 million (Armstrong & Read, 2003). Additionally, vulnerability emerges as another characteristic of small states, which can arise from both geographical location and economic factors (Cooper & Shaw, 2009, p. ix). Steinmetz and Wivel (2010, p. 7) posit that the notion of smallness can be delineated by examining the relationship between a state and its external environment, thereby establishing a defining characteristic. Furthermore, Mehdiyeva (2011, p. 17) asserts that a state's geographical circumstances can serve as an additional indicator of smallness, particularly when it is encompassed by great or middle powers within the regional complex. Although measuring smallness remains a problematic endeavour, GDP rates, population size, and geopolitical considerations will continue to be used in this study since they are defined as typical characteristics of a small state.

Small-states, theories, and geopolitical considerations

IR scholars have taken different approaches to find the best explanation for their case studies on small states' foreign policy. One of the main determinants of small-state studies is the level of analysis problem (Carlsnaes, 2007, p. 15). While most studies on small states have taken the impacts of systemic influences as certain, there is an increasing tendency among the new generation of small-state studies to work with *innenpolitik* (domestic political) factors in foreign policy. On the other hand, the traditional realist perspective does not pay too much attention to the influences of domestic factors on the decision-making process. Instead, most IR theorists have focused on the effects of the international system based on Waltz's (1959) Third Image analysis (Zakaria, 1998, p. 178). However, the relationship between domestic influences and the international system is complex and vague.

Innenpolitik approaches emphasize that a state's behaviour in foreign policy is a result of domestic sources, and the international system is not accepted as an important level of analysis. According to Braveboy-Wagner "classic liberal approaches analyzing domestic intergroup competition and the aggregation of societal interests are far more relevant than structural

explanations" (2007, p. 3). Foreign policy is a tool to achieve domestic interests, and the details of political systems, economy, and social systems are important for foreign policy analysis (Braveboy-Wagner, 2007, p. 4). Cooper and Shaw (2009, p. 9) also criticize the existing small-state literature as overly state-centric. They argue that the 'vulnerability' problem and some domestic dynamics may be more effective than structural factors (Ibid).

In the realm of small-state studies, recent contributions have emerged within the constructivist paradigm. For instance, Gvalia et al. (2013) posit that elite ideas hold greater significance than systemic factors. According to the authors, state and individual-level variables assume importance, allowing a small state to opt for balancing rather than bandwagoning, provided that elite ideology is deeply ingrained in the formulation of foreign policy (Ibid, p. 99). Gvalia et al. (2013, p. 100) also emphasize the relevance of two types of elite ideas in alliance policy: those pertaining to the state's identity and those concerning its purpose, and suggest that elite "ideas, identities, and social order preferences" all combined influence small states' foreign policy (Ibid, p. 109).

Institutionalism approaches the politics of small states from a similar perspective. Elman (1995, p. 181) argues that institutionalism is particularly well-suited for the examination of small states, particularly democratic ones, since factors inherent to domestic political institutions have the potential to alter the course of historical developments. The author posits that institutions can shape the struggles between societal and governmental actors (Ibid, p. 182). Simultaneously, these institutions can mediate the interests and capabilities of both state and societal actors (Ibid, p. 182). Within this context, institutionalism facilitates an understanding of governmental relations and the decision-making processes within weak states, shedding light on the variations observed in elite behaviour (Ibid, pp. 181-182). Elman thus offers an institutional perspective on small states and their decision-making processes in foreign policy. Nonetheless, the behaviours of non-institutionalized and peripheral states remain contingent upon their perception of threats and strategies for the balance of power within their respective regions.

Mehdiyeva (2011), however, analyzes the behavioural patterns of small states and provides four distinct strategies that need to be taken into consideration. The first strategy is reliance on international organizations, but small states cannot solely rely on institutions for their securities during emergent international crises, as these institutions may not provide timely assistance (Ibid, p. 20). The second strategy involves pursuing a self-reliance approach in foreign policy. This approach, also known as neutrality, entails small states voluntarily relying on their domestic resources and avoiding formal alliances. Mehdiyeva highlights that neutrality poses challenges, as it is primarily a product of European diplomacy and has not been widely adopted outside of Europe. The effectiveness of neutrality depends on its credibility, and a neutral state must leverage its internal resources to find immediate solutions in its international relations. Additionally, the geopolitical circumstances of a small state can necessitate a shift in its foreign policy approach (Ibid, p. 22). The third strategy Mehdiyeva explores is based on neo-realist assumptions, specifically the concepts of balancing and bandwagoning in alliance formation. According to Mehdiyeva, small states opting for a balancing strategy risk compromising their sovereignty, as a dominant power may exert influence over their foreign policy decisions (Mehdiyeva, 2011, p. 25). Lastly, the author presents the option of strategic manoeuvring as an alternative to neutrality which involves a proactive, vigilant, and highly adaptable approach (Mehdiyeva, 2011, p. 27).

