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RETICENCE TO RETALIATE²

The ceasefire in 2020 that ended the Second Artsakh War (44-Day War) instigated a post war examination, including research to better understand Armenia's political and military failures. Within the extensive range of contributing factors that led to Armenia's defeat in 2020, by far the largest factor was, and still is, the reticence to retaliate. Reticence to retaliate has removed the value of deterrence on the battlefield over the last 20 years. The interconnecting factors tied to this particular failure, such as doctrinal weaknesses and the inability to implement and execute newly formulated doctrines, justify a further examination of the topic.

It is worth noting that the main elements of Armenia's military and national security strategy doctrines were devised in 2007, with a doctrinal update through D. Tonoyan's *Preemptive Strike Doctrine*³ (2019) with various military-political theorizations in between, and N. Pashinyan's new *National Strategy Doctrine*⁴ (2021). However, Armenia's lack of strict doctrinal protocols or military science research has allowed for weak battlefield innovative concepts, including allowing Azerbaijani battlefield prowess over the last 20 years.

This study will touch upon the First Artsakh War as an example of how political and military determination and effective military thought paved the way to success on the battlefield and after the cease fire. It will then consider the transition period when Armenia's reticence became apparent and provide a background to Armenia's instances of weak deterrence, including both military and political examples under successive governments. The study will attempt to provide both sides of the story to highlight diplomatic difficulties rather than just lay blame on a particular government. Following this, we will then consider new approaches by successive future governments to alleviate this stalemate in doctrinal weaknesses. We then discuss models that illustrate how some of these concepts work in the real world, and that basic military thought, as

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² The article was submitted to the Editorial office on 25.07.2024.

³ <https://jamestown.org/program/rationalizing-the-tonoyan-doctrine-armenias-active-deterrencestrategy/>, see also <https://www.mil.am/hy/news/3884>, also <https://mediamax.am/am/news/interviews/29332>.

⁴ <https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/security%20and%20defense/Armenia%202020%20National%20Security%20Strategy.pdf>

innovative as it should be, has fundamentals which were not utilized in Armenia's case. These lack of fundamentals had actually reached the top brass through advisors and closed meetings, ushered in by experts in order to close the gaps in weaknesses. Lastly, we look to the future on how to adapt new models of deterrence value into Armenia's military doctrine and offer some suggestions on reform and where research should be directed.

The core purpose of this article, therefore, is to showcase the larger factors contributing to Armenia's failures against the backdrop of the conspiracy theories that have overwhelmed the Armenian nation. The purpose of this article is not to exonerate the failures of government leaders, but rather to put into perspective the core fundamentals of Armenian decision-making and the weakness in the decision-making processes. It considers defense policies rather than the mistakes of individuals or governments. Furthermore, it serves as a means of accessing research for members of both the Security Council and the Ministry of Defense, highlighting not only that these areas of research have been undertaken, but that they have been synthesized and are ready to be adapted into Armenian military protocol.

During And After First Artsakh War

Evidence is mounting on both Western and Russian tacit support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity from around 1998; however, there is also now speculation on Russia's lack of support for Armenia during the First Artsakh War⁵. With the USSR Ministry of Interior and KGB-forces operating with Azerbaijan towards the beginning of the war against the population of Artsakh in what was called "Operation Ring", the difficulties of Armenia's geostrategic position and in the international arena was obvious⁶. Many Western news outlets revealed bias towards Azerbaijan, which was also seen in 2020's 44-Day War. Israeli and Ukrainian support was also evident for Azerbaijan in the 1990s⁷. However, as the war unfolded, evidence of Russian tactical support for Armenia started filtering through. Volunteers from the First Artsakh War

⁵ Interview with Levon Ter-Petrosyan's advisor who wishes to stay anonymous, March 22, 2021, reiterates Russia's strong and vigilant calls on Armenia to accept Karabakh autonomy under Azerbaijan from 1996 onwards during their meetings and negotiations.

³rd President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan 2020, *Introductory remarks by Third President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the meeting of the National Assembly Investigative Commission, which investigates the circumstances of the 2016 April hostilities.* (19.08.2020), <https://www.serzhargsyan.com/en/article/serzh-sargsyan-press-conference-introduction-2020> (download date: 22.07.2024).

⁶ Remnick David, 1991. 'OPERATION RING' BRINGS FEAR, CONFUSION TO ARMENIAN VILLAGE Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/05/12/operation-ring-brings-fear-confusion-to-armenian-village/8bb2d3a3-373a-4eb8-b30a-d66be5cf2f56/n> (download date: 22.07.2024).

⁷ Melkonian M., My Brothers Road. Continuum-3PL (7 May 2008).

mention help with relaying coordinates on Azeri positions to Armenia during various battles, including the free passage of black-market weapons into Armenia⁸. Moreover, Russian ultimatums towards Turkey reduced their involvement and maintained an even playing field during the conflict⁹.

