

An Armenian Strategy for Long-Term Security Guarantees: Pursuing Western Support for the “Crossroads for Peace” Initiative

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Abstract

For decades, Russia has offered Armenia security guarantees critical to balancing regional tensions in the Southern Caucasus. However, in 2023, Russia stepped away from historic precedent and failed to assist Armenia in combating Azerbaijan’s military aggression. Given the growing uncertainty of Russian protection, this paper will argue that Armenia must look to diversify foreign policy and economic dependence. The paper identifies the proposed Crossroads for Peace infrastructure initiative as an important means for Armenia to seek alternate funding sources in the West and integrate herself into broader trade networks, thereby promoting future security and economic growth.

I. Introduction: The Crossroads for Peace Initiative

The Crossroads for Peace initiative, proposed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan at the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum in October 2023, is a vital step for Armenia to establish power and influence as a growing partner in the Southern Caucasus (Paylan). It is an initiative to build infrastructure across Armenia that connects it to neighboring countries, allowing goods to travel through the nation. The infrastructure initiative aims to integrate Armenia into the trade networks connecting the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea. Armenians hope that trade infrastructure will serve as a “conduit for cultivating economic, political, and cultural ties between the countries involved, thus advancing long-term peace and stability in the region” (Paylan). Currently, Armenia remains isolated from the Trans-Caspian Corridor (Middle Corridor). The Armenian borders are closed, and the country relies heavily on Russia for both imports and exports. The Crossroads for Peace initiative, with financing from the West, provides the most effective way forward toward a peace agreement with Azerbaijan, decreased dependence on Russia, and stronger connections to Western sources of funding and support (De Waal).

Armenia cannot remain a passive actor in the region, letting Russia’s recent demonstrated disinterest in the nation’s security move her into obscurity and further vulnerability. Armenia has a long history of genocide and violence, and the lack of

Russian security guarantees places the small nation in a vulnerable position. The infrastructure initiative is vital for the future development and security of the nation.

The question remains: should Armenia turn to Russia or the West for funding and support? Due to Russia's preoccupation in Ukraine and uncommitted posture in the Southern Caucasus, Armenia now has the opportunity to continue the shift towards the West. A complete shift to dependence on the West would be dangerous and unfeasible in the short term. By seeking financial support from the West for the Crossroads to Peace initiative, Armenia can take one step towards a broader goal of limiting dependence on Russia. Russia has proven her lack of commitment to the Armenian people, and it is in the best interest of Armenia to appeal to Western interests to ensure future security guarantees.

II. Historical Ties: From Security Guarantees to Betrayal

Armenia has historically depended on Russia for protection, but the failure of Russian peacekeeping forces in 2023 to protect Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan has led Armenia to reassess the relationship. The perception of Russia as a consistent security guarantor has been a “common currency” in Armenian policy, holding an integral place in national identity since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Zolyan). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been a source of tension in the region since before the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Crisis Group). In 1988, ethnic Armenians demanded the transfer of the Autonomous Oblast from Soviet Azerbaijan to Armenia. In the wake of independence, the two countries engaged in a two-year war. Armenia triumphed, gaining control of the seven ex-Azerbaijani SSR regions around Karabakh (Nersisyan). However, the subsequent two and a half decades of intermittent fighting showed the ever-present risk of escalation in the region. In 2020, the deadliest fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan broke out, resulting in the deaths of over 7,000 combatants and hundreds of civilians (Center for Preventative Action). It ended with a ceasefire brokered by the Russian Federation, which gave Azerbaijan full control of the previously Armenian districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, and included provisions to establish Russian peacekeeping forces in the region. In recognition of the vulnerable situation of the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia positioned forces along the Lachin corridor, the main traffic artery connecting Armenia to the isolated region (Crisis Group). By organizing the peace agreement, the Russian Federation solidified its position as a powerful regional mediator.

