

THE ADVANCED STAGE OF RUSSIA-ARMENIA MILITARY COOPERATION: THE JOINT MILITARY FORCE

(RUSYA-ERMENİSTAN ASKERİ İŞBİRLİĞİNDE İLERİ AŞAMA:
BİRLEŞİK ORDU GRUBU)

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Abstract: *After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the military and political power of Russia in many regions deteriorated significantly. The emergence of newly independent republics induced Russia to redetermine its regional policies. In this context, Russia developed new policies with regards to the Caucasia region. As South Caucasian republics, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia's relations with Russia are different from one another. While Georgie exhibited a stern stance against Russia (especially during M. Saakashvili's term), Azerbaijan was forced to follow a relatively balanced policy. At the same time, both republics paid a heavy price during their independence struggle and lost their territorial integrity. Armenia, however, prepared a safe environment for itself under Russia's patronage, and furthermore was used as a tool for the establishment of Russia's hegemony in the Caucasia region. Today, the relations between Russia and Armenia are attempted to be presented as if they are relations between two sovereign states. However, Russia's coercive policy on Armenia is intensifying day by day. As some Armenian researchers highlight, the Joint Military Force (or Joint Group of Forces) that is being recently formed between the two countries gravely harms Armenia's status as a sovereign state. The government of Armenia, however, evaluates this development as Russia's assurance towards Armenia. This article seeks to evaluate the legal status and military potential of the Joint Military Force, as well as the reactions, criticisms, and support expressed in the public opinion of Armenia towards this Force. Since the forming of the Joint Military Force is part of Russia's military hegemony policy and its support given to Armenia, the article seeks to consider this process from a comprehensive perspective and also looks into the contents of the previously signed agreements.*

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Armenia, the Russian Federation, Russian military, security

Öz: Sovyetler Birliđi'nin dađılması ardından Rusya'nın birçok bölgedeki askeri ve siyasi gücü ciddi şekilde gerilemiştir. Yeni bağımsız cumhuriyetlerin meydana çıkması Rusya'nın bölge politikalarını yeniden belirlemesine neden olmuştur. Bu bağlamda Rusya Kafkaslar bölgesine yönelik yeni politikalar gelişmiştir. Güney Kafkasya cumhuriyetleri olarak Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Ermenistan'ın Rusya ile ilişkileri birbirinden farklıdır. Gürcistan (özellikle M. Saakaşvili döneminde) Rusya'ya karşı sert bir tutum sergilerken, Azerbaycan görece dengeli politika izlemek zorunda kalmıştır. Aynı zamanda her iki cumhuriyet de bağımsızlık mücadelesi sürecinde çok ağır bedel ödemiş ve toprak bütünlüklerini kaybetmişlerdir. Ermenistan ise Rusya'nın himayesi altında kendisine güvenli bir ortam hazırlamış, ayrıca Rusya'nın Kafkas bölgesindeki hegemonya tesisinde bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır. Bugün Rusya ve Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkiler sözde iki egemen devlet arasındaki ilişkiler olarak sunulmaya çalışılmaktadır. Oysa Rusya'nın Ermenistan üzerindeki baskı politikası her geçen gün artmaktadır. Bazı Ermeni araştırmacıların da vurguladıkları gibi, son dönemde iki ülke arasında oluşturulan Birleşik Ordu Grubu (veya Ortak Askeri Birlik) Ermenistan'ın egemen devlet statüsünü ciddi şekilde zedelemektedir. Ermenistan yönetimi ise bu gelişmeyi Rusya'nın Ermenistan'a yönelik bir güvencesi olarak değerlendirmektedir. Bu makalede, Birleşik Ordu Grubunun hukuki statüsü, askeri potansiyeli, ayrıca Ermenistan kamuoyunda dile getirilen tepki, eleştiri ve destek nitelikli açıklamaların değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Makale; Birleşik Ordu Grubunun oluşturulması Rusya'nın askeri hegemonya politikası ve Ermenistan'a verdiği desteğin bir parçası olduğu için bu süreci bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla ele almakta, bundan önce imzalanmış sözleşmelerin içeriğini göz atmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azerbaycan, Ermenistan, Rusya Federasyonu, Rus ordusu, güvenlik

INTRODUCTION

The Soviet military was among the most numerous and well-equipped in the world. The civil war in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Second World War and the numerous military interventions to other socialist countries were events that showcased just how powerful the Soviet military was. From the 1980's onwards, the dissolution process of the Soviet Union's political, economic, and cultural institutions, as well as its military, began. By the end of the 1980's, there were serious social reactions towards the Soviet military especially in the Baltic Republics, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

In the strategically crucial Southern Caucasus region, within the Transcaucasian Military Zone (*okrug*), there were stationed land, sea, and air forces, and large polygons and military exercise areas. With the start of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these stationed forces became a contentious issue between Russia, appropriating the heritage of the Soviet Union, and the newly independent republics. Military barracks, ammunitions, tools and supplies, as well as weapons resulted in a negotiation process between Russia and the said republics. Both the republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, once they proclaimed their independence, took action to remove military bases belonging to Russia from within their borders. However, during this process, Russia was attempting to keep the Russian forces within the borders of the republics as much as it could. Among the South Caucasian republics, the first state to remove the Russian military from its territory was Azerbaijan. The Russian forces here left the territory of Azerbaijan in 1992, and the military bases became the property of the new Azerbaijani Republic. Among these bases was Gebele (Gabala-2, RO-7, base 754),¹ which was a radar station. As it was one of the eight largest missile defense systems of the Soviet Union, it was of utmost importance to Russia. In 2012, when there was a disagreement over the leasing price of the base, Russia ceased its operations in Gebele.

With the start of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these stationed forces became a contentious issue between Russia, appropriating the heritage of the Soviet Union, and the newly independent republics. Military barracks, ammunitions, tools and supplies, as well as weapons resulted in a negotiation process between Russia and the said republics.

The efforts of the government of Georgia for the withdrawal of the Russian military took a long time. The process finally ended in 2007, one year earlier than scheduled.

1 The construction of this facility possessing a 'Daryal' system started in 1976 and was finished in 1985.

As a result, Russia was unable to attain the expected results from its policies regarding the preserving and strengthening of its military presence in the Caucasus. In this context, Russia decided to again position its military troops in the north and south of the Caucasus, and in line with this, strengthened its military presence in Armenia both in legal and physical terms.

In such a circumstance, Russia waited for an opportunity to strengthen its military presence in the Caucasus through “legitimate” means. Such an opportunity presented itself in 2008 with the outbreak of the 5-Day Russia-Georgia War;

“Since the 5-Day Russia-Georgia war, Russia has consolidated its military presence in the South Caucasus. In 2009-2010, Russia homogenized its military presence by signing military agreements with South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Armenia and modernizing the military equipment deployed on its bases there. By these agreements, all parties agreed to prolong Russia’s presence in Armenia and Georgia’s separatist territories (recognized as independent states by Moscow in August 2008) for a period of 44 years.”²

The signing of the treaty for the formation of the Joint Military Force between Russia and Armenia could be seen as a profoundly important development for the strengthening of Russia’s military power in the region.