Diplomatically, Armenian government officials held their ground and used their diplomatic skills to circumvent pressures from both Russia and the West. Coordination between battlefield military tacticians and diplomats bought time and carefully escalated the warfare, allowing for Armenian battlefield success¹⁰. Furthermore, Armenian determination to force Russia into submission and coerce a favored outcome is highlighted by gun battles between Armenian volunteer troops and Soviet forces on the streets of Yerevan¹¹. This type of determination continued even after the ceasefire arrangement, with an anonymous general striking Azerbaijani engineering works after repeated warnings not to come closer to Armenian trench lines¹². These examples highlight a nation's ability to use “will” as a precursor to change and shift the dynamics through diplomacy from battlefield and military power against the backdrop of wavering support for the enemy.

This same determination was not seen in the years after 2000 with a transition taking place. This transition period also included its fair share of reliance on Russia and led to continuous weak doctrinal mishaps diplomatically, from a war preparation perspective and most importantly directly from Azerbaijani battlefield pressure post 2005. In the years leading up to the war, Azerbaijani unchecked vandalism of Armenian stone-crosses in Nor Jugha (Nakhichevan) during 2003 and 2006 demonstrated Armenia's first instance of its reticence to escalate¹³. Next, on 19 February 2004, Gurgen Margaryan was axed to death in Hungary by an Azerbaijani military officer during a NATO Partnership for Peace Program¹⁴. It has been speculated that this event highlights Azerbaijan's covert operations under a guise of spontaneity, which included a defense in

⁸ Interview with volunteers from first Karabakh war 02.05.2022.

⁹ Ghulinyan-Gerz I., *Armenia failed to deal with Turkey, Turkey “dealt” with Armenia*. Mediamax, 2022, <https://mediamax.am/en/column/121272/> (download date: 22.07.2024).

¹⁰ New York Times 1993 *Caucasus City Falls to Armenian Forces*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/24/world/caucasus-city-falls-to-armenian-forces.html> (download date: 23.07.2024).

¹¹ Samvel Martirosyan Youtube 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZxLsOvTE_c&ab_channel=SamvelMartirosyan (download date: 01.02.2024); see also Art-A-Tsolum, 2018. *The Deployment of the 7th Soviet Army in Yerevan – The Bloody Sunday, 1990*, <https://allinnet.info/news/the-deployment-of-the-7th-soviet-army-in-yerevan/> (download date: 23.07.2024).

¹² Retired General under anonymity in an interview with the author 31.09.2022.

¹³ *Armenian Assembly calls Congress' attention to Destruction of Julfa Cemetery*, Civil Society institute in Armenia, 2007, <https://www.csi.am/hy/node/14486> (download date: 24.07.2024).

¹⁴ *Relatives of Armenian axed to death by Azeri officer call for justice*, 2020, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/may/25/relatives-armenian-axed-death-by-azeri-officer-call-justice-ramil-safarov> (download date: 24.07.2024).

court pleading guilty but defending the assailant's actions on the grounds that the victim was Armenian¹⁵. However, it is yet unknown whether the Armenian government at the time discussed this incident as an Azerbaijani covert operation. Furthermore, it is unknown whether discussions about mounting a retaliatory response ever took place. The unexpected release of R. Safarov from Hungary again instigated a mere diplomatic response rather vertical escalation on the battlefield to shape and influence future Azerbaijani planned tactics¹⁶.

Continuing this trend, in September 2013 Armenia joined the Eurasian Union, a complete backflip from efforts to pursue an EU trade deal¹⁷. In this case, retaliation on a diplomatic front is significantly more difficult, along with circumventing Russian pressures with its potential intended consequences; however, the lack of resolve again highlights Armenia's overall political weakness. Furthermore, depending on one's view of joint Russian and Armenian bilateral agreements, such as the joint air defense in the Caucasus and other joint forces that have been established, highlights the ease at which Armenia was willing to be guided¹⁸. It can be argued that these political decisions were beneficial to the Armenian state, but it was not the decision *per se* that led to Armenia's weakness on the battlefield, but its lack of diplomatic deterrence against larger powers. In this case, deterrence on the political front with a simple counter-bilateral agreement with a second ally would have been a basic diplomatic step to counter superpower dominance.

These continued military, political and covert pressures, and tit-for-tat escalations across the frontline showcased Armenia's continued hesitation to retaliate militarily to combat the growing threat from Azerbaijan. Another example of reticence to retaliate was the shooting down of a helicopter by Azerbaijani forces in 2014, which showed not only the lack of flexibility on a subordinate level within the Armenian Armed Forces but also a hesitancy to retaliate on a strategic level¹⁹. In addition, Azerbaijan advanced closer to the frontline through bold engineering works and trenches built, in some

¹⁵ Azerbaijan: the case of Ramil Safarov, Official Journal of the EU, (13.09.2012), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012IP0356&from=HU> (download date: 24.07.2024).