In 2023, Azerbaijan launched an offensive aimed at disarming Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh. The attack was particularly effective, as it followed a 9-month de facto closure of the Lachin Road that limited Armenian supplies to the region (UN Security Council). Russia did not execute a peacekeeping response to the attack and Azerbaijan was successful in seizing the region. A mass exodus ensued, with over 100,000 Armenians relocating to the main territory (Landgraf & Nareg). Overburdened by the war in Ukraine, Russia was either unable or unwilling to act out the historical role as protector and guarantor of peace. While Russia's support for Azerbaijan has been largely contained to arms sales, Alexander Lukashenko, the leader of close Russian ally Belarus, openly supported Azerbaijan (JAMnews Staff). Given the intertwined foreign policy of the allies, Lukashenko's comments are likely reflective of Russian inclinations. As current Russian policy towards Armenia indicates a shift, Armenia must consider rethinking previous assumptions of ties between the two nations.

In the past two years, Armenia has begun to show signs of distancing herself from Russia, indicating a recognition that Russian security commitments are inadequate. Analysis suggests that Russia does not view Armenian security as vital to national security, deviating from historical policy (Huseynov & Muradov). Because Azerbaijan and their close ally Türkiye have never been a crucial enemy in Russian foreign policy, combatting Azerbaijan's influence is not an incentive for Russian support for Armenia (Baunov). While Türkiye is a member of NATO and Azerbaijan is an associate member, the government in Baku has never turned to anti-Russian rhetoric. Unlike other former Soviet states, it does not use anti-Russian sentiment as a key foreign policy objective or express strong desires to join NATO. In fact, Baku has maintained a strong albeit independent relationship with Moscow (Baunov). During the war in Ukraine, Azerbaijan has also become a key node in a transit corridor that links Russia with weapons supplied by Iran (Huseynov and Muradov). This lack of conviction and ties to other countries in the region was evident in Russia's hesitancy in challenging Azerbaijan to defend Armenia. It is clear that Armenia's security is in constant jeopardy, and the status quo governed by Russia is unsustainable for the Armenian people. The Crossroads for Peace initiative aims to pave a path toward building regional partnerships, resolving historical conflict, and generating economic growth and bargaining power for Armenia.

III. Theory of Cause and Effect

The Crossroads for Peace initiative is the means for ensuring future security for the Armenian people, as it will increase the nation's strategic value, allowing Armenia to garner security guarantees from the West in exchange for access to Armenia's resources and trade routes. The failure of Russia to come to the assistance of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 reflects a greater Russian policy of disinterest and neglect. The appeal to the West to ensure the implementation and viability of the Crossroads for Peace initiative will, without a doubt, create a period of intense instability and vulnerability for Armenia because it will directly threaten Russia's sphere of influence. However, the shift has already begun, and it is unclear at this moment how much Russia cares and how much capability Russia will be able to direct away from Ukraine to address the situation in Armenia. Given the current break in Russia's commitment to Armenia as well as the over-allocation of resources to Ukraine, it is essential that Armenia take action now to pursue the goal of diversifying foreign policy and weaning dependence on Russia (Harutyunyan).

The intent to diversify Armenian foreign policy and foreign investment is potentially dangerous. It assumes that Russia has overstretched its military resources in Ukraine and that the 2023 failed peacekeeping mission is an indication of a broader Russian disinterest in maintaining the role of protector for Armenia from the client state of Azerbaijan. It also assumes that the draw of more efficient trade routes bypassing Russia will offer enough benefits for Western nations to be willing to risk provoking Russia's anger by subverting historical spheres of influence (Paylan).

In the long run, economic growth, stability, and integration as a vital regional trading hub will provide Armenia with the most promising path toward peace and stability (Paylan). It would require a significant investment from Armenia and trust from foreign countries, as the country is currently smaller, weaker, and less stable than Azerbaijan and Türkiye. However, the initiative would invariably attract foreign investment focused on logistics and trade infrastructure (Paylan). Armenia's role as a central node in Eurasian trade would grow, enhancing cooperation in the region, leading to greater reliability and security of the trade corridor (Paylan). Additionally, by involving Western nations in the initiative, Western economic interests will become more involved in the security of Armenia. In the future, Armenia can use this relationship as leverage for security and protection from Azerbaijan and incorporation into Western markets (Nersisyan and Pilibossian). Armenia must take advantage of this window of opportunity to begin disentangling from Russia. Another opportunity

might not appear again soon, and it is clear that Armenia's security will not be a priority to any great power within the current structure of the region. Securing funding and support for the infrastructure initiative is the crucial next step toward reducing Armenian dependence on Russia.