The legal process for the formation of the joint military unit between the two countries began with President of Russia Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin’s 11 November 2016 dated order.³ The treaty text prepared in line with this order was signed by the ministers of defense of Armenia and Russian on 30 November 2016. Upon the said treaty being ratified by the Russian Duma on 14 June 2017 and by the Russian Federation Council on 19 June 2017, it was signed by President Putin on 26 July 2017.

When one examines the legal basis of the military cooperation between Armenia and Russia, the previously mentioned Russia’s military assertiveness strategy clearly manifests itself. In fact, one can come across criticisms pointing to the fact that this military cooperation is a threat to Armenia’s sovereignty.

2 “Russian Military Presence in the Eastern Partnership Countries,” Workshop (Belgium: Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies, European Union, June 2016), 27.

3 “Распоряжение Президента Российской Федерации От 12.11.2016 № 359-Рп ‘О Подписании Соглашения Между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения Об Объединенной Группировке Войск (Сил) Вооруженных Сил Республики Армения и Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации’” (Russian Federation, November 14, 2016), <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201611140002>

1) THE SOUTHERN REGION FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN MILITARY

Today, the military base in Armenia is within Russia's Southern Military Zone.⁴ During the era of the Soviet Union, many changes were made in the administrative and geographic regional layout structure of the USSR Armed Forces. According to the structure before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Transcaucasian Military Zone (*okrug*) was the highest unit of the USSR Armed Forces in the South Caucasus. In 1991, after Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia declared their independence, Russia was forced reposition its forces in the region. An important part of these forces were transferred to other territories of Russia. The Soviet military forces that were maintained in the South Caucasus were reorganized within the structure of the Russian military and the new status of this zone was decided in 19 March 1992. In January 1993, the military forces here were reorganized as the Transcaucasian Military Forces Group. The Russian administration was working with considerable effort to make the presence of these troops in the South Caucasus permanent. The forces that were withdrawn, first from Azerbaijan and then from Georgia, were relocated in other parts of the Caucasus and in Armenia.

During the restructuring process for the military regions (*okrug*), the Russian military base in Armenia was within the North Caucasus Military Zone.⁵ In 2010, with an executive order from the Russian President, important changes were made in the Russian military's command structure. With this measure, published under the name "Executive Order on the Military Organization of the Russian Federation," the North Caucasus Military Zone ceased to exist and the Southern Military Zone was created.⁶ Russian forces present in Armenia were placed under the command of this new structure. The Black Sea fleet and the 4th command of the Air and Air Defense Forces are also under the same military zone (*okrug*). These forces took part in Russia's military intervention to Georgia in 2008. Today, the borders of the Southern Military Zone overlap with the administrative borders of the Southern and Northern Caucasus

4 This zone, initially named "North Caucasus Military Zone," was instituted on 4 May 1918. After going through a few structural changes, this zone was reinstated on 4 October 2010, with an executive order of the Russian President (20 September 2010) titled the "Executive Order on the Russian Federation's Military Organization," as the South Russia Military Zone, within the North Caucasus Military Zone.

5 It was instituted on 4 May 1918. In the Soviet era, many changes were made in the structure of this military zone. In 1945, the Don, Stavropol, and Cuban military zones were created in its place. A year later, it was reinstated under the name of North Caucasus Military Zone.

6 Before this change, there were the Moscow, Leningrad, North Caucasus, Volga-Ural, Siberia, and Far East Military Zones within the Russian Military. With the 2010 change, these zones were removed and four zones in total were created: 1) The Central Military Zone, 2) The Southern Military Zone, 3) The Western Military Zone, 4) The Eastern Military Zone. Please see: "Медведев подписал указ 'О военно-административном делении РФ'," *Ria.ru*, September 21, 2010, <http://ria.ru/politics/20100921/277669145.html>

Regions. It should be emphasized here that Crimea too lies within the borders of the same region (the Southern Federal Region).⁷ The central headquarters of the Southern Military Zone is in the city of Rostov-Don. Except for the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Air and Space Defense Forces, all military and paramilitary units as well as the military bases in Armenia and in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (which are both legally a part of Georgia but nevertheless behave separately from it) are under the command of this Military Zone (*Okrug*). The Ministry of the Interior, the FSB border guards, the Ministry of States of Emergency and similar corps of other ministries and institutions are also under the command of the Southern Military Zone.⁸

2) THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RUSSIA-ARMENIA MILITARY COOPERATION

2.1) The Start of the Military Cooperation

The Transcaucasian Military Command, both strategically and in the domain of military and material capacity, was among the foremost units of the Soviet military. During the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia was in no position to keep hold of its military bases abroad.⁹ This situation, aside from being part of the Russian foreign policy's new reality, also arose from a lack of economic and material means. Meanwhile, some new independent republics were trying to obtain "inheritance shares" from the Soviet military, but they also expected the Russian military to withdraw from their countries. Both Georgia and Azerbaijan were putting in significant efforts for such a withdrawal, while Armenia was following a completely different policy. To succeed in its

7 As known, today, there are eight units recognized as Federal Regions in Russia. These were constituted directly by the authority of the President, and are units open to dispute under the Constitution and Administrative Law. The federal regions were constituted with the Presidential Executive Order (*Ukaz*) dated 13 May 2000 during Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin's first term as president, and were seven in number: Center, North-West, South, Volga (Privoljskiy), Ural, Siberia, Far East federal regions. With the executive order dated 19 January 2010 produced during the presidential term of Dmitry Medvedev, a portion of the Southern Federal Regions was separated (the northern part of Caucasia), and the North Caucasus Federal Region (*okrug*) was created. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the Crimea Federal Region was created. With the executive order of the President of the Russian Federation dated 28 July 2016, the federal region status of Crimea was abolished, and Crimea was incorporated into the Southern Federal Region. Military (defense) units and economic regional properties are considered during the formation of these regions for which there are no provisions in the Constitution. However, this does not mean that the administrative borders of federal regions and military zones completely overlap.

8 "Южный военный округ," *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, accessed: September 20, 2017, <http://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/south/history.htm>

9 In 1989, there were approximately 620,000 soldiers stationed outside of the USSR's borders. With the dissolution of the USSR, the position of these troops was removed, soldiers in Eastern Europe were recalled, and military bases in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Cuba were closed.

occupation policy against Azerbaijan, Armenia was in need of Russian military support.

Russia's military cooperation with Armenia started immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In truth, the situation between the two countries could be more accurately described as Russia's military support for and hegemony over Armenia, rather than "military cooperation."

The first legal change introduced by Armenia to authorize the presence of foreign military troops on its territory was during the last years of the Soviet Union. In the 5th Article of Armenia's Declaration of Independence in 1990, Armenia's right to have its own military forces and to obtain a share from the Soviet Military Forces was indicated. Apart from this, any foreign military presence, whether it was a base or troops, could only be decided by the Armenia's Supreme Soviet.¹⁰

On 29 December 1991, the Russian Federation's and Armenia's presidents signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security. This treaty included close cooperation in the domains of defense industry and national security, as well as provisions on cooperating on placing troops of one country on the territory of the other.¹¹

In 1992, the Armenia-Russia Treaty on the defense of the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States was signed. As Armenia was the weaker side in these bilateral-relations, Russia was able to determine the conditions. It was seen for certain that the troops to be withdrawn from Azerbaijan and Georgia would be positioned in Armenia. For that reason, Russia was as willing as Armenia for improving the military cooperation, or in other words, for the creation of a legal status for its troops to be on Armenia's soil.

