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**A LOOK TO THE FUTURE:
KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ARMENIA'S RECENT
POLITICAL & MILITARY FAILURES²**

Following the ceasefire in 2020 that ended the Second Karabakh war between Azerbaijan on the one side and the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) Republic and Armenia on the other, military-political leadership in Armenia, inclusive of local institutes as well as diasporan initiatives, have pushed for more research to improve security policy, models of deterrence and doctrinal approaches to Armenian national strategic objectives. These new attempts after loss in 2020's 44-day war included both homegrown investigations as well as the work of groups like *Justice Armenia*, an Armenian American organization that aimed to uncover the last 15 years of military-political failures and strategic/operational negligence.

It is worth noting that the main elements of Armenia's militarily and national strategy doctrines were devised in 2007 with an update to military policy through Tonoyan's *Preemptive Strike Doctrine* (2019) and Pashinyan's new *National Strategy Doctrine* (2021)³. However, further research is critical for identifying takeaways from the 44-day war and to formulate new doctrines and strategies. In particular, additional work is needed to synthesize the local Investigative Committee's closed and open interviews with high-ranking officials, including Nikol Pashinyan, David Tonoyan, and Onik Kasparian, as well as *Justice Armenia's* access to a variety of off-the-record interviews with high-ranking officials, military representatives, members from MoD, air defense experts, drone experts, artillery regiments, special operation fighters, soldiers, and volunteers.

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² The article was submitted to the Editorial office on 01.04.2024.

³ Abrahamyan E., Jamestown, 2019. Rationalizing the Tonoyan Doctrine: Armenia's Active Deterrence Strategy. <https://jamestown.org/program/rationalizing-the-tonoyan-doctrine-armenias-active-deterrence-strategy/>. Also see Armenian MoD and MFA websites for the doctrines: <https://www.mfa.am/en/>, <https://www.mil.am/en> (download date: 14.02.24).

Notwithstanding nearly 20 years of efforts, the Second Artsakh War revealed critical weaknesses and a severe misunderstanding of the value of deterrence and retaliation. These miscalculations, lack of research, lack of unique and innovative doctrinal approaches, lack of adaptation to Azerbaijani posturing, and inadequate technical preparation shed light on critical shortcomings that plagued Armenian military planners, the Security Council, and MoD.

This paper begins with an examination of the key elements shaping Armenia and the diaspora, and their reactions to these events. After suggesting the value of exploring alternative responses, the paper segues into some main takeaways from the abovementioned reports and the 44-Day War in general, delving into reticence to retaliate, the importance of maintaining independence, and the choice of a variety of strategic partners. Then, the paper proposes the advantages of bridging gaps in knowledge by first, pushing for more research, outsourcing and inter-institute cooperation, and then, proposing new doctrinal approaches to the “Art of War”. Finally, the paper touches upon how misguided narratives influence national strategy and proposes necessary improvements from the government, media and diaspora using examples from the last 15 years.

The core purpose of this article, therefore, is to showcase the key areas of improvement for the Armenian nation, government, and national objectives and how these can revamp the current Soviet standard which plagues the traditionally structured system. Tying these threads together will improve transparency and fill in gaps in research beyond the capacity of the ministries and the MoD. Working with outsourced institutes or other open-source experts can vastly improve the speed that Armenia moves forward with its reform objectives, and increase its bandwidth for cooperation among institutes, military firms and the government with the goal of ultimately working toward a united objective towards a viable and strong Armenia.