IV. Costs and Viable Alternatives

Alternative courses of action for investments in Armenia's future can be divided into two broad options. While ultimately undesirable, the first option is for Armenia to follow historical precedent and remain loyal to Russia, seeking Russian funding and political support for the Crossroads for Peace initiative. Groveling for help from Russia while simultaneously showing the economic benefits of new trade routes might placate the Kremlin's dislike of Armenia's recent moves away from Russia. Collective memory in Armenia identifies Russia as the key protector in the first war in Karabakh, so Russia has proven capable of ensuring Armenian security in the past and could continue to do so effectively (Baunov). Additionally, Russia's connection with Türkiye and Azerbaijan could be beneficial for securing their support for and compliance with the initiative (Paylan). However, providing Russia with further investments and control over the infrastructure in the country is a national security concern for Armenia, and the recent Russian desire to help Armenia has proven unreliable at best.

Additionally, developing a trade network within Armenia would allow for more goods to bypass the Eurasian Northern Corridor, a primary means for trade traversing Russian territory (Paylan). It is not in Russia's interest to provide the West with alternative means for accessing goods because it would mean that Russian instability could be avoided by the West almost entirely (Paylan). Lastly, while Russia has supplied 90% of Armenian arms, Moscow has also supplied up to 80% of Azeri arms (Nazaretyan). Therefore, peace and security between the two countries is not in Russia's best financial interest, meaning that remaining under Russian tutelage is not a viable option for Armenia to pursue true economic growth and security.

The second alternative involves appealing to other powers, namely China, Iran, or India, for assistance and support. While this is a viable middle ground that would successfully preserve ties with Russia, it would not be as sustainable or as beneficial in the long run. China's Belt-and-Road initiative (BRI) has already led the country to invest in Armenian infrastructure, exert soft power, and build a bridge from China to Western markets (Asryan). However, as of 2021, Chinese investment was

largely allocated to Iran, Georgia, and Türkiye, overlooking Armenia as a priority and leading to stagnated relations (Sahakyan). Türkiye and Azerbaijan have actively worked to use BRI investments to further isolate Armenia (Sahakyan). Given China's clear orientation towards the interests of Armenia's aggressors, dependence on China for significant infrastructure investments or security guarantees is not feasible in the immediate future. Turning to Iran, an economic relationship exists between the two nations. Recently, Iran has been looking to increase gas exports to Armenia, and as of 2024, the third Armenia-Iran power transmission line is almost complete (Kaleji). However, due to sanctions on Iran and Russia's desire to maintain access to the Armenian market for gas, it is unlikely that this is a viable means to a secure and lasting partnership (Kaleji). In 2021, Armenia-Iran trade amounted to \$471 million annually (Rubin). Yet, Türkiye's trade with Iran is approximately \$6.4 billion, leading Iran to prioritize Türkiye's interests. The last potential relationship is with India. With the continuing war in Ukraine, Armenia has already turned to India as a source of arms, and a legitimate security relationship has begun to develop between the two nations (Atasuntsev). However, the relationship is not yet proven significant enough for India to offer consistent protection in situations that counter Russian interests, as India has historically maintained intentional neutrality towards Russia (Tellis). China, Iran, and India all constitute viable and important avenues for Armenia to explore while diversifying sources of support. However, none alone offer the level of security and investment promised by Russia or the West.

In summary, the initial costs of pursuing Western funding for the Crossroads for Peace initiative will be high for Armenia and Western countries alike. Russia has spent decades curating the role of a protector to vulnerable nations to be exploited as instruments of foreign influence. Maintaining a strong sphere of influence over bordering countries is a high priority for Russian national security (Berls). Once Russia realizes that Armenia is shifting to the West, the response will likely be swift and hostile. Therefore, the largest opportunity cost for Armenia will be losing Russian support or even neutral inattention. However, Russia's actions (or lack thereof) during the attack on Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 have already stripped Armenia of territory, displaced thousands of individuals, and signaled to Azerbaijan that Russian intervention will not be a barrier to their territorial desires (Beato). The conflict of 2023 suggests that assuming that Russia will maintain security guarantees is dangerous, and given the demanding war in Ukraine, now would be the best time to risk a weakened Russia's aggression. By beginning to deepen economic connections with the West, Armenia will

create a viable path towards reduced dependence on Russia and stronger security guarantees.