While these approaches present compelling arguments regarding the influence of domestic factors on the politics of small states, they alone are insufficient for fully grasping the

concept of foreign policy. Snyder (1991) asserts that domestic pressures have a greater impact than international pressures when it comes to decision-making by national leaders of great powers (Snyder, 1991, p. 20). Schweller (1992, p. 253) further argues that domestic-level analysis holds greater utility for understanding great powers than small states, as weak states are likely to be more constrained in their foreign policy options. Due to their limited ability to absorb foreign policy mistakes, small states have unique and serious difficulties when it comes to the security dilemma (Jervis, 1978). There is no doubt that certain domestic variables should be acknowledged as key factors. However, small states are also vulnerable to the effects of the international environment compared to great powers. For this reason, small states choose their security policies mostly in response to external security risks at the international, regional, and sub-regional levels (Wivel & Oest, 2010, p. 436).

In contrast to innenpolitik theories in IR, realist scholars have generally overlooked domestic politics and internal factors. Realism, in its broad sense, centers around power dynamics between states and narrates capability as a crucial variable in foreign policy. According to Morgenthau (1968), the capability is the most influential aspect of a state when it comes to ensuring its own national security and sovereignty. The capability affects small states' foreign policies in two different ways. When a state's national interests are at risk, it first affects how that state perceives the situation. Second, it deters other states, regardless of whether they pose a threat.

While realists have different approaches, they often share common assumptions and key concepts (Steans et al., 2010, p. 53). According to Wohlforth (1994), a realist understanding of IR entails sharing principles regarding the state and the international system. For instance, the state is considered the most prominent actor, and individuals or transnational actors are not deemed essential in international relations. Additionally, states exhibit rational behaviour, formulating their policies based on threat perception and objectives (Brown et al., 1995, pp. 18-23). Anarchy, another key assumption of realist approaches, refers to a condition in which no centralized sovereign authority enforces the rule of law. Realists are concerned with anarchy at the international level, where no authority exists above states (Steans et al., 2010, p. 54). The absence of an international governing body pertains to the complex relationships among states. These relationships can involve rivalry and the use of violence, potentially leading to international conflict or influencing alliance-making policies (Grieco, 1990, p. 38).

The importance of power, which might take the form of military or physical power, and its distribution within the international system—commonly referred to as the "balance of power"—is widely recognized by realist authors (Steans et al., 2010, p. 59). Power can deter other actors in the international system from challenging a state's foreign policy. However, the lack of sufficient material power can compel a state to ally with others against the most threatening actor. Thus, "each state is concerned about its relative power in relation to other states, and power politics becomes the most salient characteristic of international relations" (Wivel & Oest, 2010, p. 432). Most states seek to maximize their security and survival prospects through a combination of internal means, such as enhancing their own capabilities through arms build-up, and external means, such as forming or joining alliances with other states (Waltz, 1979). In this context, small states generally pursue material benefits, and these factors influence their alliance policy formation.

The neo-realist perspective on small-state behaviours reflects the distribution of relative power and the balance of threat theory. Neo-realism predominantly focuses on the international system level, paying less attention to domestic factors in foreign policy. This perspective is based on two key tenets: first, that the international system is the most pertinent

level of study, and second, that small states are more likely to align themselves with threatening major powers than to act as a balance on them (Gvalia et al., 2013, p. 103). Furthermore, neorealists contend that states' foreign policy decisions are primarily determined by external threats. Vital (1995) highlights the limited capabilities of small states and argues that their primary concerns revolve around national security, with external threats assuming greater importance than domestic conditions (Vital, 1995, p. 124). According to Walt (1987, p. 17), states can adopt either a balance or bandwagon policy. Balancing policy refers to a state aligning itself with other small or great powers against a prevailing threat, while bandwagoning entails aligning with the source of the threat. Walt (1987) asserts that bandwagoning is more adopted than balancing policy by small states due to their limited capabilities, as they must align with the 'winning side' (p. 29). Braveboy-Wagner (2010) emphasizes that small states often prefer to form alliances with great powers for bandwagoning purposes, while occasionally allying with other small states to balance against another threatening power or choosing neutrality. Similarly, Wivel and Oest (2010) highlight two crucial assumptions regarding small states. First, small states primarily formulate security strategies based on external security threats at the global, regional, and sub-regional levels. Second, in situations where external threats are not decisive, internal threats may become strong, leading a small state to opt for Omni-balance, which involves balancing internal threats through external bandwagoning (Wivel and Oest, 2010, p. 436).