Armenia’s Reaction in Hindsight

After the tumultuous events of the Genocide and forcible absorption into the Soviet Union, strategic preparation for defense and security structures was not taken up in any kind by the autonomous Armenian Republic – ArmSSR. With the pressures and choices from the top of the Soviet Union leadership prioritizing the empire, not Armenia, lay the foundation for Armenia relying on another state for security, rather than its own abilities and dedicated research. Already evident during and after the First Artsakh War, lack of creating and innovating towards the future are core problems that continue to plague Armenia today. The slow pace at which research and military science has prepared security policy in Armenia is evident in the slow set up of the Security Council

and development of new doctrines for nationwide objectives introduced in 2007. Open-source evidence suggests that doctrines were not subject to updates or revisions until Tonoyan's *Preemptive Strike Doctrine* 12 years later, yet even this amendment was insufficient to counter the resurgent Azerbaijani threat. While military education, including political science education through establishments such as the MoD NDRU (National Defense Research University) has seriously improved its military, strategic and security studies programs, no Armenian university offers a PHD in Military Science.

Nevertheless, "Total Defense" - a Scandinavian concept for defense policy, has been thoroughly researched by Hratchya Arzumanyan, an expert in Finnish/Scandinavian defense models, who has recently pushed his findings within military political circles in Armenia. Arzumanyan's efforts are an example of research conducted by institutes and experts rather than from government agencies. However, if government institutes devoted energy to such efforts after the first Artsakh war, we might have seen different outcomes⁴. Finland's model showcases unique characteristics, including a non-reliant attitude, and concept of neutrality derived from the idea that the nation must defend itself, in part explains Finland's decision not to join NATO for the last 50 years⁵. The acceptance of the loss of Karelia, a Finnish region lost to the Soviet Union in 1940, triggered the push for new doctrines and innovative strategies for defense and was the mainstay in looking within rather than outward⁶. Furthermore, an acceptance of reality rather than nationalism, and pragmatism over emotion has shaped the Finnish identity and national narrative, as well as its security apparatus⁷. Finland has created laws surrounding defense and an education system regarding "Total Defense" inclusive of creating a formidable conscription army, mandating a bunker underneath every building and sophisticated military traps set up all the way to the capital⁸. In contrast, Armenia has no known underground bunker systems or defense structures identified from available evidence⁹. Nor can one identify second strike (non-nuclear) platforms across Armenia post 1994 in preparation for a possible upcoming war, hinting that

⁴ Under the condition of anonymity an expert in military affairs attests to the weak efforts surrounding military science and doctrines including "Total War"

⁵ Hämmäläinen, U. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 2022. "Optio, jonka arvo vain nousee". <https://www.hs.fi/kuukausiliite/art-2000008551871.html> (download date: 17.03.24).

⁶ A discussion surrounding Finland's defense concepts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huwzf7Yg14U&t=36s> (download date: 16.03.24).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A look at Finland's extensive Total Defense application, bunker and fortifications. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=922Db-kziCo> (download date: 04.03.24).

⁹ An expert on Military and National Security issues who wishes to stay anonymous in an interview with the author states that there are no known underground bunkers or defense structures in Armenia including that of efforts during the Soviet Union or after the First Artsakh war.

Armenia was reluctant for “Total War” against Azerbaijan¹⁰. More importantly, no plans, preparations or secret fortifications can be identified either from available imagery, photo evidence, or leaks after the Second Artsakh war, suggesting that the same dynamic is currently at play.

Pre-2020 Failures

Reticence to retaliate is one of the key strategic failures from post-2020 research¹¹. In the years leading up to the war, Azerbaijani unchecked vandalism of Armenian stone crosses in New Julfa during 2003 and 2006 demonstrated Armenia’s pattern of reticence to escalate¹². Similarly, Azerbaijani tit-for-tat escalations showcased Armenia’s continued hesitation to retaliate on a militaristic level. Another example of the helicopter shot down by Azerbaijani forces in 2014 depicts not only a lack of flexibility on a subordinate level within the Armenian armed forces, but also a hesitancy to retaliate on a strategic level¹³. In addition, Azerbaijan advanced closer to the frontline through bold engineering works and trenches built, in some places, directly in front of Armenian trench lines¹⁴. Evidence from interviews with Armenian Spetsnaz units confirm that orders were clear not to fire on such engineering works¹⁵. Satellite imagery also corroborates engineering works laid out in front of Armenian trenches, all laid after the 1994 ceasefire agreement¹⁶. Finally, the loss of Lele Tepe in the 2016 Four-Day War also marked an undeniable weak military doctrine and will on the battlefield due to the defensive nature of the battles and relinquishing the mountain strip for unforeseen and unknown reasons¹⁷. Again in 2018, Azerbaijan’s advancement into Nakhichevan’s

¹⁰ Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., ‘44 Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

¹¹ Discussions around the 44-day report from the Justice Armenia’s Investigative team conclude that reticence to retaliate played a large role in Armenia falling victim to Azerbaijan’s military prowess. Ibid.