V. Implementation Strategy

Implementing the Crossroads for Peace would involve cooperation with the Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Georgian governments to fully realize an interconnected and seamless network. . Given the deep-rooted history of conflict between these countries, this will be the most difficult barrier to implementation. For instance, Azerbaijan is intent on seizing the Zangezur Corridor, an extraterritorial corridor through Armenia's southernmost Syunik province that would connect Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan enclave (Ohanyan). Azerbaijan intends for Russian forces to perform border control and customs procedures in the corridor, excluding Armenia entirely (Institute of Security and Analysis). So, given Türkiye and Azerbaijan's repeated desire to isolate Armenia, the government must first work towards some semblance of a diplomatic agreement. This would likely benefit from third party support, potentially from a Western government or institutions like NATO or the EU, to mitigate competing state interests and historical trauma (De Waal). By framing the Crossroads for Peace initiative in terms of each state's self-interest, the peace process negotiations will be more effective (Paylan, S.). For Azerbaijan, it would provide a more direct route to European markets, while Türkiye could see enhanced trade corridors that bypass less stable regions (Paylan, S.). The infrastructure in Armenia would also place Türkiye in a strategic position as a power broker in the region, building political capital for the country on the global stage. Diplomatic relationships will likely have to remain entirely surface level in the initial stages, as it is unlikely that deep, generational trauma from conflicts will have a path to resolution before the countries become economically intertwined and Türkiye and Azerbaijan have repeatedly taken action to undermine Armenia's progress. Assistance from the West could be beneficial for supporting peace negotiations, backing Armenian promises, and ensuring compliance from Türkiye and Azerbaijan (Paylan, G.). However, pursuing trade connections and open borders is the first step towards Armenian security and future diplomatic relations with its neighbors.

The Crossroads for Peace initiative is led by the Prime Minister of Armenia, and the bodies operating under his authority would be vital for ensuring Armenia's security during the program's implementation. The Foreign Intelligence Service would be essential to identify Russian retaliatory threats and examine the shifting geopolitical scene to take advantage of Russian distraction to pursue Western assistance. The

National Security Service is also important to implement the diversification of Russian foreign policy and begin to build diplomatic bridges with neighboring nations. The initiative would also require interagency collaboration, given the proposal's complex security and economic aspects. The initiative would be supported by the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure. The Ministry of Economy would assist the Prime Minister in developing economic policy oriented away from Russia while simultaneously protecting domestic sectors during the transition. The Ministry of Finance would manage domestic funding sources for the infrastructure project. The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would collaborate to build relationships with Western nations as well as Türkiye and Azerbaijan while simultaneously looking to resolve overt tension with Russia. Lastly, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure would be essential for developing and managing the building of roads and railways and ensuring the viability of the transportation system.

VI. Time Horizons

The expected time horizons for the Crossroads for Peace initiative vary. There are multiple layers inherent to the implementation of the initiative. The first is the most technical and concrete aspect, which is the development and building of the infrastructure itself. The Crossroads for Peace plan involves both the restoration of existing roads and railroads and the creation of new ones (Pashinyan). In 2013, the European Investment Bank laid out a plan to restore the North-South Road Corridor (Bairaboina). This plan is currently in Phase 4, the construction of a 360 meter long tunnel and concrete road infrastructure between Agarak and Kajaran, so significant progress has been made (Bairaboina). What would be the most time-consuming would be the development and construction of new multiple roads running from East to West, as there is no existing infrastructure. While a limited number of roads already exist, mainly in the north, they would be unequipped to handle the high traffic rates necessary to make Armenia a central node in the trade network. Additionally, the roads are currently unconnected to the rest of the world, as the M5 highway ends a few miles short of the Türkiye-Armenia border (Google Maps). Armenia's construction industry is competent and booming due to recent foreign, individual, and government investments and loans (Arka News). However, the infrastructure construction is feasible within the next decade as the program can build on existing infrastructure.

