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Small States in the Changing Global Order: Prospects for Armenia's Foreign and Security Policy in the New Middle East

Малые государства в условиях меняющегося мирового порядка: перспективы внешней и оборонной политики Армении на Новом Ближнем Востоке

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Abstract. Introduction. The ongoing transformation of the global order has significantly altered the security landscape in the South Caucasus and wider — Eurasia, as evidenced by the 2020 Artsakh War and the 2022 Ukraine conflict. **Goals.** The paper examines how these shifts impact the foreign and security policy planning of small states, with Armenia as a case study. It analyzes the evolving geopolitical environment in the region, focusing on the strategic interests of key actors — Russia, Turkey, the US, and the EU — and their implications for Armenia. The main novelty of the article is some specific emphasis on the fact of geopolitical importance of the transforming Middle East for the South Caucasus and Armenia, in particular. **Materials and methods.** Involving strategic documents, official statements, discourse analysis, and expert interviews, the study evaluates Armenia's multi-vector foreign policy since its independence (1991) and explores its capacity for strategic maneuvering or geopolitical realignment amid systemic changes. The paper applies neorealist theory, particularly the black box concept, to assess Armenia's adaptation strategies, including its efforts to position itself as a regional connectivity hub between East-West and North-South transport corridors. Methodologically, the research employs discourse analysis, scenario modeling, and trade/economic indicators, as well as the expert interviews. **Results.** The article examines the emerging geopolitical landscape of the region after the Artsakh War and the Ukrainian crisis. The analysis of key players (Russia, Turkey, USA, EU) and their interests identifies the main factors of change, which in turn largely determine Armenia's foreign policy course. The study focuses on strategic documents, official statements, discourse analysis, and expert interviews to determine Armenia's strategic priorities. The concept of a multi-vector foreign policy that Armenia has pursued since gaining independence in 1991 is also considered. Based on theoretical approaches to the study of foreign policy planning of small states, the work assesses the possibilities for strategic maneuver or 'geopolitical choice' in the changing world order. The article refers to the neorealist theory of the 'black box', arguing that in the conditions of the new reality, Armenia seeks to adapt and ensure its own security, and position itself as a connecting node between the East-West and North-South transport corridors.

Keywords: Armenia, New Middle East, South Caucasus, Artsakh War, small states, geopolitics, foreign policy, international order, black box theory

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Аннотация. Введение. Трансформация мирового порядка оказывает значительное влияние на архитектуру безопасности в различных регионах мира, включая Южный Кавказ. Карабахская война 2020 г. наглядно продемонстрировала изменение стратегической среды в регионе, а начавшийся в 2022 г. конфликт на Украине еще более отчетливо обозначил фундаментальные сдвиги в Евразии. В данной статье исследуется, как эти изменения влияют на формирование внешней и оборонной политики малых государств на примере Армении. Анализируется воздействие глобальных процессов на систему безопасности Южного Кавказа и Евразии в тесной взаимосвязи с изменениями, происходящими на формируемом Новом Ближнем Востоке. **Методы.** Методологически работа сочетает дискурс-анализ, изучение стратегических документов, анализ торгово-экономических показателей, сценарное моделирование и экспертные интервью. **Результаты.** В статье рассматривается складывающийся геополитический ландшафт региона после Карабахской войны и украинского кризиса. На основе анализа ключевых игроков (Россия, Турция, США, ЕС) и их интересов выявляются основные факторы изменений, которые в свою очередь во многом определяют внешнеполитический курс Армении. Исследование опирается на стратегические документы, официальные заявления, дискурс-анализ и экспертные интервью, чтобы определить стратегические приоритеты Армении. Также рассматривается концепция многовекторной внешней политики, которую Армения проводит с момента обретения независимости в 1991 г. На основе теоретических подходов к изучению внешнеполитического планирования малых государств авторы оценивают возможности для стратегического маневра или «геополитического выбора» в условиях меняющегося мирового порядка. Статья обращается к неореалистической теории «черного ящика», аргументируя, что

в условиях новой реальности Армения стремится адаптироваться для обеспечения собственной безопасности и позиционировать себя как связующий узел между транспортными коридорами Восток-Запад и Север-Юг.

Ключевые слова: Армения, Новый Ближний Восток, Южный Кавказ, Арцахская война, внешняя политика, новый миропорядок, малые страны, теория «чёрного ящика»

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by global transformations in international relations. They include, inter alia, the currently evolving new world order, which influences the global security system and the strategic environment in many areas of the world by virtue of a knock-on effect.