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10 "Декларация о Независимости Армении" (Republic of Armenia, August 23, 1990), <http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=2602&lang=rus>

11 "Договор о Дружбе, Сотрудничестве и Взаимной Безопасности Между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения. Дипломатический Вестник," 1992. № 2-3. С. 19 (Russian Federation and Republic of Armenia). Additionally, for this and many other treaties' texts, please see: "Договоры и Соглашения между РФ и РА," *Rus-Arm.org*, August 12, 2010, <http://rus-arm.org/dogovory-i-soglasheniia-mezhdu-rf-i-ra/napravleniia-rossiisko-armianskogo-sotrudnichestva/dogovory-i-soglasheniia-mezhdu-rf-i-ra>

as Armenia for improving the military cooperation, or in other words, for the creation of a legal status for its troops to be on Armenia's soil. After 1994, preparations for a legal draft on this subject were initiated and a year later, on 16 March 1995, the parties signed a treaty on the Russian base in Armenia.

2.2) The Treaty of 16 March 1995 and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Protocols

On 16 March 1995, the "Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia regarding Russia's military base on the territory of the Republic of Armenia"¹² was signed. This treaty was ratified by both countries' parliaments within the next two years.¹³

The treaty consisted of an introduction and 27 articles. In the text of the treaty, there is a reference to the 21 August 1992 treaty between Armenia and Russia, stating that the reason of the existence of the base is for "safeguarding stability and security in the region."

The first article of the treaty contains definitions, the terms "Russia's military base", "military entity", "base personnel" (military personnel, civilian personnel, assigned personnel), the families of the personnel, "competent bodies", "governing bodies of the base", immovable and movable property were defined (Article 1).

In the third article of the treaty, there are important provisions regarding the status of the base. According to that article;

"Russia's base will fulfil the duties arising from the treaties between the two parties. As long as Russia's military base is within the borders of the Republic of Armenia, besides from the Russian Federation's national interests, it will also seek to maintain the security of the Republic of Armenia, within the framework of its old borders within the USSR, along with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia. The armed forces in the Russia's military base will be deployed and used within the framework of the Treaty between the Parties, the Collective Security Treaty of 15 May 1992, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and

12 For the text of the Treaty and the three protocols, please see: "Договор Между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской Военной Базе На Территории Республики Армения," ФЗ ОТ 26.05.1997 N 85-ФЗ (Russian Federation and Republic of Armenia, November 2007), http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_673/doc673a332x809.htm

13 It was ratified by the Russian Parliament on 26 April 1997 and by the Armenian Parliament on 29 May 1997.

Mutual Security between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia.” (Article 3).

The protocols added to this treaty further reinforced the decisions on military cooperation between the two countries.

The 1st Additional Protocol¹⁴ dictates that the use of the military base within the borders of Armenia will be decided by the relevant authority of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Article 8). The Armenian side will respect the status and legal situation of the base personnel and their families (Article 9).

The organization and maintaining of communication with the base is defined by the 2nd Protocol,¹⁵ which is an essential part of the Treaty (Article 12).

With the 3rd Protocol,¹⁶ the amount of prescribed conventional weapons limited by Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) is defined (Article 13). Whether it is for the flight of Russian military airplanes on Armenia’s air space or the transportation of military hardware through customs, the entries and exits were regulated by a special regime. It is provisioned that, except for the Russian military base, the entry of military entities linked to Russia’s Armed Forces should be allowed with the accord of the two parties (Articles 17 and 18).

In the treaty, there is also an original agreement on the costs and financing of the military base. Unlike Russia’s other military bases abroad, the costs of the 102nd Base in Armenia will be financed jointly by Russia and Armenia. A separate agreement was made about the ratios and the amount of the financing (Article 19). The energy, water, infrastructure, and other services necessary for the normal functioning of the base will be provided by Armenia (Article 20). In the bilateral treaties of the following years, Armenia committed itself to providing the financing for electricity, sewage, water, and other infrastructure costs of the military base. The amount of these expenses will be calculated according to the tariffs implemented within Armenia’s Armed Forces and they

14 “Протокол N 1. К Договору между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения,” *LawRussia.ru*, November 2007, http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_673/doc673a332x809.htm

15 “Протокол N 2. К Договору между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения,” *LawRussia.ru*, November 2007, http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_673/doc673a332x809.htm

16 “Протокол N 3. К Договору между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения,” *LawRussia.ru*, November 2007, http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_673/doc673a332x809.htm

will be covered 70% by Russia and 30% by Armenia. Even though the heating energy in the base was expected to be provided by Armenia, this has been delayed due to Armenia being “under a blockade” regarding transportation and transfer of energy.

For the resolution of incompatibilities in the treaty, a Mixed Commission was created in Yerevan. The issues that cannot be resolved by the Mixed Commission are to be solved through diplomatic channels (Article 21). It has been foreseen that Armenian citizens can be employed in the base. For these employees, the provisions of Russian labor law are in effect. The families of the Russian personnel working in the military base are allowed to work in Armenia and Armenian labor law is in effect for them (Article 22). This treaty has been signed for 25 years. After the completion of this time, the treaty will be automatically renewed every five years. The Parties (the two sides), under the condition to inform the other side at least six months before the expiry of this time, can end the application of the Treaty (Article 26).

When the Treaty was signed, it was stipulated by the 3rd Protocol¹⁷ that it would not exceed the ceiling level defined by CFE. Within the framework of the ceiling level defined CFE, the A and B Clauses of the Protocol’s 1st Article, the number of armored vehicles and weapons that can be possessed by Russia and Armenia have been defined. According to these decisions:

17 “Протокол N 3. К Договору между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения.”

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<i>A. The unit limit for the Russian Federation that had been determined by CFE will be increased as follows:</i>	<i>Increase in the number of units</i>
Battle Tanks	80
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	80
Infantry fighting vehicles	160
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	160
<i>Within this scope, infantry fighting vehicles and heavy armament combat vehicle</i>	75
100 mm and large caliber artillery	85
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	85
<i>B. The unit limit for Armenia that had been determined by CFE will be decreased as follows:</i>	<i>Decrease in the number of units</i>
Battle Tanks	80
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	80
Infantry fighting vehicles	160
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	160
<i>Within this scope, infantry fighting vehicles and heavy armament combat vehicle</i>	75
100 mm and large caliber artillery	85
<i>In addition, for regular forces</i>	85

According to the 2nd Article of the Protocol, within the framework of the values and using rules of the European Conventional Armed Forces Treaty of 15 May 1992, the parties will be able to change the ceiling limit.

