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Tural Dadashov

Azerbaijan National Academy of Science

PhD student

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0071-1892>

tural1995pa@gmail.com

Armenia's Militarization: A Threat to Azerbaijan's National Security

Abstract

Armenia's post-2020 rearmament trajectory represents a fundamental shift in its defense doctrine and regional strategic orientation. Triggered by its defeat in the Second Garabagh War, Armenia has intensified military procurement through non-traditional partners—most notably France and India—marking a deliberate move away from Russia-centered dependency. This study provides an in-depth analysis of the implications of Armenia's changing military strategy for Azerbaijan's security and the South Caucasus security architecture.

Drawing on strategic analysis and defense data, the paper argues that Armenia's acquisition of long-range artillery systems (e.g., CAESAR howitzers, Pinaka MBRLs), advanced air defense platforms (e.g., Akash SAMs, Mistral MANPADS), and integrated radar systems significantly expands its capacity for preemptive and precision strikes. The forward deployment of these systems near volatile frontiers—including Lachin, Kalbajar, and Zangilan—directly threatens Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, airspace superiority, and critical infrastructure.

The analysis reveals that these procurements are not solely defensive but serve as instruments of coercive deterrence and strategic signaling. Moreover, the involvement of extra-regional actors in Armenia's military buildup introduces new power asymmetries and undermines existing mediation frameworks. The study concludes that Armenia's militarization undermines regional stability, exacerbates the arms race dynamic, and generates enduring strategic risks for Azerbaijan. Immediate policy recalibration is needed to deter escalation and preserve the fragile post-conflict balance in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: *South Caucasus, Armenia's Militarization, Azerbaijan's National Security, Strategic Deterrence, Military Procurement, regional stability*

Tural Dadaşov

Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası

doktorant

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0071-1892>

tural1995pa@gmail.com

Ermənistanın hərbiləşməsi: Azərbaycanın milli təhlükəsizliyinə təhdid

Xülasə

Ermənistanın 2020-ci ildən sonrakı hərbiləşmə trayektoriyası onun müdafiə doktrinasında və regional strateji mövqelənməsində kəskin bir transformasiyanı ifadə edir. İkinci Qarabağ müharibəsindəki məğlubiyyətindən sonra Ermənistan ənənəvi təhlükəsizlik təminatçısı olan Rusiyadan uzaqlaşaraq, Fransa və Hindistan kimi qeyri-ənənəvi tərəfdaşlarla hərbi əməkdaşlığı genişləndirməyə başlamışdır. Bu tədqiqat Ermənistanın dəyişən hərbi strategiyasının Azərbaycanın milli təhlükəsizliyi və Cənubi Qafqazın təhlükəsizlik arxitekturası üçün yaratdığı fəsadları dərin təhlil edir.

Strateji analiz və müdafiə sahəsindəki məlumatlara əsaslanan araşdırma göstərir ki, Ermənistanın uzaqmənzilli artilleriya sistemləri (məsələn, CAESAR özüyəriyən haubitsaları, Pinaka

yaylın atəş sistemləri), müasir hava hücumundan müdafiə kompleksləri (Akash ZRK-ları, Mistral MANPADS) və integrasiya olunmuş radar sistemləri əldə etməsi onun əvvəlcədən zərbə endirmə və yüksək dəqiqlikli hücum qabiliyyətlərini əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə artırmışdır. Bu sistemlərin Laçın, Kəlbəcər və Zəngilan kimi həssas sərhəd ərazilərində yerləşdirilməsi Azərbaycanın ərazi bütövlüyünə, hava məkanına üstünlüyünə və kritik infrastrukturuna birbaşa strateji təhlükə yaradır. Tədqiqat göstərir ki, bu silahlanma yalnız müdafiə xarakteri daşmır, eyni zamanda məcburedici çəkəndirmə və strateji siqnalvermə vasitəsidir. Regiondankənar aktorların bu prosesə cəlb olunması isə güc balansında yeni assimetriyalar yaradır və mövcud vasitəçilik mexanizmlərinin effektivliyini zəiflədir. Nəticə etibarilə, Ermənistanın hərbiləşməsi regional sabitliyi sarsıdır, silahlanma yarışını dərinləşdirir və Azərbaycanın milli təhlükəsizliyi üçün davamlı strateji təhdidlər formalaşdırır.