In this context, one of the key issues in current international relations is the future face of the new world order in 5, 10 or 20 years. Different notions, sometimes mutually exclusive, are used to describe it: a new world order, chaos, quantum, polycentric and multipolar world, and a world without poles, to name a few.

Without getting too deep into an academic dispute on formulas, it is still possible to argue that the changes in the world order boil down to the consolidation and restoration of Russia's positions at the global stage, which were lost after the Soviet Union's collapse, strategic uncertainty and the EU's search for a geopolitical future, a shift of the US strategic focus to the Asia – Pacific, the growth and expansion of China's interests and influence, as well as the rise of 'middle powers' and the painful creation of a New Middle East. Therefore, global turbulence and uncertainties heavily impact regional security architectures in various parts of the world, making some actors leave and bringing in new ones.

Particularly, the transformation of security landscape for Armenia means a decrease in the US strategic interest towards the South Caucasus, uncertainty about the EU's role, rise of China and India, as well as Turkey's growing regional ambitions. For Russia, the South Caucasus remains a sphere of exclusive interests. However, more and more Russian scholars start question this approach, while the con-

tinuing conflict in Ukraine pushes Russia's focus almost exclusively on Ukraine [[Paronyan, Elamiryan 2021: 259](#)].

This evolving new world order is creating also a certain geopolitical vacuum in the South Caucasus, which neighboring and nearby regional powers — Turkey, Iran, as well as Israel and Arab, mainly Gulf, states — are striving to fill. This dramatic increase in the number of active players vying for influence in the South Caucasus raises the stakes in this complex geopolitical struggle while simultaneously complicating the situation for the region's own countries — Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

Consequently, the main challenge for Armenia is to realize the role and place of small and medium countries in the new global and regional environments because of the growth of global turbulence and uncertainty. In addition, the ongoing transformation of the world order has set forth the imperative of revising one's place and role in international relations and shaping one's geopolitical future.

Over time, these factors are going to have significant impacts on Armenia's foreign policy making. Hence, the main challenge for Armenia is to realize its role and place in the new global and regional environments, as well as to understand and revise the currently evolving security landscape shaping its geopolitical future.

The article argues that the South Caucasus has historically been intertwined with the Middle East and has long served as an arena for rivalry between global empires and regional powers. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) War, the geopolitical influence of the Middle East has markedly expanded toward the South Caucasus. This shift is evident not only in the unprecedented increase of Tur-

key's role, potential spillover of the Iran – Israel rivalry into the region but also, and perhaps more critically, in the intensifying competition among key Middle Eastern powers — namely, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Gulf states — for regional hegemony [Karapetyan 2024: 222]. The paper concentrates on Armenia's foreign policy priorities, as well as presents the decisive impact of the last Artsakh War on Armenia's foreign and security policy.

The most important element of the paper is evaluation of the new regional security architecture in the South Caucasus in close connection with the recent developments in the Middle East and the presentation of four possible scenarios for Armenia's geopolitical future.

Finally, the paper applies Kenneth Waltz's black box theory and tests its applicability to explain Armenia's current foreign policy.

2. Transformations and new dynamics in Armenia's security and foreign policy

2.1. Armenia's Foreign Policy: From Complementary to Cooperation

Since its independence in 1991, Armenia has not introduced its Foreign Policy Strategy as a document. However, the main principles of Armenia's foreign policy making can be traced in two National Security Strategies of Armenia, official reports, and interviews. For that reason, we are going to analyze and compare two national security strategies — those of 2007 and 2020 [National Security Strategy 2007; National Security Strategy 2020]. The first one was adopted long before the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and was active till summer 2020. The other one was developed and adopted by the current Armenian government. As a result, the analysis and comparison of some important points of the two documents will allow to reveal differences and similarities which demonstrate the potential transformational trends in Armenian foreign policy.

The National Security Strategy of Armenia adopted in 2020 (Strategy) by the new government that came to power after the so called 'Velvet Revolution' followed the previous one adopted in 2007 — by prioritizing the strategic relations with Russia, special focus on the US and European family (the US comes before Europe), as well as accentuation of cooperation with the neighbors.

The Strategy of 2007 specifies three layers of Armenia's external security strategy: international, regional, and pan-Armenian ones [Oskanian 2013: 89].

According to the Strategy, Azerbaijan and the use of force by Azerbaijan in the context of the Karabakh conflict remains the main threat to Armenia's security.