¹² Radio Liberty Chapple, A., 2020. When the World Looked Away: *The Destruction of Julfa Cemetery*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-julfa-cemetery-destruction-unesco-cultural-heritage/30986581.htmlb> (download date: 27.01.24).

¹³ The Guardian, 2014. Armenian military helicopter shot down by Azerbaijani forces, killing three. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/12/azerbaijani-forces-shoot-down-armenian-military-helicopter> (download date: 13.03.24). Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024) Chapter 4 discusses lack of individual or unit/group independent thinking and how it affected battlefield flow and initiative.

¹⁴ Check 39°27'22.39"N, 47°15'40.18"E file scroll between 2004 and 2010 to see Azerbaijani engineering works built right in front of Armenian trenches.

¹⁵ Interviews with special forces soldiers in the Armenian armed forces over the last 10 years have corroborated evidence regarding this issue of allowing engineering works to edge closer to Armenian-laid trenches.

¹⁶ Check 39°27'22.39"N, 47°15'40.18"E file scroll between 2004 and 2010 to see Azerbaijani engineering works built right in front of Armenian trenches.

¹⁷ A high ranking official under the condition of anonymity in an interview with the author mentioned

borderlands encountered no Armenian response, a testament to the entrenched static and hierarchical defense doctrine that influenced Armenian operational warfare¹⁸. This approach persisted into the 2020 Tavush/Tovuz escalation, where despite the new Preemptive Strike Doctrine formulated by Tonoyan, Armenian forces refrained from carrying out preemptive strikes and remained static, and continued battles defensive in nature albeit this time achieving success in taking the mountaintop¹⁹.

Political & Military Failures in the 2020 War

Following the Second Artsakh War, the government and institutes to a limited degree have improved their approach to research and formulating security policy, taking the lessons learned from the 44-Day War more seriously. However, a lack of coordinated effort between government institutes and non-governmental groups exists. In particular, the government has picked and chosen which lessons to learn from the 44-Day War including political immature driven politics. Initially, Pashinyan's government set the scene for the blame game, denouncing the previous government for both the precarious situation in Armenia and the loss of the war²⁰. For example, Pashinyan hinges his argument on the corrupt state that he inherited, however, *Justice Armenia's* report has refrained from discussing corruption as a major factor contributing to the loss of 44-Day War, alluding to the idea that corruption's role was weaker than originally imagined. Alternatively, pro-Serj advocates lay the entire blame of the war on Pashinyan; however, meticulous research by both the investigative teams have put the deep seated issues into perspective which outline the loss of the war as a consequence of system-structural military integration with Russia and an inherited Soviet doctrine, this has been corroborated by high- ranking officials from both ends of the political spectrum who wish to stay anonymous²¹. Other examples of laying blame exist within various circles that pursue party politics rather than cohesively attempting to understand failures and move forward, particularly when the research post 2020 war is available²². An example of

that experts brought up concerns about the defensive nature of the 2016 4-Day War battles in closed meetings between high-ranking officials.

¹⁸ Ingilizian M., 2018. *Azerbaijan Pushes into Nakhichevan Borderlands*. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2018/11/08/azerbaijan-pushes-nakhichevan-borderlands/> (download date: 12.02.24).

¹⁹ *Chapter 4* Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

²⁰ To see Pashinyan' blame game <https://hetq.am/en/article/125051> (12/02/24).