The expected time horizons for diversifying foreign policy are much longer. Pursuing Western support for the Crossroads for Peace initiative is just one small step towards a broader goal of shifting away from Russia, pursuing economic and security guarantees, and seeking a way forward from the extreme violence that defines the historical relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan. To entirely disentangle the Armenian economy, society, politics, and security from Russia is unrealistic in the foreseeable future. However, given Prime Minister Pashinyan's steps, seeking alternative funding sources for infrastructure is another important step. A peace agreement with Azerbaijan and normalized relations with Türkiye are important but relatively distant goals (Kaleji). As the geopolitical atmosphere shifts, for instance, with the inevitable conclusion of the war in Ukraine or the implementation of policy from the incoming Trump administration, Armenia will have to reassess the potency of security risks and take advantage of moments of Russian weakness and Western warmth to pursue incremental security gains.

VII. Feasibility of the Policy

The biggest concern for procuring Western support is the deep generational conflicts between Armenia and Türkiye and Azerbaijan that remain unresolved. Armenia is a small country, and given the history of hostility from Türkiye and Azerbaijan, some wonder whether the West would even notice if either state attempted to absorb Armenia. At the commemoration of the 109th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, an Armenian protestor said, "genocide is the policy of the Turkish state [referring to Türkiye and Azerbaijan]" (Beato). Given that Türkiye and Azerbaijan are wealthier, more connected, and have existing ties to NATO and the West, it seems highly unlikely that Western governments will jeopardize these relationships to support Armenia wholeheartedly. Additionally, during Azerbaijan's attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, NATO remained neutral, turning a blind eye to Türkiye's role in fueling the conflict despite accusations of ethnic cleansing (Ghazal). Measures must be taken to fully convince the West of Armenia's potential. The Crossroads to Peace initiative would require building a diplomatic bridge between the three countries in the Caucasus, as the success of the trade networks would be impossible without regional collaboration (Paylin, S.).

Armenia is also dependent on Russia in almost every sector. Russia is Armenia's biggest trading partner, and many elite government officials and business owners depend on strong relationships with Russia. Russia provides more than 90% of

Armenia's natural gas and owns the pipeline infrastructure (Kochinyan). Russia also owns Armenia's railroads and electricity networks. However, access to Western markets can mitigate the impacts of Russian retaliation, and Western investments in infrastructure through the Crossroads for Peace initiative would make Russian infrastructure less essential. In terms of energy, gas pipes are already connecting Armenia to Iran, so gas can bypass Russia if necessary (Kochinyan). Diversification is always a challenge, and Armenia's situation is no different, given that its history is defined by Russia (De Waal).

Despite the geopolitical challenges, the West has displayed multiple instances of reciprocity towards Armenia's subtle attempts to break ties with Russia that indicate interest. The flow of arms from Russia dropped significantly upon Prime Minister Pashinyan's decision to freeze membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization. However, this gap was filled by arms shipments from France and India (De Waal). In 2023, the European Union also deployed a civilian border-monitoring mission with more than 200 personnel to Armenia to observe and report on the situation with Azerbaijan (EU Mission Armenia). In April 2024, the US Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the United States International Development Finance Corporation released a statement that pledged millions of dollars to Armenia to support humanitarian efforts, democratic protections, and security. The statement also included funding from USAID for "transport [strategies] supporting regional transportation integration, like the Armenian government's Crossroads of Peace initiative," with the goal of integrating Armenia into global trade routes (USAID). In 2024, the EU also promised to continue supporting Armenia and supplying non-lethal aid (Oxford Analytica). Most notably, Armenia made a risky move to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, meaning that if Putin were to visit Armenia, he could theoretically be arrested. This signaled to Western governments Armenia's potential for cooperation and growing animosity towards Russia. The seeds of a relationship with Western governments have been planted, but the Armenian government must make efforts to ensure that these relationships flourish.

VIII. Conclusion

Armenia is now at a critical juncture in developing foreign policy and domestic stability. The Crossroads for Peace initiative is the mechanism that can propel the nation into status as a regional hub for trade and logistics and provide an avenue toward friendly relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan (Fochtman). Remaining at the mercy of Russia is not a viable option for Armenia's security. Moscow indicated in 2023 that protecting Armenia is not feasible, either due to capabilities or other foreign policy interests. It is important that Armenia take advantage of this brief lapse in Russian attention to pursue alternative sources of security and prosperity. Prime Minister Pashinyan's Crossroads for Peace initiative is a crucial policy to revitalize Armenia's strategic and economic position, as well as lobby for diverse Western support.

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