2.3) Other Bilateral Treaties between the Governments

Asides from the Treaty and Protocols previously mentioned, many state and government level treaties were signed between the parties.¹⁸ In 1996, the treaty on the financing of the military base, the treaty on the deployment of international military supplies, the land provision treaty for the placement of the military base, the treaty on the fulfilment of the housing needs of the military personnel and their families, and the treaty on the opening of Russian Defense Ministry middle schools within Armenia's territory were signed. In 1997, treaties concerning mutual legal aid on cases involving the base, and the

18 For the article of General A. S. Tretyakov who was involved in the preparation process of legal documents for the military cooperation of Russia and Armenia between 1991 and 2000, please see: А.С. Третьяков, "Вооруженные силы РФ в республике Армения: некоторые правовые аспекты пребывания," *Журнал Право и безопасность*, Номер 1-2 (6-7), June 2003, http://dpr.ru/pravo/pravo_5_19.htm

use of weapons by Russian troops outside of the base were signed between the two states. In 2000, a state-level treaty on the coordination for the use of armed forces in maintaining the security of Russia and Armenia was signed. In the same year, state-level treaties about common air defense systems, on the duties and competences of the base and the Armenia's Armed Forces air defense and air force were signed. Also, a treaty was signed on the cooperation between the two defense ministries for the use of both countries' airspace and the mutually cooperative administering of flights by military units.¹⁹

In December 2005, in the treaties between Armenia and Russia, it was provisioned that the Russian military base in Armenia would be expanded. Subsequently, Armenia's administration reserved land and immovable property for the 102nd Military Base.²⁰

2.4) The 4th Protocol

On 11 November 2003, the 4th Protocol in addition to the Treaty was signed. This treaty, ratified on 20 December 2004 by the Russian Parliament, only contained two articles. In the protocol, the aforementioned Treaty's 3rd Article was changed and the principal ground for the use of the base was designated as the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security between Russia and Armenia that was signed on 29 August 1997.²¹

2.5) The 5th Protocol

An important development on the legal status and mission duration of the base happened on 20 August 2010 with the signing of the 5th Protocol.²² With this protocol, the 3rd Article on the legal status and the 26th Article that determines

19 For the treaties, please see: Третьяков, "Вооруженные силы РФ в республике Армения: некоторые правовые аспекты пребывания."

20 Ali Asker, "Tehlikeli Anlaşma: Rusya Türkiye'yi Sivazlıyor, Azerbaycan'a Aba Altından Sopa Gösteriyor," *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü*, August 7, 2010, <http://www.21yyte.org/arastirma/ermenistan/2010/08/07/5172/tehlikeli-anlasma-rusya-turkiyeyi-sivazliyor-azerbaycana-aba-altindan-sopa-gosteriyor>

21 "Протокол N 4. К Договору между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения," 11 ноября 2003 года, *LawRussia.ru*, November 11, 2003, http://www.lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_668/doc668a570x571.htm

22 "Протокол N 5 между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о внесении изменений в Договор между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения о Российской военной базе на территории Республики Армения от 16 марта 1995 г.," *Zaki.ru*, August 20, 2010, <http://zaki.ru/pagesnew.php?id=58430>

the mission time of the base was changed, effectively extending it to 49 years.²³ According to the protocol, besides from Russia's national interests, the base will also ensure Armenia's security along the Armenia's Armed Forces. During the restructuring of the base, all leftover weapons and ammunition was given to Armenia's Armed Forces.²⁴ Another significant aspect of this change is that the expression "protecting the Republic of Armenia in accordance with its old borders within the Soviet Union" is removed from the text, therefore also removing any limitation. The Armenian side, with the removal of this limitation, gained confidence that it would be safeguarded against any intervention coming from Turkey or Azerbaijan. In order to pay the price of this "assurance," Armenia authorized Russia to possess military bases within Armenia's borders.

3) THE MILITARY POTENTIAL OF THE 102ND BASE

The 102nd Military Base, situated in Gyumri and 120 km from Yerevan, was structured on 1 September 1994. It was initially constituted within the authority of the 127th Brigade connected to the 7th Army, itself under the command of the Transcaucasian Military Department. This Brigade was deployed to Armenia in 1953. In 1995, the base was constituted with the name 102nd Military Base. In the base, there are the Yerevan (Erebuni Airport)²⁵ and Gyumri garrisons. In here, there are the Russian Federation's operational force within Armenia, the 123rd Motorized Division, the 3624th Air Base, a military hospital, postal services, the garrison court, the radio station of the General Intelligence Administration connected (GRU) to the Russian Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Within the Gyumri garrison, there are the 128th Motorized Division, the 124th Motorized Division, the 988th Air Defense Regiment, and the 992nd Artillery Regiment. In addition to this, there are also tanks, recon, repair, radiation, chemical, and bacteriological defense, anti-tank divisions, radio electron, medical and military police divisions, a military hospital, depots, a bank, and a Federal Security Service (FSB) branch.²⁶ Within the base, there are three education centers that are active. The first one is Nubasaran, 25-30

23 The duration is calculated on the basis of 1995, which is year the treaty was signed. In 1995, when the treaty was signed, the duration was determined to be 25 years. With the signing of the new protocol, this deadline has been extended to 49 years (calculated on the basis of 1995). Consequently, the treaty will be in effect until 2044.

24 "МО РФ: Россия будет передавать ВС Армении вооружение на безвозмездной основе," *Panorama.am*, June 22, 2011, <http://panorama.am/ru/politics/2011/06/22/andrey-gusev/>

25 This is the aviation department linked to the base in Gyumri (3624th Air Base).

26 "Госдума РФ одобрила протокол о продлении срока размещения российской военной базы в Армении," *Yerkramas.org*, June 18, 2011, <http://www.yerkramas.org/article/17667/gosduma-rf-odobrila-protokol-o-prodlenii-sroka-razmeshheniya-rossijskoj-voennoj-bazy-v-armenii>

km from Yerevan, the second is Kamhud, 15-17 km from Gyumri, and the third one is the Alagoz polygons, 15-109 km from Artik. According to the treaty signed between Armenia and Russia on 30 September 1992 (the one on the status of Russian border defense units within Armenia), Russian soldiers are given the task of protecting Armenia's borders with Iran (45 km) and Turkey (345 km).²⁷

Since 2010, the structure of the 102nd Base and there was changed to a brigade system.

4) THE MILITARY SUPPORT PROVIDED BY RUSSIA TO ARMENIA

It has to be stated that, in line with the conditions imposed by the treaty signed in Tashkent on 15 May 1992 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, neither the process of determining quantitative limit for armaments to be given to former Soviet Union republics nor the methods to monitor the giving of such armaments is compatible with the principles of justice.

