

POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND ARMENIA: AN AZERBAIJANI PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL DYNAMICS*

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Abstract

The bilateral relations between Armenia, which regained its independence in 1991, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, a pivotal geopolitical actor in the Middle East, have significant implications for regional and global dynamics. Situated within a critical geopolitical corridor, these relations serve as a lens through which to understand the broader strategic competition involving global powers such as the U.S.-UK coalition and the Russia-China alliance. This study examines the formation, development, and challenges of Armenian-Iranian relations. The relevance of this research stems from the evolving geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus, particularly after the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan war. Key issues include Iran's role as a regional security provider, Armenia's attempts to navigate geopolitical isolation, and the implications of these dynamics for Azerbaijan's national interests.

A multidisciplinary approach is employed, integrating realism and constructivism theories to analyze the complexity of Armenian-Iranian relations. The study uses historical and comparative analysis, a review of primary and secondary sources, and qualitative methodologies to address the nuanced interplay of political, security, and economic factors.

The study identifies five distinct phases of Armenian-Iranian relations from 1991 to the present, characterized by shifts in geopolitical strategies and diplomatic priorities. It highlights Iran's use of the Armenian community as a political and economic lever. The findings underscore the necessity of viewing these relations not as isolated bilateral interactions but as integral to the strategic dynamics of the South Caucasus.

Keywords: *Armenian-Iranian relations, South Caucasus, regional security, realism, constructivism, Multidisciplinary approach*

İRAN VE ERMENİSTAN ARASINDAKİ SİYASİ İLİŞKİLER: BÖLGESEL DİNAMİKLER BAĞLAMINDA AZERBAIJAN PERSPEKTİFİ

Öz

1991'de bağımsızlığını yeniden kazanan Ermenistan ile Orta Doğu'da önemli bir jeopolitik aktör olan İran İslam Cumhuriyeti arasındaki ikili ilişkiler, bölgesel ve küresel dinamikler açısından önemli çıkarımlara sahiptir. Kritik bir jeopolitik koridorda yer alan bu iki ülkenin ilişkileri, ABD-İngiltere koalisyonu ve Rusya-Çin ittifakı gibi küresel güçleri içeren daha geniş stratejik rekabeti anlamak için bir merceğe görevi görmektedir. Bu çalışma, Ermenistan-İran ilişkilerinin oluşumunu, gelişimini ve zorluklarını incelemektedir. Araştırmanın önemi, özellikle 2020 Ermenistan-Azerbaycan savaşından sonra Güney Kafkasya'daki gelişen jeopolitik manzardan kaynaklanmaktadır. Temel konular arasında İran'ın bölgesel güvenlik sağlayıcısı olarak rolü, Ermenistan'ın jeopolitik izolasyonu aşma girişimleri ve bu dinamiklerin Azerbaycan'ın ulusal çıkarlarını nasıl etkilediği açıklanmaktadır.

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Makalede Ermenistan-İran iliŐkilerinin karmaŐıklıđını analiz etmek iin realist ve konstruktivist (yapılandırıcı) teorilerini entegre eden ok disiplinli bir yaklaŐım kullanılmaktadır. alıŐmada siyasi, gvenlik ve ekonomik faktrlerin nanslı etkileŐimini ele almak iin tarihsel ve karŐılaŐırmalı analiz, birincil ve ikincil kaynakların incelenmesi ve nitel metodolojiler kullanılmıŐtır.

alıŐmada jeopolitik stratejilerde ve diplomatik nceliklerde deđiŐimlerle karakterize edilen 1991'den gnmze Ermenistan-İran iliŐkilerinin beŐ ayrı aŐamasını belirlenmiŐtir. Makalede İran'ın Ermeni toplumunu siyasi ve ekonomik bir kaldıra olarak kullanması vurgulanmıŐtır. Bulgular, bu iliŐkilerin izole ikili etkileŐimler olarak deđil, Gney Kafkasya'nın stratejik dinamiklerinin ayrılmaz bir parası olarak grlmesinin gerekliliđini vurgular.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Ermenistan-İran iliŐkileri, Gney Kafkasya, blgesel gvenlik, realizm, konstruktivizm, ok disiplinli yaklaŐım*

1. Introduction

The study of relations between Armenia, which, like other former Soviet republics, declared the restoration of its state independence in 1991, and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), a pivotal actor in geopolitics of the Middle East, holds significant relevance on multiple levels.