However, the new 2020 Strategy is much clearer to define Azerbaijan as the number one threat.

A similar transformation the Strategy faced regarding Turkey. The former version was quite clear in Armenia's desire to normalize the relations with its western neighbor. We saw those attempts when Serzh Sargsyan, the second President of Armenia who inherited the post from his teammate Robert Kocharyan in 2008, started the so called 'football diplomacy' [Farmanyan 2023: 448].

The 2020 Strategy demonstrates a more realistic stance toward Turkey compared to previous approaches. It explicitly criticizes Turkey's unneighborly policy toward Armenia, highlighting its continued blockade, refusal to establish diplomatic relations without preconditions, and denial — and in some cases, justification — of the Armenian Genocide, as well as Turkey's military-political support for Azerbaijan to pursue a military resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict [Shougarian 2016: 21].

At the same time, there is not more focus on Georgia and Iran in comparison with the former one [National Security Strategy 2020: 12].

Provided the fact that Armenia is a landlocked country and its connection with the external world goes through Georgia and Iran, the relations should be strived to be on the level of strategic cooperation.

However, given the complex West-Iran and Russia – Georgia relations, it is enormously hard for Yerevan to balance in its relations with the neighbors. On the other hand, given Armenia's good relations with all the four powers opens a window of opportunities to facilitate dialogue among them. Though this be a complex task, it can be implemented in case of successful Armenian diplomacy, which might also involve potential of the Armenian dias-

pora. Both strategies outline the relations with Russia, US, EU, stability in Georgia and Iran. Additionally, the Strategy prioritizes relations with India and China. This is not new, and the older version also touches upon both India and China. However, the older version mentions India and China as part of the Asia Pacific, while the new one views them without their regional ties.

Interestingly, there is a much more comprehensive stop on Armenia's multilateral cooperation in the previous version than in the latest one. This might resemble the general decline of multilateral diplomacy and roles of international organizations over the last thirteen years.

The approaches towards the CSTO and NATO remain quite similar, while not much attention is paid to them in both the Strategies.

But what is of particular significance is that continuous expanding cooperation with Middle Eastern states is cited among Armenia's priorities.

In its turn, for the first time since independence the new Middle Eastern strategy drafted in the Armenian Foreign Ministry acknowledges that Armenia is aimed to come back to the Middle East — to its historical area of natural life and development [Interview 2020].

Thus, at the strategic level, Armenia's foreign policy priorities remain largely consistent. However, the evolving geopolitical landscape has introduced critical nuances that reflect broader shifts in the emerging world order. Notably, these developments underscore — for the first time in Armenia's modern foreign policy — the growing strategic significance of the Middle East as a key factor in regional security and alliance-building [Foreign Policy]. The explicit articulation of the need for Armenia to be involved in the regional security system of the Middle East marks a significant evolution in Yerevan's strategic thinking.

2.2. Second Artsakh War and Geopolitics of the South Caucasus

On 27 September 2020, Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey launched a new war against the non-recognized Republic of Artsakh. The conflict was frozen after the First Karabakh War of 1992–1994 with trilateral Ceasefire Agreement of May 1994. The OSCE Minsk

Group — with the co-chairmanship of Russia, US, and France — was leading the peace talks.

Though the ceasefire regime was constantly being violated during these years and very often Azerbaijan was claiming to shift the peace talks to the UN umbrella, however, there was a general recognition of the Minsk Group with the co-chairmanship format and the fact that Russia, US, and France have the exclusive right to deal with the conflict resolution [Nalbandian 2019: 256].

With the Karabakh conflict being the number one foreign policy issue for Armenia, the talks format has been under no question by Armenia's authorities since the format was established in the mid-1990s. The situation has not changed after the Revolution.

However, the last Artsakh War has profoundly altered the security landscape not only for Armenia, Artsakh, and Azerbaijan, but the regional security architecture in general, or to be more precise, it demonstrated the already transformed reality and made it explicit.

For the first time after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey openly supported Azerbaijan and demanded full participation in the peace talks with Russia (without the US and France) [In threat 2024]. Being one of the most important security issues not only in the South Caucasus but also in post-Soviet space in general, if succeeded, the new format would mean a complete change of the security architecture in the wider region. Russia and Armenia then opposed Turkey's participation — each of them for own reasons. Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs made this clear in June 2021, stating that if Turkey entered the peace-building process in Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran, as a regional power, should have the same privileges [Foreign Minister 2021].