While the realist perspective primarily focuses on great power politics and the behaviour of key actors in the international system, neo-classical realism, and its proponents highlight the significance of an emerging multipolar international system (Zakaria, 2008, pp. 1-5). One key aspect is that neoclassical realism has emerged as an approach specifically designed to analyze a state's foreign policy. While neoclassical realists, like other realist scholars, view states as the primary actors in international politics, they depart from classical realism and neo-realism by acknowledging the importance of domestic variables and elite perceptions in shaping a state's foreign policy (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 20).

Different theoretical frameworks explain small states' options for foreign policy, but their geopolitical setting is equally important, particularly for small states in developing or less developed regions, geography is still a major factor in decision-making. Some small states are located in developed, democratized, and institutionalized regions in the West, and they have different threat assessments compared to those on the periphery. Geographical proximity to regional or superpowers, as well as regional rivalries among small states, can impact their security policies and alliance strategies. Therefore, geography should also be considered in the study of small states, and the foreign policies of these states must be analyzed in relation to their regional circumstances (Handel, 1990, p. 51). Landlocked states, on the other hand, have distinct threat perceptions compared to other states. According to Idan and Shaffer (2011), these states face constraints on their foreign policy options as they need to secure access to infrastructure and facilities in neighboring states to participate in international trade. Small state politics can also vary based on their relationships with great powers since having a strategic location or reserves of natural resources increases the importance of small states (Inbar and Sheffer, 2013). However, proximity to powerful neighbors also makes them more vulnerable. Therefore, small states with similar circumstances may exhibit different behaviors due to the influence of geography and natural resources on their alliance choices. In the following sections, the geopolitical circumstances of a small state will also be tested in the Armenian case.

Armenia as a small state

Armenia is located in a conflict-ridden region, surrounded by regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and Russia, as well as smaller actors of the international system like Georgia and Azerbaijan. The country has a small economy and a population of almost 3 million in a relatively small geographical area. As a landlocked small state, Armenia suffers from structural and geographical challenges, and border issues and perceives threats from the neighboring countries, such as Azerbaijan and Turkey. On the other hand, Armenia has strong military and economic ties with Russia and Iran. Additionally, Armenia maintains supra-regional relations through partnerships with the EU, NATO, and the US, as well as its kin communities outside, which is known as the Armenian diaspora.

From Independence to 9/11

Following independence, Levon Ter-Petrosyan emerged as the leader of the Republic of Armenia. As the leader of a small and fragile country, Ter-Petrosyan had to contend with external and internal challenges. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue had triggered a series of regional problems. Turkey, another regional state, supported Azerbaijan due to historical, ethnic, and linguistic commonalities with that country (German, 2012, p. 221). Turkey and Armenia already had fragile ties due to the historical enmity and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue further hindered the possibility of reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. This was followed by a dual blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan in 1991 and Turkey in 1993 (Papazian, 2006, p. 239). Consequently, this double blockade made Armenia more reliant on Russia for military protection and the preservation of economic interests.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became involved in ceasefire negotiations and signed a Treaty of Friendship with Armenia in 1991 (Papazian, 2006, p.239). The Ter-Petrosyan government also signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in 1992 and the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance in 1997 to benefit from Russian security protection (Ibid). According to German (2012), Armenia perceived that a combination of CSTO membership and Russian support would be adequate in providing the country's security after the first years of independence (German, 2012, p. 221). Meanwhile, the Republic of Armenia also started another partnership with Iran to obtain vital supplies, especially in the energy sector (Petros, 2003, p. 12). Iran's exports to Armenia increased from \$14 million in 1993 to \$125 million in 1996 (Payaslian, 2007, p. 210). Armenia-Iran relations also reflect the regional distribution of power. While Turkey has strong ties with Azerbaijan, Armenia can balance Turkey's military and economic power by improving its partnership with another regional power. Georgia is also a regional partner and holds strategic importance as a northern gateway linked to the Black Sea for Armenia (Galstyan, 2013, p. 2).