The analysis of the formation, contemporary dynamics, and challenges in the bilateral relations between the two states holds considerable global relevance, due to the strategic positioning of these states within a pivotal geopolitical corridor, acting as an intermediary zone between powers embodying thalassocracy and tellurocracy. Several scholars argue that the outcome of the strategic competition between the U.S.-United Kingdom coalition and the Russian-Chinese alliance is likely to be determined within this critical intermediary region. Against the backdrop of the decline of Russia's influence in the region, France, which is not reconciled to the growing influence of its arch-geopolitical rival, the United Kingdom, has completely different goals in the South Caucasus and its influence on Armenia and Iran. From this point of view, the relations between the states of the region, including Armenia and Iran, cannot be viewed simply as relations between two actors of the international political system. Both states are influenced by different power centers. In light of these considerations, an in-depth examination of the factors influencing the bilateral relations between Armenia and Iran, the study of the current level and problems of relations will allow to understand the essence of the struggle between the power centers in the region, the modelling and forecasting of the future development scenarios.

The relevance of this topic at the regional level is underscored by the necessity to delineate the characteristics and trajectories of regional alignment trends, which are pivotal for fostering peace and security in the Caucasus under the prevailing circumstances. An evaluation of the national security interests of the IRI, alongside an analysis of Armenia's role in safeguarding these interests, grounded in rigorous scientific methodology and facts, has the potential to engender significant shifts in practical policy implementation. Iran possesses not only political and economic interests but also security concerns in the Caucasus region. Characterized by its distinct organizational framework and conceptual approach to foreign policy within the global political arena, it becomes imperative to conduct a nuanced examination of this country's policy toward each of the South Caucasus states individually.

From the perspective of Azerbaijan's national and state interests, the examination of the

establishment, current dynamics, and challenges of Armenian-Iranian relations holds significant relevance. Both Iran and Armenia share physical boundaries with the Republic of Azerbaijan and possess intersecting or conflicting interests. Consequently, their bilateral relations exert both direct and indirect influence on Azerbaijan. The dynamics between Iran and Armenia, which had occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory for many years and suffered a significant defeat in the 44-day war of 2020, are marked by distinct characteristics that shape their interactions.

Taking into account the common historical past, similar traditions, and belonging to the same religion, the Republic of Azerbaijan expressed its concern and dissatisfaction with the political and economic support provided by the IRI to the aggressor Armenia at different times. Azerbaijan has repeatedly emphasized that the development of close relations between the Islamic Republic and a state responsible for massacres and genocides against Muslims, while also engaging in the systematic destruction of Islamic historical monuments in both occupied territories and within its official borders, runs counter to the principles publicly stated in Iran's foreign policy. The National Leader and former president of Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev, said in his address to the official representatives of the Iranian state:

"Iran-Azerbaijan relations cannot be equated with Iran-Armenia relations. A deep history, shared historical roots, common culture, traditions, and a shared religion binds our countries and peoples. In contrast, your relationship with Armenia is likely limited to economic interests. Therefore, I urge you to view these relationships through a different lens" (Əliyev, 2011, 58).

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev, suggested that Armenia displays insincerity toward Muslim countries, including Iran, and engages in covert subversive activities:

"...when Armenian officials are in Europe, their main argument is that they live surrounded by Muslim countries—three of their neighbors are Muslim. Yet, in their dealings with Iran, they consistently speak hypocritically about friendship" (Əliyev, 2020, 307).

The significance of this topic is further underscored by the evolving geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus. Armenia's nearly three-decade-long occupation of Azerbaijani territories not only posed security challenges for Iran but also served as a lever for expanding its political and economic influence over Armenia. The Armenia-

Azerbaijan war from September to November 2020 resulted in the liberation of occupied territories, the restoration of full control over the Iran-Azerbaijan border, the reopening of regional communication lines, and the proposal of new frameworks for cooperation. As a result, a new geopolitical architecture is taking shape in the region. It should be clarified what changes this situation may cause in the relations between the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the IRI, as well as to identify what threats and opportunities it will create for the two countries. Predicting what steps these states can take in the circumstances and the possibilities of joint action on the basis of scientific and methodological principles is important both for peace, security and cooperation in the region, and for Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

In light of the above, a comprehensive study of Armenian-Iranian relations will provide valuable insights into the policies of regional and global actors vying for influence in the South Caucasus. Determining the factors affecting the formation of relations, clarifying the reasons for Iran's close cooperation with Armenia despite presenting itself as the protector of the Muslims of the world, revealing the problematic points in bilateral relations are necessary in terms of defining an effective and preventive policy.