On the other hand, Turkey is continuing strengthening its positions in Azerbaijan, most probably, with the aspiration of further expansion both in the South Caucasus and further to Central Asia.

Thus, the dualism of the period is that Russia recognizes the region as a sphere of major or even exclusive interests, seeing it as a part of the post-Soviet space, while Turkey is returning to the South Caucasus through its alliance with Azerbaijan.

However, what has already happened is the gradual shift of the South Caucasus from being an exclusive part of the post-Soviet space towards the Middle Eastern agenda. Thus, looking back to the end of 2020, one could claim that the last Artsakh War has significantly changed the power balance in the South Caucasus and beyond, particularly, strengthening Russia's and Turkey's positions, weakening the positions of the West (or fully removing from the peace process), but also creating a very fragile power balance on the ground which, as the later history shows, collapsed very shortly with slight refocusing of Russia's attention towards Ukraine.

The new status quo significantly contributed to the transformation and implementation of an updated Azerbaijani strategy towards Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia, inter alia, in the form of hybrid warfare. The new reality has triggered a new wave of hybrid war against Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia, ended with ethnic cleansing of the non-recognized state and ongoing conflict with the Republic of Armenia.

2.3. *Small States in Transforming Global Environment*

For long time it was believed that as Thucydides put 'the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept' [Small States 2014: 21; The Success 2023: 14].

However, the developing new world order and rapid technological transformations are fostering the development of a qualitatively new reality, where small states might be more jeopardized, but will have also a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the formation of a more fair, responsible, and prosperous reality for the international system, in general, and for themselves. To reveal and materialize those opportunities, first we need to understand the essence of the concept of 'small states'.

There is an ongoing debate about the definition of 'small states' in professional literature. There are two main approaches towards the understanding of the concept — quantitative and qualitative (or objective and relativist) ones.

The quantitative (or objective) approach is measuring 'smallness' based on such parameters, as territory, population size, geography,

size of economy (GDP) and markets, military power, and so on.

However, especially in post-Cold War era, the quantitative approach received tough critique for not being able to comprehensively explain the place and role of small states in international system, as well as the challenges they face and the opportunities they have [Elman 1995: 174].

Baldur Thorhallsson argues that territory and economy can be not much useful on their own: "*Having a small territory creates some advantages and disadvantages but these challenges are not particularly pronounced <...> It is possible for a state with little territory to have a large population, economy and military capability; and thus, be powerful. On the other hand, states with extensive territory can also have little power*" [Thorhallsson 2018: 17]. Comparison of much smaller but much more powerful Switzerland with larger but weaker Mali is a clear reflection of the above.

Thus, the other approach to conceptualize the notion of small states is the relativist one, which is discussing 'smallness' in relativist terms [Sarkissian 2023: 16].

According to Robert Steinmetz "*smallness and power are relativist terms, which can be defined in relationship with other states. Particularly, they suggest focusing on asymmetries*" [Small States 2014: 16].

Clive Archer and his colleagues continue this approach and argue that "*being a small state is tied to a specific spatial-temporal context and that this context — rather than general characteristics of the state defined by indicators such as its absolute population size or its military expenditure relative to other states — is decisive for both the nature of challenges and opportunities, and the small states' answer to these challenges and opportunities*" [Small States 2014: 58]. They continue and explain that smallness in their perception is a comparative and not an absolute idea. According to them, this means that it is necessary to distinguish between issue areas where the notion of small state is relevant, and issue areas where it is not, depending on a particular set of security problems and foreign policy dilemmas.

Consequently, thinking in relativist terms means that based on specific situations, a state

might be stronger or weaker than its counterpart.

For instance, Denmark or many other states might be considered small in comparison with the United Kingdom. On the other hand, Denmark will not be considered small in comparison with Iceland.

In this regard, the former President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian (2018–2022) outlines three fundamental components, which determine the fate of a small state — a strong foundation for identity and purpose, national mission and strong leadership, articulated vision and strategic planning [Sarkissian 2023: 16].

Thus, it can be concluded that nowadays there is no consensus among scholars on the universal definition of small states. On the other hand, given the current transformations in world politics, as well as the evolving results of technological changes, states can be effective and relatively powerful if they enjoy internal stability, wise governance, and can effectively neutralize external threats.

One thing is clear — smallness is a relative parameter. This means that being small does not mean being weak or failed. Moreover, small states have an advantage, as they can be much more flexible and adaptive to the evolving reality, than their larger counterparts. This is especially true, if they can feel the change, have a clear vision, and are determined to act.