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helicopters. However, if surface area and population were considered, Azerbaijan should have obtained 565 tanks, 860 armored vehicles and 566 artilleries. During this process, Armenia, did not heed the imposed armament limits and continued to purchase weapons from Ukraine, Belarus, Kirghizstan, China, Bulgaria, and especially Russia. Within the framework of the Tashkent Treaty, Russia transferred 2/3 of its bases in Armenia, 180 T-72 tanks, 60 BTR-

²⁷ The treaty on status of the Russian Federation border defense troops in the Republic of Armenia was signed on 30 September 1992. Border troops in Russia are under the authority of the Federal Security Service (FSB). As stipulated in this treaty, Russian units are committed to protecting Armenia's borders with Turkey and Iran. As of now, four units of the FSB are stationed in Gyumri, Armavir, Artasat, and Mehri in Armenia. Moreover, Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport's control entrance gate is under the supervision of the FSB. Today, the number of Russian border defense troops on Armenia's territory is estimated to number around 4.5 thousands.

60, and BTR-70, 25 BRM-1K, 130 artillery and mortars, and tens of Osa, Igla, and Silka type air defense complexes to Armenia. However, even this was not the end of it, as Russia equipped the Armenian military in 1993 and 1996 with weapons, military technology, and ammunition.²⁸ Russia's armament aid to Armenia continues today as well. It is a known fact that Russia donated to Armenia armaments worth a total of 1.8 billion dollars.²⁹

According to the statements made by officials in the Russian Armed Forces, the number of personnel in the base is 4245, among them, 370 are officers and 500 are civilian experts.³⁰ According to articles in the Russian media, half of officers and almost all of the contracted soldiers are Armenians who obtained Russian citizenship.³¹ According to Armenian sources, the number of personnel in the base is 12,000. During the 2008 war against Georgia, Russia sent important amounts of supplies and soldiers to this base.³²

On 21 June 2010, during the approval of the 5th Protocol, Colonel Andrey Gusev who is the head of the Cooperation Agency with CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) States within the Russian Ministry of Defense gave a speech in front of Russian senators and stated that during the restructuring of the base, leftover weapons, armored vehicles, and ammunition was been to the Armenian Armed Forces.³³

We could say that there are serious doubts about the transparency of Russian armament transfers to Armenia. On 2 December 2013, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to the 102nd base, "Smerc" and 9K37M1-2 "Buk-MI-2" systems were among the displayed weapons. On the 9A39M1-2 start-charge set up, there were two different 9M38M1 and 9M317 anti-aircraft guided missiles. These weapons were not previously within the 102nd Base's

28 Hatem Cabbarlı, "Bağımsızlık Sonrası Ermenistan-Rusya İlişkileri." Ankara Çalışması (Ankara: ASAM, 2004).

29 According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data from between 1991 and 2014, the total worth of Russia's armament sales to Armenia was 521 million dollars. This number does not conform to reality. According to the data of the United Nations Conventional Weapons Registry system, the total value of Armenia's armament procurement from Russia was 16 million dollars in 2013. Within this scope, 35 tanks, 110 armored combat vehicles, 50 launching mechanisms, and 200 missiles linked to them were purchased. "Военно-техническое сотрудничество между Россией и Арменией. Досье," *Tass.ru*, December 2, 2013, <http://tass.ru/info/803760>

30 "Личный состав российской военной базы в Армении готов выполнять задачи по предназначению," *Yerkramas.org*, June 22, 2011, <http://www.yerkramas.org/article/17787/lichnyj-sostav-rossijskoj-voennoj-bazy-v-armenii-gotov-vypolnyat-zadachi-po-prednaznacheniyu>

31 Владимир Кравченко, "Зонтик для российского форпоста." *ZN,UA*, August 13, 2010, https://zn.ua/POLITICS/zontik_dlya_rossiyskogo_forposta.html

32 "Ermenistandaki Rusiya bazasında 12 min hərbcı var," *Musavat.com*, August 26, 2010, http://musavat.com/news/gundem/ermenistandaki-rusiya-bazasinda-12-min-herbci-var_83610.html

33 "МО РФ: Россия будет передавать ВС Армении вооружение на безвозмездной основе."

armament potential. According to the information given to Putin, “Smerc” was sent “during the summer of 2013” and the “Buk-M1-2” was sent to the base in 2012.³⁴

The last weapon delivery to Armenia was made during the summer of 2016. Russia, to provide weaponry, accorded a 200 million export credit, paid by interests throughout 10 years starting in 2018, to Armenia. According to the weapon purchase contract, the Armenian military purchased from Russia “Smerc” bullets, an “Igla-S” missile complex, the radio recon “Avtobaza-M”, “Soltntsepek” flame machine system with TOS-1A transportation-firing device, 9M113M guided missiles, RPG-26 bomb launcher, Dragunov sniper rifles, “Tiger” armored vehicles, and engineering and communication tools from Russia.³⁵

Levon Ayvazyan, head of defense policy department of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia, even stated that the supplying of certain types of armaments had been carried out earlier than scheduled. Drawing attention to the privilege granted to his country in the armaments trade between Russia and Armenia, Ayvazyan continued as follows:

“We have specific agreements with Russia which allow Armenia to carry out cooperation with Russia in military-technical field at specific terms, for instance we can buy arms, military technique from Russia with domestic prices. This is a great advantage and unique privilege for our country”³⁶

Simultaneously with this contract, Russia’s “Uralvagonzavod” enterprise won the tender for the modernization of tanks of the Armenian armed forces. According to Leonid Nersisyan, the military observer of the news agency REGNUM and the chief editor of the *The New Defense Order* magazine, numerous T-72 and (in the 1980’s) T-72B model tanks were produced during the Soviet era. Ever since the date of their production, many of these tanks have remained in depots without being sent to military units, and can be acquired for a very reasonable price. However, today, Armenia is not acquiring these available tanks, but is instead acquiring the latest model tanks produced in mid-

34 “Какое вооружение продемонстрировали Путину на военной базе в Армении: военные топ-новости недели,” *REGNUM*, December 8, 2013, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1742378.html>

35 “Поставки российского оружия в Армению начались,” *Interfax.ru*, June 29, 2016, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/515955>

36 “Supply of Russian armaments to Armenia is carried out in accordance with schedule,” *Armenpress*, May 23, 2017, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/891900.html>

2000's.³⁷ Without a doubt, in the absence of Russia's direct credit support to and privileged sales policy for Armenia, Armenia lacks the capability to compete with Azerbaijan in the realm armament acquisition.