On the other hand, Armenia has suffered from structural economical problems inherited from the Soviet era. Although Armenia had a successful and relatively strong economy during the Soviet period, economic deterioration began in 1989 after the earthquake and independence attempts in 1991, and it continued to worsen until 1992 (Sarian, 2006, pp. 194-5). Consequently, addressing the economic problems became the foremost issue for the new government, and the Ter-Petrosyan government pursued a moderate policy in transitioning from a socialist system to a free market economy due to the negative effects of the regional blockade, the lack of carbon minerals, and a weak domestic market (Payaslian, 2007, p. 201). Another step taken to fulfill the country's basic requirements was land reform and privatization initiatives in 1992 (Sarian, 2006, p. 197). However, as a small state, Armenia could not avoid staying under Russian influence, and it had not improved its bilateral relationships with other regional countries or pursued a multilateral foreign policy, unlike its counterpart Azerbaijan, which had strong ties with regional and international powers.

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Furthermore, Armenia initiated diplomatic efforts in 1994 with the European states regarding the Karabakh issue. The EU showed interest in Armenian development and democracy projects and aimed to address the Karabakh problem. This improvement had the potential to reduce Armenia's isolation in foreign policy; however, "Yerevan considered relations with Russia of paramount strategic importance, both in the context of bilateral ties and within the Commonwealth of Independent States" (Payaslian, 2007, p. 207). Despite strong opposition from some parts of the Armenian Diaspora, the Ter-Petrosyan government also sought to establish commercial and diplomatic ties with Turkey.

The United States has also shown interest in the Caucasian states due to the geopolitical importance of the region, particularly for transit routes towards the oil-rich Caspian region. Additionally, the US has natural ties with Armenia due to its Armenian population (Zarifian, 2014, p. 505). The Armenian-American community has exerted relatively influential lobbying activities, notably through organizations such as the AAA and ANCA, advocating for the interests of their perceived homeland and its foreign relations with the US. In the early years of independence, the US primarily intended to provide foreign aid to support democracy and development in Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Furthermore, Armenia-US relations improved after the US encouraged the three South Caucasus countries to participate in the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994.

During the second president of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, Armenia had different priorities in its foreign policy. According to Papazian (2006), Ter-Petrosyan was brutally realistic, and refused to embrace 'national romanticism' while Kocharyan approached the most sensitive topics cautiously (p. 242). However, their foreign policy practices and alliances did not progress significantly due to systemic constraints, regional dynamics, and the limitations imposed by existing problems.

New Initiatives in the Post-9/11 Era

Armenian policymakers believed that the post-9/11 interventions by the United States to redesign the Middle East had the potential to alleviate the geopolitical isolation faced by Armenia. Mirzoyan (2010, p. 3) emphasizes that small states like Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have evolved within the setting of the post-9/11 world from being mere subjects of regional politics to objects, capable of influencing the interests of global actors. Although the Kocharyan government had initiated efforts towards military and economic alliances with the European Union (EU) and the United States, through NATO and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in the late 1990s, concrete actions took place in the early 2000s. The mismatch between Armenian foreign policy's objectives and its capacity, however, presented difficulties in the second decade. In 2004, Armenian military forces participated in Kosovo Force (KFOR) for the first time. Subsequently, the NATO partnership deepened with the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2004, following bilateral negotiations. However, Armenia's primary concern was to avoid antagonizing Russia, and the country declared that its relations with NATO would not lead to permanent membership.

Another significant initiative, known as football diplomacy, took place between Turkey and Armenia starting in 2009 when Serj Sarkisyan came to power (Kalpakian & Ipek, 2011, p. 308). This initiative aimed to improve Turkish-Armenian relations, and both sides engaged in negotiations to address certain structural issues. In this context, the foreign ministers of both countries signed protocols that were expected to establish diplomatic relations. However, the protocols were failed and eventually withdrawn from both countries' parliaments, putting an end to the endeavor (Minasyan, 2012, p. 3).

Armenia's alliance policy was shaped by significant regional developments. For instance, the 2008 Georgian-Russian War highlighted Russia's determination in its neighboring region. It became evident that the US, EU, and NATO could not stop the Russian offensive only with diplomatic support (Shafee, 2010, p. 185). After the 2008 war, many post-Soviet states understood that Russia retained significant power and that they did not choose to rely heavily on the West for their defense (Shafee, 2010, p. 185). As a result, Armenia found itself once again isolated in the region, maintaining close ties with Iran and Russia, while also holding memberships in key international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) (Payaslian, 2007, p. 224).