²¹ An interview with the author with a high-ranking official describes the deep seated issues as structural rather than political or individual. A second interview with another high ranking official also describes the nuances of failures as system based rather than party affiliated. This has been the consensus in discussions with high-ranking officials.

²² A look at an opinion contrary to research from both the 44-Day War investigations <https://armenianweekly.com/2022/04/06/equipping-armenia-to-defend-itself/> (download date: 29.03.24). Although this article came out before subsequent 44-Day War research conclusions, one can

skipping lessons learnt by the government from the 44-Day War inferences include attitudes/narrative such as Pashinyan’s “*peace at all costs*” narrative, which should instead prioritize new defense research and structures²³.

On the flip side, efforts to support unity and highlight successes are evident albeit the weaker paradigm at play. For example, Vahan Zanoian pushes for unity and a diasporan strategy that engages the diaspora as hands-on partners in Armenia, a facet he argues is critical for the success of any diaspora policy. Another policy research institute APRI (Applied Policy Research Institute) set up post Second Artsakh war is conducting research to support policy in Armenia with experts such Benjamin Poghosyan who advocates a careful and nuanced approach to strategic hedging. Homegrown Armenian think tanks are also funding new research and working towards stronger collaboration between non-governmental institutes and government, highlighting that positive efforts exist²⁴. However, efforts need to be cohesive and coordinated, with objectives planned out and based on national priorities, rather than ideology or party politics, and most importantly, spearheaded by the government.

Above all, maintaining independence and sovereignty is a major takeaway from research on the 44-Day War and preceding 15 years. Efforts to procure military hardware from a variety of strategic partners came to naught, epitomized by Sargsyan’s failure to seal a deal with China. Sargsyan quickly made a 180-degree turn and opted for a Russian loan instead, highlighting the difficulties in independent decision-making²⁵. Similarly, the switch from the European trade deal to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014 also showcased the Armenian government consistently making about-faces to appease Russia, a facet of subservience and dependence. Although independence is, to some degree, an illusion for small countries, the right to independence allows for more sustainable decision-making to support Armenia. More research is needed to find strategies to achieve these very important national objectives, with mature diplomacy achieving objectives such as reducing dependency, creating more sophisticated and accurate narratives, and garnering a cohesive front.

One of the more important takeaways from the 44-Day War has been the right to maintain a variety of strategic partners and push for multi-vector strategic policies. A

excuse the author however it highlights how opinions lacking specific research often are used to create narratives to support party politics.

²³ Abrahamyan E. discusses Armenian leadership’s steps as capitulation rather than a player in negotiations post 2020 war. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg-Yi6BHJKY&t=800s> (download date: 29.03.24).

²⁴ <https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/02/01/defining-nation-and-state/> (download date: 19.02.2024).

²⁵ A look at Armenia’s failed attempt to diversify with a military loan from China <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13491-russian-loan-allows-armenia-to-upgrade-military-capabilities.html?tmpl=component&print=1> (download date: 28.03.24).

high-ranking official under the condition of anonymity conveyed the limited support from Russian technical teams prior and post war and highlighted the difficulties Armenia faced in various sectors of its military, which included the slow pace of sales of various equipment especially – long-range weapons²⁶. Interviews with high-ranking officials have also outlined the disastrous effect of one main strategic ally and an over-reliance on this single partner²⁷. Other examples of this uni-vector policy are joint Armenian-Russian commands and forces²⁸. The current Armenian government is working to remedy this issue and is maintaining its right to nurture relationships with a variety of new strategic partners; whether this is the correct strategy is up for debate, but steps have been taken to pursue a multi-vector policy²⁹.