In 2016, the formation of the Joint Military Force, a joint force of Armenia and Russia, will further increase Armenia's capability to get weapons and ammunition from Russia. In fact, in that case, the weaponry and ammunition sold to Armenia will not cost the standard export price but the internal tariff decided by the Russian State Defense Orders Unit (Gasoboronzakaz).³⁸ Another important element is that Russia has repeatedly transferred weapons to Armenia "off the record". Among this weaponry, there are the "Iskandar" missiles. These tactical missiles have a range between 280 and 500 km and have extremely accurate target hitting capability. Even though "Iskandar" had been developed in the beginning of the 1990/2000's, it had never been exported until today. Only in 2005, Russia planned to sell "Iskandar" missiles to Syria, but abandoned this attempt after a request by Israel.³⁹ The information on the provision of these weapons gained certainty during the 21 September 2016 military parade in Yerevan. It is also interesting to note that, while the United States and European countries increased their pressures on Russia after it decided to deploy "Iskandar" missiles in Kaliningrad (Russia's exclave right in the heart of Europe), these countries chose to remain silent when Russia sold of this missile system to Armenia.⁴⁰

The acquisition of the Iskandar missiles somewhat relieved the Armenian armed forces against a possible maneuver from Azerbaijan;

"The Armenian missile arsenal currently includes Soviet-era Scud-B and Tochka-U systems with firing ranges of 300 and 120 kilometers respectively. The Azerbaijani military has implied that it can neutralize them with S-300 surface-to-air missiles supplied by Russia in 2009-2010 as well as other missile-defense systems reportedly purchased from Israel in 2012. But these systems would most probably be unable to

37 "В Армению поставляется огромное количество нового оружия - эксперт," *GeoClub.info*, November 16, 2016, <http://geoclub.info/v-armeniyu-postavlyaetsya-ogromnoe-kolichestvo-novogo-oruzhiya-ekspert/>

38 Ольга Божьева, "Эксперт объяснил создание единой военной группировки России и Армении," *МК.ru*, November 14, 2016, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2016/11/14/ekspert-obyasnil-sozdanie-edinoy-voennoy-gruppirovki-rossii-i-armenii.html>

39 Алексей Никольский, "Гришкин Д. «Искандеры» доехали до Армении," *Vedomosti.ru*, September 9, 2016, <http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/09/19/657501-iskanderi-dochali-armenii>

40 Hatem Cabbarlı, "Güney Kafkas Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde," *Karadeniz Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Sayı: 53 (2017): 62.

intercept Iskander-M missiles, one of the most potent weapons of their kind in the world.”⁴¹

According to the dominant view in Armenia, the acquisition of armaments from Russia reliably “freezes” the possibility of conflict with Azerbaijan. No dissident voice can be heard in Armenia’s society against the acquisition of armaments. On the contrary, Russia’s military support is seen as an assurance against a possible attack by Azerbaijan.

In 12 January 2015, Private Valeriy Permyakov stationed in the base attempted to desert by crossing the Turkish border and on 12 January 2015, he massacred the Avetisyan family. This event caused great upheaval in Armenia, and demonstrations were held for the closure of the military base and the extradition of Valeriy Permyakov to be judged in Armenia.

5) PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE MILITARY BASE

Russia has certain problems linked to its military bases abroad. Notably, the fact that the cost of rent of these bases is proportionally large in terms of Russia’s economic power, the financing question, the difficulties related to covering the expenses, and also the discipline problem frequently come up on the agenda. The fact that, along with Russian soldiers, citizens of the host countries also work in these bases aggravates the discipline problems. In 12 January 2015, Private Valeriy Permyakov stationed in the base attempted to desert by crossing the Turkish border and on 12 January 2015, he massacred the Avetisyan family

(7 people were killed by Permyakov, among whom were two elder persons and one 6 months old child) in Gyumri.⁴² This event caused great upheaval in Armenia, and demonstrations were held for the closure of the military base and the extradition of Valeriy Permyakov to be judged in Armenia.

In 12 August 2015, the Gyumri Garrison Military Court found Permyakov guilty of desertion, theft of and illegal carrying of arms, and sentenced him to 10 years of imprisonment on the condition that it takes place in a heavy regiment prison.⁴³ The case for the murder of the Avetisyan family was seen at

41 Emil Danielyan, “Why Armenia’s Military Alliance With Russia Is Not At Risk,” *RFE/RL*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-armenian-russia-military-alliance/27351046.html>

42 The Avetisyan family members were killed in their home by an automatic weapon while the 6 months old baby was heavily wounded by a bayonet and passed away in a hospital seven days later. Please see: “В Гюмри пришли за российским солдатом,” *Kommersant.ru*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.kommersant.ru/Doc/2646031>

43 “Пермякова приговорили к 10 годам тюрьмы,” *Sknews.ru*, August 13, 2015, <http://www.sknews.ru/rubriki/transcaucasus/69293-permakova-prigovorili-k-10-godam-turmy.html>

Armenia's court of general jurisdiction of the Shirak Region. The court tried Permyakov under the crimes manslaughter, brigandly assault, and illegal passing of borders as defined by Armenia's Penal Code, and sentenced him to life imprisonment.⁴⁴ On 18 May 2017, Permyakov was extradited to Russia to serve his sentence.⁴⁵

In the aftermath of the Permyakov incident, the Russian General Staff declared that all the conscript privates will be dismissed from the base to be replaced by contracted soldiers by 2016. However, according to open sources, there are very few contracted soldiers who are commissioned in the base.

Another important issue is that deployments to this base are very expensive and difficult. Until the recent period, due to a treaty, these deployments were taking place through Georgia. In 2008, after the Russian-Georgian war, the deployment of Russian soldiers and supplies to Gyumri through land was effectively stopped and all communication and supplying has taken place via air. On 20 April 2011, the Georgian Parliament voted to annul the treaty in unanimity and forbade any kind of passage to Russian soldiers and supplies headed for the base through Georgian soil. The Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs of the time, Grigol Vashadze, in a statement to the Azerbaijani news outlet APA, warned that "The increase of the military potential of the Russian base in Gyumri constitutes a danger for Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia."⁴⁶ In Georgia's decision process, it could be said that suggestions by the US had an effect. According to certain news articles from 2017, it has been observed that supplies have been deployed to the Russian army in Armenia through Georgia. However, these claims have not been officially confirmed.

Georgia's denial of airspace pushed Russia to examine the option of the Iranian corridor. Russia considers making the deployments to the base through the Anzali Port in the Caspian Sea and then to Mehri.⁴⁷ Among the least likely possibilities, it is considered that Russia could transfer the base to Armenia and focus its attention to the North Caucasus. However, with the international sanctions that followed the invasion of Crimea, its inflexible policy regarding

44 "Валерий Пермяков приговорен к пожизненному заключению," *Sputnik*, August 23, 2016, <https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/armenia/20160823/4711964.html>

45 Дарья Ерёмкина, "Армения передала России осужденного за семикратное убийство солдата," *Deutsche Welle*, May 18, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/ru/армения-передала-россии-осужденного-за-семикратное-убийство-солдата/a-38894451>

46 "Вашадзе: продление сроков пребывания российской военной базы в Армении опасно для региона," *Aze.az*, September 7, 2010, http://www.aze.az/news_vashadze_prodlenie_srokov_41264.html

47 "Грузия заблокировала российскую базу в Гюмри," *Army-News.ru*, April 22, 2011, <http://army-news.ru/2011/04/gruziya-zablokirovala-rossijskuyu-bazu/>

Syria, and the airplane crisis between Turkey and Russia, the public opinion debates about the military have been pushed to the background and taking a stance against the international “imperialist powers’ exclusion and isolation policy” against Russia has been presented as a national duty. Today, Russia is seeking to increase its presence against the United States not only in the South Caucasus but around all of the Caspian Sea and the Middle East and has gone into an “attack mode” against the US. The Russian presence in Hamedan, and the desire for commissioning of a permanent sea base and air base in Syria, the pursuit of negotiations for military bases in Vietnam, Egypt, and Cuba could be seen as part of this offensive stance.⁴⁸

Speculating about Russia abandoning or closing its base in Armenia is almost impossible. If anything, it is expected that this base which is right next to Turkey and constitutes a threat to regional states will see its military potential increased. Russia, by making bilateral treaties with Armenia and reinforcing the Armenian Armed Forces, is rendering Armenia increasingly dependent to itself. Armenia, as a state pursuing occupation policies against Azerbaijan, does not have many options to resist this dependency. This is so because, Russia, by sporadically also selling weapons to the Azerbaijani military, is benefiting from the continuing dispute between the two sides.⁴⁹

6) THE JOINT MILITARY FORCE

Russia’s military cooperation with Armenia is not limited to the 102nd Military Base. Russia’s goal in the middle to long term is to create a hegemony over the Armenian military while referring to it as “military cooperation”. This policy of Russia is being implemented gradually.