External Dynamics of the Armenian Foreign Policy

To engage in international trade, landlocked states must gain and maintain access to the facilities and infrastructure of their neighbors, as well as transit through those states with their products, and the alternatives available to landlocked states for foreign policy are severely limited (Idan & Shaffer, 2011, p. 241). In the Armenian case, its relatively precarious position within the international system and its constrained material power capabilities within the regional power dynamics have had a significant impact on its foreign policy. Armenia has struggled to diversify its foreign policy and lessen its reliance on Russia in spite of the chances provided by the international system since its independence, which is a result of both territorial and international restrictions. Its geographical isolation constitutes one of the primary determinants of Armenia's foreign policy.

At the international level, Armenian foreign policy is primarily driven by regional security concerns, with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue being the most influential factor. Although Armenia established a strong sense of sovereignty in the post-Cold War era (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 8), its foreign policy options have been constrained by the fear of national security threats. The regional conflict with Azerbaijan has shaped Armenia's alliance policy at the regional and international levels. Russia has played a protective role in Armenian foreign policy, particularly against threats perceived from Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, Armenia faces a significant dilemma in its relations with Russia. On one hand, Armenia's defense doctrine aims to develop the capacity to independently confront and win wars with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, there is a strong need for alliances with at least one regional power to neutralize the threat from Turkey (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 21). According to Mirzoyan (Ibid), only Russia is interested in and capable of playing such a role in the foreseeable future.

The ongoing conflict and dispute with Azerbaijan have significantly impacted Armenia's regional relations with neighboring states such as Iran, Turkey, and Georgia. As German (2012) argues, the ongoing dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh has polarized regional powers, with Russia supporting Armenia and Turkey's strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, thereby dividing the region into two opposing blocs (p. 223). The opposition between regional states has compelled Armenia to ally with Russia for its military and economic partnerships. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO and other pro-Western international organizations have initiated efforts to engage with the Southern Caucasus region and negotiate their integration into the pro-Western security system. In this context, Armenia established partnerships with NATO, particularly in cooperation with peacekeeping operations. However, Armenia maintained a cautious approach to avoid antagonizing Russia, and its cooperation with NATO did not progress further. While Azerbaijan and Georgia, the other post-Soviet Caucasian states, expressed their intentions to integrate with NATO, Armenia opted to maintain its security through the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty (Shahnazaryan, 2006, p. 355).

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The relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia are based on regional competition between the two post-Soviet countries. Armenia sees Azerbaijan as a greater threat due to its expanding international status. Based on the World Bank data, Azerbaijan, which has a population of 10 million, produced \$54 billion in GDP, whereas Armenia, which has a population of only 3 million, generated about \$14 billion (World Bank, 2021). Azerbaijan's rich oil and gas reserves in the Caspian region make it more attractive to the international system and major powers. Moreover, Azerbaijan's oil-dependent economy holds significant importance for U.S. regional policy. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's economic growth enables greater military investment (German, 2012, p. 218). As a result, Armenia's perception of threat is greatly influenced by this competition.

Armenia had no diplomatic or direct economic relations with Turkey until recently. In the first phase of the independence of Armenia, there were attempts to improve political relations between the two countries, but these efforts failed due to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the conflictual historical narratives between both countries. The disagreement deepened when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became increasingly militarized in 1992 (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 67). Historically, Armenia has been a subject of competition between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and during the last century of the Ottoman Empire, Russia became the 'protector' of the Armenian people (Ibid, p. 53). Consequently, the regional conflict with Azerbaijan and the regional competition between Turkey and Russia have had a negative impact on Turkey-Armenia relations.

Armenia's relations with Iran are another outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Faced with blockades from Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia had to diversify its economic partners to reduce its reliance on Russia. While Armenia did not have a military alliance with Iran, it is a strong economic partner in terms of foreign trade. Armenia imports approximately 600,000 tons of goods from Iran each year, constituting almost 5% of its total imports until recently (Zarifian, 2008, p. 133). Additionally, Armenia relies on Iran for a significant portion of its energy needs. However, these relations have posed challenges for Armenia's relations with the United States, particularly due to the U.S. embargo on Iran over its nuclear aspirations. According to Zarifian (2009, p. 385), Armenia cannot afford to maintain strong relations with both the U.S. and Iran together.