The object of the study is bilateral relations between Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Factors affecting bilateral political relations, the dynamics of development and decline of political ties, the main directions of economic cooperation national policy in Iran, attitude towards the Armenian community, activities of Armenian organizations are the subject of the research.

2. Methodology

Analysis of the relations between Armenia and Iran cannot be effectively conducted from a single theoretical perspective. This is due to both the complexity of the nature of interstate relations in the modern era and the characteristics of the foreign policy of the two states. Neither the Islamic Republic of Iran nor the Republic of Armenia are traditional western model nation-states. Although Iran looks like a republic in terms of structure, it has a unique political system. The religious-spiritual elite has special mechanisms of control over republican institutions. Foreign policy issues are not solely determined by the political inclinations of the President or foreign policy institutions; rather, the supreme religious leader embodies the considerable influence of the religious-spiritual elite over foreign policy matters. This political framework prevents those who lead the state's political institutions from opposing the

directives of this elite.

Another pertinent issue pertains to the foreign policy line established since the declaration of the Islamic Republic in Iran. Iran has articulated the principle of "*neither East nor West, only the Islamic Republic*," which serves as a cornerstone of its foreign policy orientation (İbrahimov, 2021, 83). Through this principle, the IRI has sought to alter the established norms of the international relations system throughout its existence. This perspective complicates the evaluation of its foreign policy within the framework of the international political system that emerged after World War II. Although the Islamic Republic has publicly renounced the legacy of the Shah regime it replaced, it simultaneously invokes Iran's 5,000-year history of statehood. This invocation reflects a continuity of Persian diplomatic traditions that are deeply rooted in history. Consequently, Iran's diplomacy is characterized by a multi-vector approach that is both intricate and complex.

Religion exerts a significant influence on the state in Armenia, as well as in Iran. Historically, the traditions of Armenian diplomacy have been established by ecclesiastical figures. Additionally, Armenia's foreign policy is influenced by the Armenian diaspora and various lobby organizations operating abroad.

Considering the mentioned points, it is necessary to refer to the principles of several theories for the study of Armenian-Iranian relations. In this regard, the main theories referred to when studying the relations between the two countries are realism and constructivism.

3. Analytical Perspectives on Iran-Armenia Relations: Insights from Azerbaijani Scholarship

This topic has always attracted the scholars, researchers, and political scientists in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which shares boundaries with both Iran and Armenia. One of the earliest Azerbaijani studies on Iranian-Armenian relations is Mirza Bala Mammadzadeh's work '*Ermənilər və İran*' (*Armenians and Iran*). Mammadzadeh, who lived as an émigré in Iran during the 1920s, provided critical insights into the anti-Turkish activities of Armenian organizations within the country. He also highlighted how Armenians at that time manipulated the concept of Aryanism or pan-Aryanism to advance their own political agendas (Məmmədzadə, 1993, 10).

The scholarly contributions of Azerbaijani researchers, including Seyidagha Onullahi, Eynulla Madatli, Atamoglan Mammadli, Subhan Talibli, Vusal Gasimli, Zaur Shiriyev, Zulfiya Valiyeva, Kamala Ruintan, Hatem Jabbarli, Fakhreddin Huseyn, Masiagha

Mahammadi, Nasib Nasibli, Yegane Hajiyeva, Alimusa Ibrahimov, and others, have played a pivotal role in advancing the study of various dimensions of the issue.

Onullahi's work *'Erməni millətçiləri və İran'* (*'Armenian nationalists and Iran'*) adopts a more journalistic tone, presenting information that is analyzed primarily through the author's personal perspective rather than adhering to rigorous scientific methodological principles (Onullahi, 2002). Meanwhile, A. Mammadli's articles examine the evolving dynamics of political and economic relations between the two countries (Məmmədli, 2008). Additionally, S. Talibli's studies provide a comprehensive overview of Iran's policy in Armenia (Talibli, *İran İslam Respublikasının Qafqaz siyasətində Dağlıq Qarabağ problemi (1991-2005-ci illər)*, 2016).