Açar sözlər: *Cənubi Qafqaz, Ermənistanın hərbiləşməsi, Azərbaycanın milli təhlükəsizliyi, strateji çəkəndirmə, hərbi satınalma, regional sabitlik*

Introduction

Armenia's Defense Budget Trends (2020–2025)

Armenia's post-war defense posture reflects an aggressive fiscal and doctrinal recalibration aimed at recovering military parity and establishing deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis Azerbaijan. From 2020 to 2025, Armenia increased its defense expenditure from \$634 million to \$1.7 billion, a growth of approximately 167% (Armenia Ministry of Finance, 2023). The defense budget's share of GDP rose from 4.98% in 2020 to over 6.5% in 2025, making it one of the highest in the region in relative terms (Caspian Policy Center, 2023). The composition of Armenia's military budget also shifted significantly. A larger proportion has been redirected from personnel and administrative costs toward weapons procurement, technological upgrades, and foreign military training programs. This transformation coincides with Armenia's pivot from Russian-made arms to Western and Asian suppliers, which has been interpreted by analysts as part of a broader strategic realignment (AIR Center, 2023; RUSI, 2023).

Research

Unlike pre-2020 defense spending patterns, which focused on legacy Soviet equipment and static border defense, post-war allocations have been aimed at enhancing mobility, precision-strike capability, and intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance (ISR) systems. These capabilities support both defensive and offensive operations, blurring the distinction between deterrence and provocation.

Despite the relative size of the Armenian economy, these increases are considered fiscally unsustainable. In 2025, the country is projected to run a budget deficit of over 5.5% of GDP, driven in part by its elevated military expenditures (EVN Report, 2024). Critics within Armenia have expressed concern over the long-term social costs of militarization, including underinvestment in civilian sectors and rising dependency on external arms providers.

From a comparative perspective, Azerbaijan's 2025 defense budget is forecasted at \$5 billion, nearly triple that of Armenia in nominal terms. However, the rapid pace of Yerevan's military investment, particularly in advanced strike and surveillance technologies, is closing the capability gap, thereby intensifying the regional arms competition (SIPRI, 2023; Azernews, 2024).

The data strongly suggest that Armenia's defense budget is no longer reactive but rather part of a systematic and externally supported rearmament strategy that has direct implications for peace, stability, and the future of military balance in the South Caucasus

2. France and India's Role in Armenia's Rearmament

In the wake of its 2020 military defeat, Armenia strategically diversified its defence partnerships by forging bilateral military cooperation agreements with France and India—two countries that have since become its most significant arms suppliers outside of Russia. These partnerships signify not only a shift in procurement sources but also reflect a broader political realignment with far-reaching implications for regional power dynamics.

France: Political Endorsement Coupled with Lethal Aid

France's involvement transcends symbolic support. In 2022 and 2023, Paris and Yerevan signed multiple defence agreements, leading to the delivery or confirmed future transfers of advanced military hardware. These include:

- **Mistral MANPADS** (range: 6 km; target types: helicopters, drones, low-flying aircraft)
- **Thales Ground Master 200 and 400 radar systems** (range: 250–450 km; functions: multi-role surveillance, air defense targeting)
- **Tactical communications equipment** and command-and-control platforms for battlefield coordination
- **CAESAR 155mm self-propelled howitzers** (range: 40+ km; role: precision artillery support)

These systems are primarily deployed in Armenia's southern regions, including **Syunik and Vayots Dzor**, areas in proximity to Azerbaijan's strategic transportation corridors and border zones (Commonspace.eu, 2023). While French officials present these transfers as "stabilizing," the tactical potential of these systems to support offensive posturing has raised alarms in Baku (AIR Center, 2023).