The internal dynamics of the Armenian Foreign Policy

In the post-Soviet era, Armenian political leaders were not independent from historical realities that are embedded in Armenian national identity. Soviet legacy and Russia's position as a historical 'protector' have shaped the leader's perception of national interests. According to Mirzoyan (2010) Armenian political and strategic identity is bound by issues motivated by its history with Turkey and Azerbaijan (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 176). Furthermore, Borshchevskaya (2013, p. 103) stresses that "many Armenian elites –both in Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora– believed that loss of independence under the Soviet yoke and the absence of democracy it entailed was an acceptable and perhaps even a welcome price to physical security from 'pan-Turkism'. Ultimately these historical problems reflected leaders' perception of national security choices. In the first years, Ter-Petrosyan aimed to dispel these traditional security perceptions (Mirzoyan 2010, p. 176). However ongoing territorial dispute with Azerbaijan affected his political decision on the matter of national security. Ter-Petrosyan personally played an important role in the Karabakh movement (Minasyan, 2012, p. 2) and the militarization of the country's foreign policy had inspired him to seek a nationalist course of action. During the Kocharian government, the foreign policy of the new ruling elites was based on a more nationalist approach. According to Papazian, though these two kinds of elites were different in

personality and image, they both had similar ideological concerns (Papazian, 2006, p. 236). Consequently, both leaders assumed that Armenia's national interest necessitate a closer partnership with Russia either militarily or economically. Serzh Sarkisian, who also has Nagorno-Karabakh origin, became the third president of Armenia in 2008. Sarkisyan's government pursued a dual approach to foreign policy. On one hand, like his predecessors, Sarkisyan emphasized the importance of Russia as a provider of national security (Mirzoyan, 2010, p. 166). On the other hand, he sought to normalize relations with Turkey. Above all, all three presidents of Armenia aimed to improve negotiations with international organizations based on their perceptions of national interests. However, these initiatives faced constraints from internal elite groups, diaspora communities, and external environmental security concerns.

The influence of Russia on Armenian politics can be seen as another determinant of foreign policy. Due to its shared history with the Soviet Union, Russia has significant advantages in Armenian domestic affairs. The Russian language continues to hold importance in the post-Soviet era as Armenians seek to maintain connections with the broader world (Kaeter, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, the Soviet years produced their own military and bureaucratic elites. Even under Ter-Petrosyan's rule, when new nationalist elites emerged, many major enterprises were still led by directors from the Communist era (Herzig & Kurkchian, 2005, p. 168). Additionally, Armenia's double blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey limited the ability of the new Armenian elites and businesses to engage effectively in regional and international trade, leading to a reliance on economic ties with Russia.

The diaspora is another domestic force that has some impact on Armenian foreign policy. Despite being a small state, Armenia has one of the largest and most influential diaspora groups worldwide. While Armenia's population is now around 3 million, the total Armenian population living around the world is estimated to be 7-8 million (Baser & Swain, 2009, p. 52). The diaspora serves as a natural representative of the Armenian state, and under blockade conditions, these diaspora groups have acted as diplomatic tools and provided economic assistance to their nation-state. However, these groups can also limit Armenian foreign policy due to their divergent approaches and agenda from the homeland, and diaspora groups strongly criticized policymakers due to their differing perspectives on the relations with Turkey (Ibid, p. 61). Regarding the most recent conflicts in Karabakh, the political opposition to Turkey held by the diaspora's political wings and supported by lobbying organizations (Üstün, 2023, pp. 97-101) has been a significant barrier to Turkish-Armenian collaboration in the region.

Armenia-NATO partnership

During the Cold-War era, NATO was created as a security organisation that is controlled by the U.S. and European countries against to Warsaw Pact. However, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the alliance started a number of enlargement projects with post-Soviet nations, including Russia, but they did not progress. Russian views of NATO are hostile, according to Brzezinski (2009, p. 16), and "are motivated by historical anger of the Soviet defeat in the Cold War and by nationalist antagonism to NATO's expansion".

In the post-Cold War era, NATO and its largest member states have argued that the post-Soviet states' membership would lessen their perceptions of threat and facilitate their democratic transition and security-sector reform, giving Russia helpful, stable neighbors (Charap and Troitskiy, 2013, p. 52). In contrast to NATO enlargement in post-Soviet countries, Russia sought to counter this in its near geography, strengthening collective security arrangements in post-Soviet Eurasia under its own leadership, especially through the Collective Security Treaty

Organisation (CSTO), along with a variety of bilateral security agreements with Armenia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine (Ibid, p. 52).