The publication *'Iran-Armenia Relations: Geopolitical Reality versus Political Claims'*, the result of the collaborative research by Gasimli, Shiriyev, and Valiyeva, stands as one of the rare scholarly works in Azerbaijan directly addressing this subject matter (Qasımlı et al., 2011).

K. Ruintan's numerous articles on Armenian-Iranian and Azerbaijani-Iranian relations are distinguished by their rigorous analytical depth and extensive utilization of Persian-language sources (Ruintən, *Dağlıq Qarabağ problemi və İran İslam Respublikası*, 2010; Ruintən, *Ermənistanda baş verən ictimai-siyasi proseslər İranlı mütəxəssislərin gözü ilə və İran KİV-lərində*, 2011).

In H. Jabbarli's book on Armenia's foreign policy, the relations between Armenia and Iran are briefly addressed, providing a succinct yet informative overview of the diplomatic interactions between the two states (Cabbarlı, *Ermənistanın xarici siyasəti (1991-2012)*, 2014). A distinguishing feature of the author's articles is the predominant reliance on Armenian sources, which adds a unique dimension to these works (Cabbarlı, *Ermenistan'ın İran Politikası Armenia's Iran Policy*, 2012).

In several of A. Ibrahimov's articles, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is examined, with particular attention to its key strategic directions in the Caucasus. These works also address various aspects of Iran's relations with Armenia (İbrahimov, 2021).

In 2019, a groundbreaking monograph focusing on Armenian-Iranian relations was published in Azerbaijan, marking the first comprehensive study of this subject within the Azerbaijan's academic sphere by Elnur Kalbizada, Y.Bakhshiyeva and A. Azimli

(Kəlbizadə et al., 2019). Furthermore, in recent years, E. Kalbizada has made a substantial contribution to the field, with over 60 scholarly articles examining various aspects of Armenian-Iranian relations (Kalbizada, Armenian policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1991: geopolitical conditions and realities, 2020; Kalbizada, İslamî Şûra Meclisi Ermeni Milletvekillerinin Sözde "Ermeni Soykırımı"nı Tanıtma Girişimlerinin İran'ın İç ve Dış Politikasına Etkisi , 2024).

4. Factors Affecting Relations

Political relations between Armenia and Iran are influenced by geographical, historical, demographic, geopolitical, security and economic factors.

Some of these factors have shaped the establishment of relations, while others have influenced the nature of those relations. The geographic proximity and physical borders play a crucial role in determining both the establishment and the continuity of relations between Armenia and Iran. Iran's geographical and geopolitical position and economic opportunities make it one of the important countries for Armenia. Although Iran is trying to turn Armenia into a corridor for access to Europe, this is not possible due to geopolitical factors. Iran views Armenia as a key means of sustaining its influence in the South Caucasus.

The historical factor enhances Iran's influence over Armenia while simultaneously prompting a cautious approach due to certain issues that have left a significant mark on the state's collective memory.

Iran uses the demographic factor - the presence of the Armenian community in this country for improving its state image in the international community, to gain economic advantages, and to benefit from the power of the Armenian lobby in American and European countries. Armenia, on the other hand, uses the demographic factor more for the purpose of political and economic interests.

One of the key factors influencing the development of political relations is the presence of the Armenian community in Iran. This community serves not only as a tool of leverage in Iran's relations with Azerbaijan but also as a means for the Islamic Republic of Iran to foster a positive international image by emphasizing the existence of an Armenian community with significant autonomous rights within its borders. Iranian Armenians play a vital role in facilitating and regulating relations between Iran and Armenia (Valizadeh et al., 2015 (h.sh.1394), 1088). At the same time, the Armenian community ensures Iran's connection

with Armenian lobby organizations and political groups that have influence in different countries of the world, including the USA, France, Lebanon, and Syria.