First of all, it is necessary to underline that Armenia and Russia’s common military formation dates to 2000. This formation was composed by the 102nd

48 Ирина Джорбенадзе, “Америка и Россия могут сделать Закавказье «местом для драки»,” *Rosbalt.ru*, October 20, 2016, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2016/10/20/1560360.html>

49 The Russian Presidential aid Yuri Usakov has said that Russia is selling arms to its ally Armenia and that there was nothing to disprove about this, however, that Russia is also selling arms to Azerbaijan. Please see: Джорбенадзе, “Америка и Россия могут сделать Закавказье «местом для драки».” Russia’s importance in the Azerbaijani market has been felt since 2010. According to the 2014 statistics of the Azerbaijani military, the country has bought substantial amounts of arms and ammunitions from Russia: 24 Mi-35M helicopters, 60 Mi-17 helicopters, the S-300PMU-2 air defense missile system, 130 T-90SA tanks, 100 BMP-3 infantry combat vehicles, 70 BTR-80/82 armored battle vehicles, around 450 artillery systems and multi-barreled rocket-launchers, 300 portable anti-aircraft missile launchers and 1500 rockets for these launchers were included in the deal worth 2 billion dollars between Azerbaijan and Russia. Please see; Екатерина Тесемникова, “Как обеспечивается баланс сил в Закавказье,” *Vestikavkaza*, July 14, 2014, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/articles/Kak-obespechivaetsya-balans-sil-v-Zakavkaze.html>

Military Base and the Fifth Brigade forces of the Armenian Armed Forces. On 23 December 2015, a treaty on the creation of a joint Armenian-Russian air defense system was signed in Moscow⁵⁰ and was ratified on June 2016 by the Armenian Parliament.⁵¹ With this treaty, Armenia obtained the opportunity to use S-300 missile systems and 4th generation jet fighters. During peacetime, Armenia's part of the air defense system will be under the command of the Armenian Armed Forces Air Defense Command.⁵²

A further step to strengthen Russia's military presence in Armenia was taken in 2016. On July 2016, a governmental proposal on the creation of the Joint Military Force was made, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a positive answer to this proposal on 14 November 2016. The commander of the Joint Military Force is to be appointed by the Commander-in Chief of the Armenian armed forces. However, this appointment will be subject to the confirmation of the Russian Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief. During peacetime, the Joint Military Force will be under the command of the Armenian General Staff.⁵³

In a statement by the Ministry of Defense of Armenia, it was stated that certain legal and organizational issues that lie under confidentiality are currently being worked out. Also, it has been reported that the new formation's mission to safeguard Armenia's borders as well as regional security in general, and the different weapons and ammunitions to be deployed are reportedly being negotiated.⁵⁴

It would be insufficient to explain the formation of the Joint Military Force from the perspective of a security issue. This formation is not only important in terms of Russia's military and economic cooperation with Armenia, but also important in terms its regional policies. In this context, different factors are highlighted in the evaluations written after the signing of the treaty. Containing evaluations from four experts, the expert commentary titled "What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean for Security in the South

50 "Парламент Армении одобрил создание объединенной системы ПВО с Россией," *Interfax.ru*, June 30, 2016, <http://www.interfax.ru/world/516175>

51 There were 102 votes for and 8 votes against the treaty.

52 Парламент Армении одобрил создание объединенной системы ПВО с Россией.

53 "Путин одобрил создание объединенной группировки войск России и Армении," *Interfax.ru*, November 14, 2016, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/536849>

54 Тигран Петросян, "Минобороны Армении сообщило о перевооружении объединенной группировки войск с Россией," *Kavkaz-uzel.eu*, November 16, 2016, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/292706/>

Caucasus?”⁵⁵ published by the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)⁵⁶ is noteworthy in this respect.

In the commentary, Director of the Regional Studies Center (an independent thinktank in Armenia) Richard Giragosian evaluates the treaty from the perspective of Georgia. According to Giragosian, the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force poses two concerns for Georgia:⁵⁷ 1) In April, Azerbaijani military offensive against Armenia succeeded, the first military victory for Azerbaijan since 1994. Despite Georgia’s neutral status, this new conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has posed new risks for the stability of the region, and 2) Russian-Armenian military relationship has over the years gradually eroded Armenia’s independence in exchange for security guarantees. Armenia’s sovereignty may become questionable due to this process. This is another risk for Georgia.

According to Dr. Tracey German of King’s College, the creation of the Joint Military Force serves to enhance Russian military power’s presence in the Caucasus. This Force has similarity with the Joint Group of Force between South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Russian armed forces. The Russian sphere of influence is getting stronger with Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “...considers an attack on one member-state to be an attack on all and guarantees mutual military assistance if a member is attacked.”⁵⁸ German states that Armenia wants protection against Turkey and Azerbaijan and that;

“Moscow is determined to retain its influence in the South Caucasus and by maintaining weak states in its neighborhood that are dependent on it for political, economic and military support, Russia seeks to keep them within its geopolitical orbit and counterbalance the growing presence of Western actors. This latest development should act as a stark reminder of the need for greater international attention paid to the region and the imperative of negotiated settlements to its unresolved conflicts.”⁵⁹

Nona Mikhelidze, Senior Fellow at the Istituto Affari Internazionali in Italy, states that there are several reasons for regional actors to be concerned

55 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean for Security in the South Caucasus?” *Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)*, December 1, 2016, <http://gip.ge/what-does-the-russian-armenian-joint-military-force-mean-for-security-in-the-south-caucasus/>

56 According to its website, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is “a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization founded in early 2011.” Please see: <http://gip.ge>

57 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 1-2.

58 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 2.