NATO underwent changes in the post-Cold War era, and with the fall of the Soviet Union, it began to have relations with the South Caucasus region, including Armenia. Priego (2008, p. 50) identifies two sets of partner countries in the region: those interested in full NATO membership, such as Georgia, and those interested in maintaining cooperation with the alliance without seeking membership, like Armenia. Armenia's partnership with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program started in 1994, and the Armenian mission to NATO was established in 1997 (Petros, 2003, p. 13). This cooperation covered various areas, including defense policy and strategy, military education, civil emergency planning, national defense research, language training, military exercises, and peacekeeping (Ibid). Armenia's involvement with NATO further expanded when it joined the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 2004. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Armenia saw an opportunity to diversify its international politics and reduce its reliance on Russia by engaging with the United States and France. However, this did not imply a radical shift in Armenia's security policy, as it maintained its strategic relations with Russia while seeking stronger ties with other global powers (Priego, 2008, p. 55).

Armenia's Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian declared that Armenia intended to participate in all peace and security initiatives, leading to high-level meetings between NATO and Armenia representatives. In 2009, Armenia contributed military support to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, and bilateral negotiations with NATO have continued since then. However, Armenia has made it clear that it does not aspire to permanent NATO membership. According to Priego (2008, p. 50), Armenia does not perceive NATO as more conducive to its national security, primarily due to the Alliance's stance against its key ally, Russia, and the role played by Turkey, which is seen as a source of threat, within NATO (Ibid). Unlike Georgia, which has ambitious goals for full membership, Armenia does not see it as necessary to deter its neighbors or adversaries, as that task is reserved for Russia (Ibid, p. 51). Consequently, Armenia believes that its membership in the CSTO and the support it receives from Russia are sufficient to safeguard its security interests (German, 2012, p. 221).

An Analysis of the Armenia-NATO Partnership

In the first decade after independence, international systemic factors played a significant role in Armenia's foreign policy decisions. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a major determinant of Armenian alliance policy, and it had a negative impact on NATO-Armenia relations. Armenia's security interests and NATO's potential benefits were in contradiction, as the major partners of the alliance, such as Turkey, posed a threat to Armenian foreign policy. Additionally, forging a security alliance with NATO could antagonize Russia, which served as Armenia's main security provider (Petros, 2003, p. 2). However, in the second decade, there was a shift in Armenia's foreign policy, especially after the 9/11 attacks and the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The increased interest of NATO and the US in the Caucasus region, as part of the US' intentions in the Middle East, presented an opportunity for Armenia to diversify its international relations and decrease its overreliance on Russia. Armenia began to soften its historical aversion towards NATO, and the alliance pursued a flexible policy towards Armenia, taking into account its strong relations with Russia and avoiding forcing it into a zero-sum choice (Priego, 2008, p. 52). The 2008 Georgian-Russian war had implications for the partnership between Armenia and NATO. It demonstrated that verbal support from the US and NATO did not provide a fully secure climate in the South Caucasus, and Russia was willing to use force to assert its influence in the region (Shafee, 2010, p. 185). Overall, environmental factors such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, proximity to great powers, and limited capacity have shaped and

constrained Armenia-NATO relations. The choices made by Armenia in this partnership are influenced by its perceived threats and security interests, and the state acts in accordance with its material benefits. In other words, the conflict, the presence of major powers in the region, and Armenia's limited capacity are the main determinants of the NATO-Armenia partnership.

Domestic Level

The domestic roots of Armenian foreign policy in the early years of independence were strongly influenced by the capability problem and the regional conflict in the South Caucasus. Armenia's dependence on Russia and its isolation from regional economic and strategic developments compelled Armenian leaders to maintain their military alliance with Russia. Additionally, Armenian leaders, such as Ter-Petrosyan, believed that cooperation with an organization in which one of its enemies (Turkey) was a major actor would not be feasible (Priego, 2008, p. 52).

Under the Kocharian government, Armenia decided to increase its involvement in PfP exercises, indicating a growing interest in relations with NATO. The motivation behind this decision was to diversify Armenian foreign policy and benefit from NATO's dominant position in order to enhance the effectiveness of their foreign policy. However, systemic and regional constraints continued to limit Armenia's ability to pursue an independent policy toward NATO. For example, in 2004, Kocharian refused to attend the NATO summit in Istanbul due to the tension between Armenia and Turkey.