While geopolitical dynamics have generally drawn the two countries closer, they have occasionally led to situational crises. The security factor also strengthens their political relations. Iran, which unequivocally opposes the expanding influence of powers such as the United States, Türkiye, and Israel in the Caucasus, aims to keep Armenia within its sphere of control and influence. Developments in the South Caucasus, particularly in Armenia, which functions as a key component of Iran's security perimeter, may pose potential security risks to Iran. Iran acts as a security provider for Armenia, especially in economic terms. Factors influencing bilateral political relations include Iran's efforts to export hydrocarbon resources to Europe through alternative routes, its pursuit of markets for its products, and Armenia's efforts to break free from its geo-economic isolation.

In the period after 1979, there were 4 theoretical approaches to foreign policy issues in the Islamic Republic of Iran: realist, ideological, pragmatic and reformist (Fakhreddin et al., 2010, 199-206). The years when Armenia declared independence coincided with Iran's withdrawal from ideological approach in foreign policy. At this time, Iran's new regional foreign policy was based purely on national interests due to the geopolitical processes taking place, and expanding the revolution was no longer a top priority. At the present stage, Iran's Caucasus policy is mostly not ideological, but realistic and pragmatic.

While Armenia is a secular state in terms of its political system, it occasionally employs ideological tools. In its relations with Iran, however, Armenia adopts a more realistic-pragmatic approach rather than an ideological stance.

Stages of political-diplomatic relations

The development of Armenian-Iranian relations since 1991 can be systematically categorized into five distinct stages, as outlined below:

1. the stage of establishment and definition of primary directions (1991–1997);
2. the phase of interconnected evolution (1998–2008);
3. the period of rapprochement in response to geopolitical threats (2008–2018);
4. the phase of ambivalent or duplicitous diplomacy (2018–2020);
5. the post-2020 stage.

The period from 1991 to 1997 marked a phase of relationship building and rapprochement, aligned with shifting geopolitical dynamics (Kalbizada, Armenian policy of

the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1991: geopolitical conditions and realities, 2020, 4). At that time, Armenia initiated military aggression and a war of expansion against Azerbaijan. Armenia actually committed genocides and bloody actions against Azerbaijanis - Muslims in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, destroyed Muslim religious monuments, and subjected them to insults. The aggressor country has attempted to frame its occupation of Karabakh as a "sacred cause," promoting it among Christian countries as a "liberation movement" for oppressed Christian Armenians from perceived oppression by Muslim Turks.

In order to create a positive image in the Islamic world, Armenia emphasized his relations with Iran. Of course, the IRI, which borders Armenia and the ex-occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was aware of the processes taking place near the northern borders. Iran made several attempts to stabilize the situation in the region until the adoption of the Bishkek protocol on the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan in May 1994, and the discussions on the complete ceasefire between the defence ministers of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in Moscow on May 16 (Əhmədov, 2015, 48-49). But these attempts were unsuccessful. After the agreements reached with the mediation of the IRI, Armenia carried out more bloody operations and occupied new territories.

During those years, there were no major political, economic, religious, or ethnic crises between Iran and Armenia; however, some minor misunderstandings occurred. The political leadership of the two countries evaluated all opportunities for strengthening relations, and a number of projects were implemented, especially in the field of transport and energy (Kalbizada, New Caucasus policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1991 and Armenia, 2020, 41).

The second stage coincided with the reign of the second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008). These years are characterized by a number of researchers as a period of "interconnected evolution" in the foreign policy of Armenia (Talıblı, İranın Qafqaz siyasətində Ermənistan (1991-2006-cı illər), 2016). At this stage, Armenia sought to gradually enhance its relations with both the Russian-Iranian partnership in the region and with the United States and European states; however, it was unable to fully escape Moscow's influence. In response to the evolving regional dynamics, Iran aimed to strengthen its ties with Armenia. Notably, in the years following 2001, Iran's efforts in this regard intensified significantly.

It is clear from the conducted analyzes that in those years, in some cases, Armenia's

non-support of the US and European countries' sanctions against Iran was not due to the country's loyalty to Iran or its policy of solidarity with its neighbors. In such important and tense moments, Russia made the decision instead of Armenia in accordance with its geopolitical interests. Some authors consider the sanctions imposed on Iran as a threat to Armenia's economic security (Galstyan et al., 2016, 109-110). From this perspective, the adverse repercussions of international political and economic sanctions imposed on Iran have manifested significantly in Armenia.