Following these two takeaways, investigations into the 44-Day War have identified the need for more research that fills research gaps evident in Armenia’s governmental and non-governmental institutes³⁰. A key priority must be identifying where this lack of research exists and working towards ways to bridge that gap. For example, both Britain and the US have an extensive network of outsourced firms for military research, security, think tanks and experts in a variety of non-governmental agencies that fill this need for defense research and policy acceleration. In Armenia’s case, vital miscalculations from a lack of thorough research came about based on decisions made on perceptions. For example, the politically-motivated belief that Armenia was the strongest military in the region contributed to complacency³¹. Similarly, the 2016 Four-

²⁶ Abrahamyan E, Ingilizian M, ‘44-Day War Report’, *Chapter 4* in unpublished report (forthcoming 2024) outlines lack of long-range weapons as a key factor of Armenia’s loss in the 44-Day War. See graph highlighting how Russian arms sales to Azerbaijan surpass Armenia. <https://posting.cc/zyrRCwPh> (download date: 25.03.24). See <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers> database to check the number of Smerch systems sold to Azerbaijan compared to Armenia, the most effective long range weapons system used in the 44-Day War. (download date: 25.03.24).

²⁷ Interview with the author with a high-ranking officer describes how limiting its strategic partnership to Russia had its consequences.

²⁸ A look at creation of Russian Armenian Joint forces <https://www.armenpress.am/eng/news/854011/eng/> (download date: 25.03.24).

Abrahamyan, E. The Central Asian Caucasus Analyst 2016. Russia and Armenia Establish Joint Ground Forces. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13416-russia-and-armenia-establish-joint-ground-forces.html> (download date: 25.03.24).

²⁹ Pashinyan’s admission in his interview with the local investigative committee highlights the attitudes that existed towards pursuing a multi-vector policy prior to the 2020 44-Day War. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiM1Cl4V6Ow> (download date: 02.03.24).

Also, an Interview with the author with a member from the investigative committee who wishes to stay anonymous describes that one of the factors that contributed to the 44-day war loss was the uni-vector policy that limited strategic cross platform cooperation with other military partners.

³⁰ Discussions around the 44-Day War report with the local investigative team member who wishes to stay anonymous concludes that a lack of research existed prior to the 44-Day War and currently still exists in a variety of sectors within the military and on doctrinal approaches.

³¹ See *Chapter 3* Air Force and Air Defense Performance for complacency Abrahamyan E, Ingilizian M,

Day War, which was hailed as a victory, also supported the idea of a strong military with pseudo successful battles across the frontline³². Eado Hecht from the *Military Strategy* magazine in his article “*Drones In The Nagorno Karabagh War: Analyzing The Data*” mentions the possibility of how “*Armenians were lulled into complacency from defeating drones*” prior to the 44-Day War and *Justice Armenia’s* 44-Day War report also describes air defense operations in the 2020 Tavush battles as shortsighted due to the impending preeminence of new drones in the 2020 44-Day War, such as the *Bayraktar* and *Harop*³³. Lack of solid research meant that Armenians failed to fully understand not only their technical limitations, but the “Art of War” strategy deployed by Azerbaijan³⁴. New research projects, new doctrines, and innovative “Art of War” concepts, such as new mission command structures, and new command and control techniques, including network-centric warfare, are vital. Furthermore, ideas from the “Total Defense” model need to be incorporated into doctrines and military education. Hratchya Arzumanyan’s book “*Horizons*” on Total Defense has covered a large range of research on this topic; however doctrinal approaches and deterrence policies need to be embedded into military thought and practice.

Narratives

A last category of analysis and future research surrounds the role of narratives in driving and motivating people, including through Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a form of communication that relies on psychological patterns. These techniques can affect national objectives and the will of the people including that of the will of the enemy³⁵. Superpowers instinctively and often consciously prepare statements and structure sentences to subconsciously deliver a message³⁶. A textbook example from the West is CNN’s article “*Azerbaijan Reclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh. What does that*

Kalayjian Z, ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

³² A look at Serj Sargsyan’s comments regarding his attitudes on the 4-Day War. <https://news.am/en/news/597630.html> download date: 04.03.24).

Pseudo here refers to the strategic level victory which in essence was a failure, not in regard to the actual tactical battles that held ground or retook posts. Abrahamyan E, Ingilizian M, ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024) *Chapter 4*.