2.4. Discussion: Four Scenarios for The Geopolitical Future of Armenia

One of the key elements of structural realism is the concept of ‘black box’. It means that domestic structure cannot impact the foreign policy of a given state as it is predominantly formed by the international environment [International Relations 2021: 9].

Given the little change in strategic approaches towards foreign policy making during the last twenty years, saying the least, one would think that the concept of ‘black box’ works well in case of Armenia.

However, the current transformations in international system — especially, the results of the Second Artsakh War and the currently evolving conflict in Ukraine — make Armenia rethink its foreign and security policy. The Second Artsakh War has become a very explicit demonstration of this misunderstanding of the

tendencies in international relations and global politics. Therefore, the ‘black box’ is changing, given that the structure of international system faces a transformation. This makes the political elites in Armenia re-evaluate and reformulate the foreign policy strategy, adjusting it to the new reality in the context of the new global and regional agendas. The above may entail the following scenarios of geopolitical future for Armenia.

2.5. Further Integration with Russia

The results of the Second Artsakh War have significantly increased Russia’s influence in Armenia. This was, particularly, about Russia’s peacekeepers in Artsakh, Russian military and border forces in Armenia’s Syunik Province, uncertainty with the fate of the OSCE Minsk Group, and so on. At the same time, the rising threat of military intervention of Azerbaijan (fully supported by Turkey) in Armenia was increasing Armenia’s dependence on Russia’s military force. Additionally, the Government of Armenia was discussing with Russia the opportunity to deploy Russia’s border forces on the Armenia – Azerbaijan border [Armenia – Russia 2022: 34]. All those developments might have fundamentally impacted the foreign policymaking of Armenia, shifting it from a more balanced multi-vector foreign policy agenda to the one more unilateral with Russia. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has precipitated a fundamental restructuring of Eurasian energy transit networks, with Russian gas exports and re-export operations increasingly dependent on Turkish and Azerbaijani transportation infrastructure. This shift has engendered a condition of asymmetric interdependence, wherein Moscow’s strategic flexibility in the South Caucasus has become constrained by its reliance on Ankara and Baku.

Russia’s ‘Special Military Operation in Ukraine’ has quite significantly changed the geopolitical environment in the South Caucasus, making Russia almost fully re-focus onto Ukraine and pushing the West engage closer with the region and Armenia, in particular. This is pushing Armenia to reconsider its foreign and security policy. On the other hand, the major question is what is going to happen when the conflict in Ukraine is over or freezes.

However, the current global development and regional situation present new opportuni-

ties for Moscow and Yerevan to reevaluate and fully reset their strategic alliance — established at the end of the last century on the foundation of shared long-term geopolitical and geo-economic interests, as well as enduring civilizational and value-based principles.

2.6. *Developing Cooperation with Turkey*

Normalization of relations with Turkey might be another scenario for Armenia.

In 2009–2010, the third President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan — via the so-called ‘football diplomacy’ — initiated an Armenia – Turkey rapprochement which failed shortly after the sides signed the so-called Zurich Protocols [Farmanyan 2023: 435].

Nowadays, with the rising role of middle powers and particularly that of Turkey, there are some strong voices in the Armenian government to start the process of normalizing relations with Turkey. Ankara also came up with such a suggestion shortly after the last Artsakh war, initiating a so-called ‘Platform of Six’ and inviting Armenia to join (after it recognizes the results of the war) [Transformation 2024: 86]. Given the rise of Turkey and its rather significant role in the South Caucasus and Middle East, its continuing membership in the NATO, as well as persistent unilateral efforts of current Armenia’s government to balance Russia’s presence in Armenia with Turkey, Armenia – Turkey rapprochement might be another scenario for geopolitical future of Armenia.

2.7. *Third Scenario: What about the West?*

There are a few tendencies regarding strategic presence of the West in the South Caucasus and particularly in relations with Armenia.

The first tendency is about the decline of US strategic interests in the region. The second tendency is about rather strong EU presence in the region and in Armenia, but in terms of soft power and economic cooperation. Finally, after the start of the current phase of the conflict in Ukraine, the US and the West in general demonstrated an increasing interest towards the region, inter alia, facilitating the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

With the rising great power competition, ‘return’ of the role of hard power in international relations, and rising role of Turkey in the region, including in terms of hard power, the West might face gradual decline in its strate-

gic presence in the region and Armenia. On the other hand, if the West succeeds with the Armenia – Azerbaijan normalization process, and, as a result, normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey, this might qualitatively change balance of powers in the region, and significantly strengthen the Western footprint in the South Caucasus.