The analysis of Armenian-Iranian relations during these years reveals that regional geopolitical shifts fostered a strengthening of bilateral ties. Exclusion from large-scale regional and global initiatives spurred Armenia and Iran to pursue alternative projects to assert their strategic autonomy. Concurrently, Russia's growing influence over Armenia further shaped the dynamics of Iran-Armenia relations, with Armenia's stance on sanctions against Iran largely aligning with Russian policy positions.

In the third stage covering the years 2008-2018, the geopolitical processes led to the further strengthening of the relations between the two states. Thus, the military conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 had a negative impact on the economic and transit relations established by Armenia through Georgia.

Examining the political relations between the two states during this phase of rapprochement in response to geopolitical threats yields several insights. Unlike the initial stages of diplomatic establishment and interconnected evolution, the trajectory of relations at this stage was not consistently upward. However, shaped by shifting geopolitical conditions, this period marked the elevation of Armenian-Iranian relations to a level of strategic partnership. The years 2012 and 2014 entered the history of Armenian-Iranian relations as situational crisis years.

Armenian-Iranian relations post-2018 could be characterized as an insincere rapprochement or a phase of contradictory foreign policy. At this stage, Armenia paid more attention to relations with the United States and European countries than to relations with Iran. Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power as a result of the "velvet coup" in Armenia in 2018, tried to get the support of Western countries, including the United States, and made a number of changes in strategic relations with Russia, which also affected relations with Iran. After coming to power, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan held his first meeting with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, in the USA - in New York (Kəlbizadə et al.,

2019, 157-158).

After the heavy defeat of Armenia in the 44-day war that took place between Armenia and Azerbaijan in September-November 2020, and the change in geopolitical conditions in the region, a new stage in Armenia-Iran relations has begun. The rapid rise of Azerbaijan's power and influence seriously worried a number of political forces in Iran as well as Armenia, especially supporters of the conservative line. Iran was strongly opposed to the opening of transport and communication lines in a corridor format - the creation of the Zangezur corridor - which Armenia had pledged to open under the November 10 trilateral statement. A number of political groups in Iran believed that the opening of this corridor could deprive Iran of many economic benefits, it could lead to the direction of international transit routes in this direction, and the loss of importance of certain routes passing through Iran. Those groups call the opening of the Zangezur Corridor an "Israeli Project", deliberately distorting this process and presenting it as a violation of Armenia's sovereignty and the seizure of territories important for the relations between Iran and Armenia.

After a while, Armenia's re-strengthening of its Western-leaning foreign policy, especially its joint military exercises with the United States, caused serious dissatisfaction not only with Russia, but also with Iran.

Iran's stance on several issues within the evolving geopolitical landscape of the region aligns notably with France, which seeks to expand its influence in the region, potentially even surpassing that of Russia. This alignment marks a significant shift. Like Russia and Türkiye, Iran opposes an increased U.S. presence in the region, including Armenia, and regards with reservation the initiatives undertaken by Armenia's current authorities in this direction. Simultaneously, Iran is concerned about the growing influence of Türkiye and Azerbaijan and seeks to counterbalance it through diplomatic-political means, as well as by providing military support to Armenia. Iran's designation of Armenia's borders as its "red line" reflects its opposition to the proposed "Middle Corridor" (the Zangezur Corridor, which constitutes a segment of it) that would traverse its own territory. Russia, on the other hand, is interested in opening the corridor from Zangezur and having its own control over this part of the "Middle Corridor" in order to ensure its influence on the "Middle Road" which is an alternative to the Northern Road passing through its territory. In this regard, Iran has even made a number of alternative proposals to Azerbaijan. However, Ibrahim Raisi, who had been rapidly fortifying ties with Armenia and actively pursuing measures to alleviate the diplomatic chill with Azerbaijan during April-May 2024, met a mysterious fate in a helicopter crash.

The ascension of Masoud Pezeshkian, a representative of Azerbaijanis and reformists, to power in early elections precipitated notable shifts in Iran-Armenia relations. Despite the attempts by conservative factions within the Iranian state apparatus to bolster ties with Armenia, Pezeshkian maintains a rather distant and cold stance towards the country. This sentiment was evident during his meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who visited Tehran for the swearing-in ceremony on July 30, 2024, where Pezeshkian remarked that he would only enhance bilateral relations "as much as possible" (Iran's Policy On Armenia Unchanged, Says New FM, 2024).