During the Sarkisyan government, Armenia continued its relations with NATO. Sarkisyan aimed to decrease Russian influence on Armenian politics and establish diplomatic relations with Turkey, an important NATO member. The 2008 Georgia-Russia war had a negative impact on Armenian regional perceptions, particularly on the economy, as Georgian ports served as Armenia's main gateways to foreign trade. Sarkisyan's government also recognized that NATO would not be a rational choice for alliance due to Russia's resistance to sharing its former territory with another alliance formation (Shafee, 2010, p. 185).

The Armenian Diaspora can be seen as another domestic variable in NATO-Armenia relations. The Armenian diaspora spread throughout the world, including politically active and educated Armenians integrated into American and European economic, social, and political life. According to Kotanjan (2004), these diaspora groups have played a role in promoting Western liberalism and democracy, potentially acting as a bridge between Western security alliances and Armenia due to their orientation towards those systems.

Opportunities and Constraints

The functions and potential benefits of NATO have been a subject of discussion. Some argue that NATO has contributed to democratization and positive trends among its member states, promoting reform in the military and strengthening democracy. NATO enlargement projects can also contribute to regional political order and co-opt younger generations into Western norms and perspectives. However, in the case of Armenia, as it does not seek full NATO membership, the direct impact on democracy may be less significant. Nonetheless, participation in NATO's PfP and IPAP projects could still influence national institutions, such as military education, national defense research, and language training cooperation.

Another potential benefit of Armenia-NATO relations is increased effectiveness in international affairs through negotiations and participation in peacekeeping operations. This can also serve as a means to establish ties with Western countries and strengthen Armenia's arguments on issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia-NATO relations can also be seen as an attempt to engage in soft balancing against Russia. While Armenia does not seek NATO

membership, utilizing another military alliance as a foreign policy tool can help reduce Russia's excessive influence in the South Caucasus and allow Armenia to play a more independent role in foreign policy decisions.

However, it is important to consider that Armenia's partnership with NATO and its potential membership may create regional security challenges in the South Caucasus. The 2008 Georgian-Russian war demonstrated that circumstances of war can occur unpredictably, and military alliances with the West do not always guarantee desired outcomes. In summary, while Armenia-NATO relations offer potential benefits such as influencing national institutions, increasing international effectiveness, and soft-balancing against Russia, they also present regional security considerations and uncertainties in times of conflict.

A shift?

Armenia faces specific constraints in the regional context, and its foreign policy decisions are influenced by the balance between regional interests and threats. It was argued that the Armenia-NATO partnership can not refer to any significant shift in Armenian foreign policy. This opinion is supported by a number of factors, including the fact that, despite Armenia's efforts to diversify its foreign policy, Russia continues to play a major role in both internal and external decision-making processes. Armenia is a small state and cannot bear the costs and risks of joining any military alliance that would be seen as a rival to Russia. Armenia pursued a solid military partnership with Russia and joined the CSTO because of the unresolved and heavily militarized Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Armenia also has a Russian airbase on its soil, underscoring the significance of its alliance with Russia. Second, there has not much public support for a NATO relationship. While Armenian elites and politicians express interest in working with NATO, this is not enough to significantly alter Armenian security policy on its own. Armenia's stance on NATO has greatly influenced by internal variables, such as public opinion and prevalent views. In summary, despite some initiatives and interactions between Armenia and NATO exist, the partnership has not resulted in a fundamental shift in Armenia's security alliance policy. Armenia's strong reliance on Russia and the absence of substantial domestic support for NATO partnership contribute to the limited impact of the relationship on Armenian security decisions.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to investigate Armenia's foreign policy decisions and its alliances as a small state. It is argued that the foreign policy of a small state can only be comprehended through a combination of internal and external factors. While it is not asserted that domestic factors are the sole determinants of foreign policy, they are considered intervening variables in the decision-making process throughout the article.

The initial sections of the paper focused on discussing the concept of a small state and theoretical approaches. It is posited that the capabilities, vulnerabilities, and geopolitical locations of small states are principal determinants of their foreign policy. Subsequently, the study analysed Armenian foreign policy to identify the factors that have shaped the continuity or change in its foreign policy. It was argued that external security concerns were significant, while the views of leaders and the perceptions of elites also played a crucial role in influencing Armenian foreign policy decisions. Based on these, the politics of NATO-Armenia relations was examined, and it is argued that these initiatives should not be viewed as indicative of a shift in Armenian foreign policy. Furthermore, it is asserted that Armenia faced environmental security challenges that constrained its ability to change its foreign policy, given their impact on policymakers and influential figures in foreign policy decision-making.

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