India: Emerging Strategic Supplier

India's defence relationship with Armenia has grown exponentially since 2022, resulting in arms deals reportedly exceeding **\$400 million** (Jamestown Foundation, 2022). Indian-provided systems include:

- **Pinaka Mk-I and Mk-II MBRL systems** (range: 40–75 km; capability: area saturation, rapid deployment)
- **Akash SAMs** (range: 25–30 km; targets: aircraft, cruise missiles, drones)
- **Swathi Weapon Locating Radar** (range: 50 km; function: enemy artillery detection and counter-battery fire)

These assets drastically improve Armenia's battlefield awareness and reaction time, allowing for **real-time tracking and interception** of Azerbaijani positions near contested zones, especially around **Kalbajar, Lachin, and Zangezur** (EVN Report, 2024).

Strategic Ramifications

Collectively, these military acquisitions have expanded Armenia's tactical horizon from a static defense model to a **mobile, surveillance-integrated, and long-range strike-capable force**. The presence of foreign-supplied precision-guided munitions and tracking systems challenges the regional deterrence equilibrium and introduces new escalation dynamics.

From a doctrinal standpoint, these developments also mark a transition from "reactive deterrence" to **pre-emptive defence logic**, particularly in contested zones. This shift not only jeopardizes Azerbaijani border security but also threatens to entrench a permanent state of militarized tension in the South Caucasus (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2023).

3. Strategic Threats to Azerbaijan's National Security

Armenia's militarization—underpinned by advanced weaponry from France and India—poses multifaceted threats to Azerbaijan's national security.

3.1 Weapon Deployment Near Sensitive Borders

The deployment of newly acquired systems, particularly in Armenia's Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces, places Azerbaijani regions such as Kalbajar, Lachin, and Zangilan under the effective range of offensive systems like the Pinaka MBRL and CAESAR howitzers. This enables Armenia to conduct cross-border saturation fire or surgical strikes against both military and critical infrastructure targets (EVN Report, 2024; AIR Center, 2023). The increased firepower near the Lachin Corridor—an essential logistical artery—further amplifies the strategic vulnerability of Azerbaijan's border territories.

3.2 Air Superiority and Drone Vulnerability

Armenia's acquisition of French and Indian air defence systems, including Mistral MANPADS and Akash SAMs, introduces a layered aerial denial structure capable of intercepting both manned aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles. These systems are calibrated to specifically target the types of drones that proved decisive for Azerbaijan in 2020, including Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2s and Israeli Harop loitering munitions (SIPRI, 2023).

3.3 Threats to Civilian Infrastructure

With artillery systems capable of reaching 40–75 km into Azerbaijani territory, Armenia's rearmament also endangers key civilian infrastructure—including hydroelectric plants, highways, and rail lines such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. In addition, the Zangezur corridor, a planned transnational economic route linking mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan, lies within effective artillery and rocket range, exposing it to potential disruption or sabotage (Jamestown Foundation, 2022).

3.4 Strategic Misinformation and Psychological Pressure

Beyond physical threats, the militarization campaign is being accompanied by an information warfare effort, aiming to present Armenia as a rising military power and sow doubt about Azerbaijan's deterrence credibility. This contributes to a political narrative that emboldens hardline elements within Armenian society and complicates peacebuilding initiatives (Mediamax, 2024; Howell, 2023).

3.5 Long-Term Escalation Scenarios

The fusion of new technologies with aggressive deployment near conflict-prone areas increases the risk of miscalculation. Short decision windows, enabled by real-time targeting radars and ISR platforms, reduce the margin for de-escalation. Combined with nationalist rhetoric and external backing, this creates a volatile situation in which even a tactical-level incident could trigger a broader military engagement (RUSI, 2023).

Armenia's new force posture, thus, does not merely enhance its defence but redefines its strategic intent—placing Azerbaijan in a position of perpetual vigilance, and eroding the strategic equilibrium established after 2020 (Novruz, 2025).

Conclusion

Armenia's post-war militarization reflects a deliberate shift from reactive defence to assertive deterrence, underpinned by expanded defence spending and strategic arms acquisitions from France and India. This transformation has significantly increased the threat to Azerbaijan's national security by enhancing Armenia's long-range strike capabilities, degrading airspace stability, and exposing critical infrastructure to potential attacks.

Rather than restoring balance, Armenia's rearmament is fuelling a regional arms race and undermining fragile security dynamics in the South Caucasus. Without timely diplomatic and strategic responses, this trajectory risks entrenching a protracted security dilemma and escalating regional tensions.

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