5. Security and Defense Ties.

Armenia, which cooperated partially with NATO and closely with the Collective Security Treaty Organization to ensure its military security after declaring its independence, has tried to benefit from the opportunities of the IRI in this direction. After the 44-day war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020, tensions in Azerbaijan-Iran relations strengthened Tehran-Yerevan cooperation in the field of military and security. Iran, which previously declared that its cooperation with Armenia is not directed against a third country, and emphasized that this cooperation is only related to general military equipment issues, has completely changed its policy in this direction. During the war, the active use of the UAVs manufactured in Türkiye and Israel by the Azerbaijani army led to the strengthening of cooperation in this field between Armenia and Iran.

This assertion is supported by the fact that in August 2022, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) attracted military experts from Belarus and Russia to the two-week unmanned aerial vehicle training held in Kashan (Iran Hosts Drone Tournament with Russia, Belarus and Armenia, 2022). It should be noted that in October 2022, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, the former commander of the IRGC and adviser to Iran's supreme religious leader on military affairs, named Armenia first among the 22 countries that officially applied for the purchase of Iranian-made military drones (22 countries requested to purchase Iran military drones, official says, 2022). Interest in Iranian drones, especially Shahed-136 UAVs, increased after their use in the Russian-Ukrainian war. According to another information, at that time SEPAH gave Armenia 500 units of Dehlavieh anti-tank missile system and 100 units of Almas system (Huseynov, 2022). Following Masoud Pezeshkian's ascension to power, notable shifts occurred in the realm of military cooperation. Notably, on November 24-25, 2024, the "Araz Joint Military Exercises" were conducted in the Aslanduz settlement of Ardabil Province, featuring the participation of

special forces from the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Despite some recent developments the military and security interests of Iran and Armenia in the South Caucasus exhibit considerable overlap. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in the Caucasus is predicated on a defence realism approach concerning military and security matters. In the current situation, Iran realizes that it is deprived of the opportunity to become the only hegemonic power in Armenia. Therefore, it tries to maintain its power and influence over this country. Armenia, on the other hand, evaluates Iran's approach to the security issue and its concerns, and tries to use it for its own interests.

6. Cooperation within the Framework of International Organizations and Multilateral Platforms

The only international organization in which both Iran and Armenia hold full membership is the United Nations. Within the framework of international organizations, Armenia has in some cases shown support to Iran in matters related to its nuclear program (Месамед, 2015, 82) The Eurasian Economic Union was the organization in which both countries actively participated for a long time. Armenia is a full member of the organization. Iran has observer status in the organization and actively cooperates with it.

It is known that Iran, facing sanctions from the United States and European countries, and Armenia, which has been excluded from regional projects due to its prolonged occupation of Azerbaijani territories, have intermittently sought alternative multilateral cooperation platforms. Notable examples include the Turkmenistan-Iran-Armenia, Greece-Armenia-Iran, and Armenia-Iran-India initiatives, through which both nations have aimed to foster collaboration. However, following the events of 2020, the foundations of cooperation under the Turkmenistan-Iran-Armenia framework have been significantly undermined by various factors, notably the influence of Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The Greek-Armenian-Iranian platform represents an effort to cultivate cooperation rooted in a shared opposition to Turks. The strengthening of the influence of the USA on Greece, the problems that have arisen between Iran and Greece regarding oil tankers have also blocked the development of cooperation within the framework of this platform (Iran urges Greece to resolve oil tanker crisis without US involvement, 2022).

In recent years, the Armenia-Iran-India cooperation platform has attracted more attention. India is trying to form a new route as an alternative to China-Central Asia-

Azerbaijan-Georgia (Armenia) Türkiye route (Middle Corridor). This is the India-Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Black Sea line. In terms of military security, the Pakistan-Azerbaijan-Türkiye axis is being formed against the India-Iran-Armenia axis.

Both Iran and Armenia are interested in cooperation in the 3+3 (Türkiye, Iran, Russia + Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) format proposed by Azerbaijan and Türkiye after the 2020 war.

7. Interparliamentary Relations

The formation of inter-parliamentary relations mainly coincides with the second half of the 90s of the 20th century. One of the first visits of parliamentary delegations from Iran to Armenia was in August 1995. Currently, inter-parliamentary friendship groups operate in the parliaments of both countries. The Armenian-Iranian inter-parliamentary friendship group formed after the extraordinary parliamentary elections held in Armenia in 2021 consists of 18 members. The group is chaired by Gevorg Papoyan from the "Citizen Contract" faction (Friendship Groups of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. Friendship Group Armenia-Iran, 2020).