³³ Abrahamyan E, Ingilizian M, ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024)

³⁴ *Chapter 3* Air Force and Air Defense Performance Abrahamyan E, Ingilizian M, Kalayjian Z, ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

³⁵ Patterson, Molly; Monroe, Kristen Renwick (1998-06-01). “Narrative in political science” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 1 Polletta, Francesca; Callahan, Jessica (2017). “Deep stories, nostalgia narratives, and fake news: Storytelling in the Trump era”. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*.

³⁶ An example of embedded commands: <https://www.nlpworld.co.uk/nlp-glossary/e/embedded-command/#:~:text=An%20NLP%20Embedded%20Command%20is,by%20voice%2C%20and%20or%20gesture>. (download date: 03.03.24).

mean for the tens of thousands living there?” The title acknowledges Azerbaijan's attack on Artsakh as acceptable by using the word reclaim, all while projecting concern for the unnamed people living in the region. Similarly, Russian policy frequently crafts narratives to garner public opinion against Armenia, divide the Armenian nation into various political camps and create a rift towards a war between Armenian and Russia, just as it justified the Ukraine conflict as a denazification attempt³⁷.

Counter narratives have a major role in working toward policies and national objectives that contradict great power politics, in which Armenia has been frequently ill-served. For example, Australia has created a narrative against China: that it supports a liberal, rules-based order, and that its actions are not against China's power or influence but rather its revisionist behavior, such as increased assertiveness in the South China sea³⁸. This framing paints the picture that Australia has no choice but to battle for its right to maintain order in its region, while simultaneously continuing trade and friendly relations with China. In Armenia's case, the nation has a right to choose its strategic partnerships but needs to carefully juggle counter narratives. Creating careful, powerful narratives are vital for Armenia's new strategic hedging. One example to counter Russian narratives aiming to divide Armenian public opinion, would reaffirm Armenia's right to pursue a variety of strategic partners, based on Russia's lack of fulfillment of its security promises during the 2022 Azerbaijani incursion into Armenia not due to aspirations towards the West.

Other examples of weak narratives created from non-governmental organizations are the catchphrase “*Strong Syunik*”, instead “*Syunik Throughout Time*”, which would offer a better narrative. While the first implies that Syunik is weak, the second conjures the idea that Syunik is an ancient place belonging to Armenians. Another weak catchphrase is the name of Rouben Vardanyan's political party which translates to “*Country to Live In*”. This framing again implies that the country is not livable, whereas an alternative could be “*Building A Country*”. This party line would demonstrate that the party is striving ever upwards toward even greater successes. The battle of the narratives is not about whether these issues are correct or whether the current government actually has ambitions towards the West or Russia; rather, innovative language can help frame policies in the public sphere and psyche. These processes and sciences merit further research and proposals for execution within political circles.

³⁷ Russia's narrative of denazification <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/ukraine-has-nazi-problem-vladimir-putin-s-denazification-claim-war-ncna1290946> (download date: 03.03.24).

³⁸ Tarapore, A. Australia Is Not On The Fence Between Australia and China 2018. [Online] <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/australia-not-fence-america-china/>. Example of Revisionist. <https://apnews.com/article/us-philippines-blinken-marcos-south-china-sea-0c39aa94e32469f3d608561c2c0f167c> (download date: 03.03.24).

CONCLUSION

The core purpose of this article is to encourage policy acceleration and research and to strive for collaboration between government institutes and non-government groups. More importantly, this article serves as a launching point for more discussion around these important topics, building on strong earlier research conducted and directions for future exploration. Armenia's general reticence to retaliate on the ground pre- and post-2020 needs new approaches to tackle deep-seated issues. Managing Armenia's difficult geopolitical landscape with security policies and its new multi vector approach in the changing global political security environment demands nuance and leadership, down to the granular level of sentence structures and language. Furthermore, research to better understand these nuances are critical for Armenian leadership to base decisions on research rather than perceptions. These issues demand solid research from academics and experts of the highest caliber who might then become conduits and platforms for future innovation that ensures the viability of Armenia now and in the future.

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