It is also important to note that while a military alliance between Armenia and Europe — particularly France — is possible, it faces logistical challenges. Such an alliance cannot be easily sustained by land or sea, partly due to the unpredictable domestic political situation in Georgia.

2.8. *Armenia as a Regional Hub*

Armenia is geographically located in the South Caucasus, a region that lies at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and acts as a connecting bridge between Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Its strategic liminality places it within the scope of what political geographers and strategic theorists refer to as the ‘Greater Middle East’ or ‘New Middle East’ — a concept that emerged in post-Cold War and post-9/11 geopolitical thought to describe a zone of overlapping security complexes and developmental challenges stretching from Morocco to Central Asia [Cornell 2024: 13].

Nowadays Armenia enjoys deep and comprehensive partnership with almost all global powers.

The Middle East is another key foreign policy vector for Armenia. Being historically part of that region, Armenia preserves close political, economic and humanitarian ties not only with Iran, with which it has a common border, but also with the majority of the region’s countries, Arab countries, in particular.

The above vectors of Armenia’s relations predetermine a model of its geopolitical future aimed at developing cooperation with Eurasian global and regional centres of power. In this scenario, Armenia re-evaluates the strategic environment in the world and the region and adapts its foreign policy strategy, priorities, and actions accordingly. In this respect, Armenia could pay special attention to the Middle East as a region of vital interests for Armenia and Armenians. Historically possessing, preserving and developing the strategic knowledge

and understanding of that region, Armenia may become an effective link and communicator between the Middle East, on the one hand, and Russia, the West and China, on the other. As a result, this scenario assumes developing Armenia as a regional hub to connect East and West, South and North, particularly, Russia and Europe with the Middle East and Indian Ocean, China with Europe.

3. Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the world order is changing and impacting security architecture on global, regional, and local levels. In the South Caucasus, the changing international order is resembled by the rising role of Turkey, ambiguity of the US strategic presence, uncertainty with the position of the EU and European powers, as well as an increasing role of China in the region as a soft power. The Second Artsakh War has clearly demonstrated that new reality. In the meantime, the evolving conflict in Ukraine has significantly transformed the security landscape in the South Caucasus, providing new parameters of the 'black box'. In this reality Armenia has several options to build its geopolitical future: closer integration with Russia; strengthened cooperation with Turkey; some pro-Western orientation; and its emergence as a stronghold and hub for the region and beyond. In the context of the regional balance of power shifting decisively in favor of the Turkey – Azerbaijan axis, the Arab world emerges as a natural strategic ally for Armenia capable of contributing to the restoration of equilibrium in the region. The Gulf states possess substantial potential to act as catalysts for Armenia's economic development while supporting its geopolitical interests in the evolving architecture of the New Middle East. Despite growing regional cooperation initiatives — such as the Abraham Accords and the

Middle East Economic Corridor — structural rivalries persist between key regional actors. This dynamic creates opportunities for Armenia to cultivate strategic partnerships with Arab states seeking to counterbalance Turkish influence. This strategic convergence suggests that Armenia's engagement with the Arab world is not merely a tactical adjustment but a structural realignment in response to the new geopolitical realities of the South Caucasus and the Middle East. Strong alliance with India is feasible, as Iran does not object to military shipments through its territory. For that Armenia must further strengthen military-political cooperation with India and deepen its strategic alliance with Iran across all domains.

Thus, the fourth scenario is the most beneficial for Armenia, as it allows the country to develop as a self-sufficient and powerful nation-state based on strategic sovereignty and national interests. That is the most complex scenario, especially given the developing new world order with rising major power competition. It demands strategic vision, skillful governance, and professional implementation to master the process. The realization of this scenario will largely hinge on the evolving dynamics in the Middle East. For Armenia, the potential deepening of a regional conflict involving Iran and Israel carries significant strategic uncertainty and the risk of severe consequences. In such a destabilized environment, the possibility of renewed hostilities targeting Armenia cannot be discounted. Azerbaijan may exploit the resulting disorder to pursue unilateral actions, including the forcible establishment of an extraterritorial corridor through Armenia's Syunik Province to Nakhichevan. These risks highlight the urgent need for Armenia to adopt a proactive and multifaceted approach to national security and regional diplomacy, with a focus on conflict prevention, deterrence, and strategic resilience.

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