The Iranian-Armenian inter-parliamentary friendship group also operates in the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran. The group includes 13 members. Ramazan Ali Sobhanifar was the chairman of the friendship group at the 10th convocation of the Assembly. He was elected to the parliament from Razavi province of Khorasan. Karen Khanlari, the representative of the Armenians of North Iran in the parliament, and George Abramyan, the representative of the Armenians of South Iran, were included in the group.

The researches prove that the views and statements that both countries are unable to express or do not want to express at the level of the political leaderships are revealed and declared precisely through the members of the parliament. Armenian deputies in Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly play the role of a "shield" in the pressures directed against Iran from abroad regarding national and religious issues. The presence of Armenian deputies is shown as counter-evidence against the opinions expressed about the violation of the rights of various national and religious groups. One of the special activities of the Armenian representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly is the implementation of propaganda activities against Azerbaijan and Türkiye. From this point of view, Armenian representatives periodically raise the issue of fake "genocide" (Kalbizada, İslamî Şûra Meclisi Ermeni Milletvekillerinin Sözde "Ermeni Soykırımı"nı Tanıtma Girişimlerinin İran'ın İç ve Dış Politikasına Etkisi , 2024, 729-744).

Recently, there has been a notable increase in initiatives aimed at enhancing inter-parliamentary relations. In October 2024, Iran and Armenia formalized an agreement to expand their inter-parliamentary cooperation across various levels, thereby strengthening the activities of friendship groups and specialized committees within the parliaments of both states (Iran, Armenia agree to strengthen parliamentary cooperation, 2024, 1-2). Analyses show that after the reformist and Azerbaijani president Masoud Pezeshkian came to power in Iran, the development of relations with the Iranian parliament, where conservatives are strong, is no coincidence. It should not be forgotten that the chairman of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, was one of the two main opponents of Masoud Pezeshkian in the last presidential elections.

8. Conclusion and Perspective

Although the relations between Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran seem close and strong, in reality a number of problems underlying these relations do not promise positive prospects.

The first of these issues is the constructed narrative surrounding the supposed historical existence of a “Greater Armenia.” Numerous Armenian organizations and the official historiography of Armenia promote this notion, which encompasses territories belonging to Azerbaijan, Eastern Anatolia, Southern Georgia, as well as the northwestern provinces and districts of present-day Iran, within the baseless concept of “Greater Armenia.” This narrative is frequently illustrated on various fabricated maps designed to support such claims.

Another issue that will cause ideological problems is the unfounded claims made by some statesmen and politicians in Iran regarding the 17 cities of the Caucasus. In fact, this claim, which is made against Azerbaijan from time to time at various levels, also targets Armenia itself. The claim that “the 17 cities of the Caucasus belong to Iran” is also attributed to the city of Yerevan, which historically belonged to Azerbaijan and is currently the capital of Armenia. In general, the idea of returning the Caucasus to Iran, which is often put forward by conservative groups, also calls into question the state independence of Armenia.

Thirdly, the current Armenian regime's tendency towards Western integration and cooperation with the United States does not bode well for relations with Iran. The current situation shows that the intensified relations with Iran stem from Armenia's desperation. It

should not be forgotten that there have been attempts in Armenia to transfer a number of strategic facilities to the control of the United States.

The trajectory of future relations may unfold along several possible scenarios:

(1) The continuation of the current religious-conservative regime in Iran, while Armenia develops its relations with the US and European countries to get out of the critical situation it finds itself in, may lead to a weakening of relations.

(2) If a regime change occurs in Iran or if relations between Iran and the West develop in any way, this country's influence on Armenia will increase, and Armenia will become a convenient route for Iran to reach Europe.

(3) Russia's complete weakening in the Ukrainian war and its focus on its internal problems may further strengthen Iran's attempts to fill the vacuum in Armenia.

(4) Armenia's acceptance of the new geopolitical realities in the region and its choice of cooperation proposed by Azerbaijan and Türkiye will confront Iran with new realities in the South Caucasus and may give impetus to the strengthening of regional integration tendencies.

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