59 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 2.

regarding the Joint Military Force between Russia and Armenia:⁶⁰ 1) Under the Joint Military Force, it will be Russia's armed forces, and not Armenia's, that will patrol Armenia's borders with its neighboring countries, 2) In case of the breakout of a war, Armenia's armed forces will be placed under the command of Russia's Southern Military District, 3) The creation of the Force debunks Russia's argument that it is an impartial party in the peaceful resolution process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict headed by OSCE Minsk Group. Furthermore, according to Mikhelidze, there may be a counter-reaction from Azerbaijan;

“Baku could abandon its balanced foreign policy and seek to upgrade military relations with Ankara. All these developments would lead to extensive military mobilization in the South Caucasus and eventually to escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”⁶¹

Finally, Dr. Rick Fawn, Professor of International Relations at University of St. Andrews, draws attention to five points regarding the Joint Military Force:⁶²

1) The West did not react much to the creation of the Joint Military Force, 2) Armenia's military cooperation with Russia is very comprehensive in terms of its content. The creation of the Force is meant to bolster primarily Russia's but also CSTO's presence in the former Soviet world. Therefore, the creation of the Force should come as no surprise, 3) The creation of this Force is ominous for Azerbaijan; it clearly showcases Russia's support for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, 4) The creation of this Force presents a danger to the stability in the Caucasus and is meant to further Russia's interests in the region. However, it is unlikely that this instability will spread to Georgia, 5) Georgia lacks the ability to affect this Force, but in any case, it is not directly affected by its creation or presence. However, the creation of such a Force represents an interesting opportunity for Georgia; Georgia can serve as an intermediary between the feuding Armenia and Azerbaijan, and thereby promote itself as a positive platform for the conflict.

Meanwhile, in Armenia, while some commentators express discomfort with the Treaty for the creation of the Joint Military Force, an important section of commentators emphasizes the major importance of the creation of such a military force for the security of Armenia.

According to some Armenian commentators, the country's economy entered Russia's sphere of influence at an earlier time. Today, by offering its military,

60 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 3.

61 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 3.

62 “What Does the Russian-Armenian Joint Military Force Mean...” 3-4.

which is the most important component of the security apparatus, to Russia, the Armenian government has seriously violated the sovereignty rights of Armenia. The essential goal of this treaty is the expansion of Russia's sphere of influence, regardless of Armenia's national interests. Therefore, while the Joint Military Force is not ensuring Armenia's protection, it is actually making it a target for NATO.⁶³

In sum, one needs to emphasize that in Armenia, there are very few who think critically of the Joint Military Force. Both for experts and for the general public opinion, Russia is the protective shield for Armenia against "enemy countries" (Azerbaijan and Turkey). Economically and socially, it is also impossible for Armenia to support itself without the Russian market. There is a general view in Armenia that Russia's support is vital for the protection of occupied areas suffering from developmental problems.

On the other hand, the arguments of those who support the treaty can be summarized in the following way: Russia and Armenia created such a military force by being aware of the new political reality. Regardless of this arrangement, there was *de facto* such a Russian-Armenian joint unit since the first headquarters command drill in 1995. After the April 2016 skirmish, the possibility of an Azerbaijani attack (especially from Nakhichevan) became an important problem.⁶⁴ Moreover, the headquarters structure of the Armenian military, its tactics and strategy, weapons and ammunition are the same as those in the Russian Armed Forces. An important part of colonels and higher-ranking

Armenian officers are graduates of Russian military schools. Their military planning and education methodology is also the same. All these factors considered, the Joint Military Force will be a unit possessing high combat capability. The existence of such a unit constitutes no threat for Armenia.⁶⁵

63 For the statement of the Armenia Political and International Research Centre expert Ruben Megrabyan, please see: Петросян, "Минобороны Армении сообщило о перевооружении объединенной группировки войск с Россией."

64 The ceasefire signed in 1994 has been violated hundreds of times due to the border skirmishes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, because most of these violations are small in scale, they do not attract much attention. On 2 April 2016, the situation arising from Armenia's breach of the ceasefire led to a large-scale conflict. The skirmish happened on the 23rd anniversary of Armenia's occupation of Kalbajar, while both countries' presidents were in the United States for the nuclear security summit. The skirmish could only be stopped on 6 April, with the ceasefire proclaimed by the Azerbaijani side. Nazim Cafersoy, "'4 Gün Savaşı' ve Bölgesel Dengeler," *Deutsche Welle*, April 6, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/tr/4-gün-savaşı-ve-bölgesel-dengeler/a-19168839>

65 For the statement of Sergey Minasyan, the Vice-Director of the Caucasus Institute, please see: Петросян, "Минобороны Армении сообщило о перевооружении объединенной группировки войск с Россией."

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For this reason, it would be very difficult to say that Armenia will pursue a realistic and critical policy regarding its cooperation with Russia in the near and medium term. In the political and social life of Armenia, in terms of the relations between the West and Russia, the pro-Russian forces are in the clear the majority. On the issue of military cooperation, the voices of the pro-Western sections, who are low in number and weak in influence, was already not being heard much;

“Pro-Western circles in Armenia rarely discuss these specific security issues in their critique of Russian-Armenian dealings. Nor do they question the underlying motive behind successive Armenian governments’ pursuit of close ties with Moscow: continued Armenian control over Nagorno-Karabakh. So far the pro-Western camp has been unable or unwilling to disprove the notion that, as long as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved, Armenia’s ability to resist Russian pressure and seek deep integration with the West will be seriously limited.”⁶⁶

Besides it’s the enormous military support it provides to its strategic ally Armenia, Russia’s selling of armaments to Azerbaijan from time to time clearly showcases its commercial interests. This policy that Russia has pursued all along to keep Caucasia under its control has given the “cease-fire” in the region the attribute of a bomb that can explode at any moment.

CONCLUSION

Russia’s 102nd Military Base in Armenia is considered as the important military force in the Southwest wing. This base, besides from providing military power, is a tool for Russia to exercise psychological leverage in the region. The Armenian government thinks that in the possible event of a war with Azerbaijan, it will be able to use the 102nd Military Base. The claim that more

66 Danielyan, “Why Armenia’s Military Alliance With Russia Is Not At Risk, November.”

than half of the personnel in the base are Armenians, and that, according to certain unofficial sources, that the personnel of the base is not 4-5 thousand but 12 thousand, present in media outlets and open sources, is thought-provoking.

Russia, having discontinued CFE towards the end of July 2007 and having withdrawn from the Treaty in December 2007, is pursuing an armament policy in the Caucasus. The treaty on the prolonging of the use of the 102nd Military Base has also emboldened Armenia, which holds the position of being an aggressor state. Regarding this situation, certain analysts suggest that Turkey needs to establish a military alliance with Azerbaijan and place a military base in Nakhichevan. On the other hand, some think that Turkey should not take part in this conflict because it would further accentuate the militarization in the area. In any case, these developments are an important concern for the frontier state that is Turkey.

As of 2016, the Russia-Armenia military cooperation has reached a further level. The fact that Armenia, pursuing an aggressive and invasive policy, establishes a common military unit, the Joint Military Force, with Russia, is an expression of Russia's support for Armenia. This entity, as a source of threat in the Caucasus, is increasing its strength as we speak.

According Armenia's public perception, the Joint Military Force is preventative strategy against an external attack threat emanating from Azerbaijan (even Turkey). The 2011 Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support reflects this public perception, since with this agreement, Russia and Armenia pledge to use "all possible means" if one of them becomes faced with an attack or aggression. However, Armenia, as the side that has rejected for the last twenty years the positive offers of both Azerbaijan and Turkey for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, is the direct source of the instability in the region.

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