¹⁶ *Prisoner without Conscience Pardoned and Promoted*, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/prisoner-without-conscience-pardoned-and-promoted/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

¹⁷ Gardner A., *Armenia chooses Russia over EU*, 2013, <https://www.politico.eu/article/armenia-chooses-russia-over-eu/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

¹⁸ Gotec G., *Russia and Armenia to establish joint military force*, 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/armenia/news/russia-and-armenia-to-establish-joint-military-force/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

¹⁹ Armenian military helicopter shot down by Azerbaijani forces, killing three. The Guardian, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/12/azerbaijani-forces-shoot-down-armenian-military-helicopter> (download date: 18.04.2024); see also Ingilizian M., Chapter 4 discusses lack of individual or unit/group independent thinking and how it affected battlefield flow and initiative. Abrahamian E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024)

places, directly in front of Armenian trench lines — a complete backflip from the post-1994 military prowess on the frontline against Azerbaijani trenches, according to the general who wishes to remain anonymous²⁰. Evidence from interviews with Armenian Spetsnaz units confirms that orders were given not to fire on such engineering works during Serzh Sargsyan’s tenure. Satellite imagery corroborates that engineering works were laid in front of Armenian trenches in various locations across the entire frontline²¹.

Military Thought and Doctrine

The first public notions of a reformed military thought were made in 2015 by Serzh Sargsyan at the Ministry of Defense, in which he remarked, “*However, any incident directed against us has been and will be followed by an action of retaliation. Until recently, the response actions of ours have been symmetric in form and asymmetric in terms of inflicting more damage*”²². It is known that during Serzh Sargsyan’s tenure, soldiers did cross no-man’s-land as a retaliatory response, and where larger tit-for-tat escalatory responses occurred, these were based on the need to present a defense against attacks such as the Four-Day War in 2016. Mounting village-to-village or town-to-town strikes upon an attack is standard retaliatory response and what has been used as the standard counter retaliatory response. However, retaliation against the above examples, such as Gurgen Margaryan’s murder or other small tit-for-tat escalations seen over the years, never elicited any proportionate or vertical escalation as a doctrine to induce deterrence. Furthermore, the asymmetric retaliation mentioned by S. Sargsyan in his comments implies that the Armenian military machine has responded to the above-mentioned battlefield offenses with a larger punch; however, countless examples of zero to weak retaliation have been seen over the 10-year period, with no evidence that supports any doctrinal or non-doctrinal value of horizontal or vertical deterrence, except for some *post-hoc* frontline incursions.

In response to this weakness in military thought, Serzh Sargsyan also observes:

“From now on, actions of retaliation asymmetric in form may also take place. The hotheaded have to expect countless surprises. Furthermore, in case we register a larger and more threatening accumulation of forces across our borders and the

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

²² 3rd President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan 2020, *Introductory remarks by Third President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the meeting of the National Assembly Investigative Commission, which investigates the circumstances of the 2016 April hostilities*, <https://www.serzhsargsyan.com/en/article/serzh-sargsyan-press-conference-introduction-2020> (download date: 24.07.2024).

*line of contact, we reserve the right to commit a preemptive strike*²³.

This highlights the beginnings of Serzh Sargsyan's government, aware of how Armenia's military doctrine or battlefield tactics should transcend and adapt to the situation arising from the ever-present pressures from Azerbaijan. This presents a better-late-than-never approach, although there has been no solid retaliation asymmetric in form or pre-emptive for that matter against the 2016 attack on Armenian posts in the south, which came after the new reform in military thought at the Ministry of Defense. The loss of Lele Tepe in the 2016 Four-Day War marked again the defensive nature of the battles and relinquishing the mountain strip for unforeseen and unknown reasons, including no post-doctrinal response²⁴. The loss of Lele Tepe, a strip about 2 km long, had strategic implications not only from the crack it predisposed into the frontline, but it highlighted a weak military and political will to offset Azerbaijani battlefield and diplomatic pressures, instilling confidence in Azerbaijani military planners²⁵.

Round-table discussions and closed-door meetings, including reports from experts, voiced opinions on Armenia's weak military doctrine and military thought. Meetings also surrounded the weak impetus to execute the concepts in real time; evidence such as this highlights that the top brass were aware of the shortcomings. A high-ranking officer in the Armenian armed forces explained that closed-door discussions delved into Armenia's weak and vulnerable position and that reforms in doctrinal concepts on static divisions, including executing new military thought, were critical to alleviate the stalemate on the frontline. Furthermore, soldiers upon returning from NATO training were quick to realize the issues surrounding Armenian military formational concepts and made efforts to alert the military-political elite to new warfare techniques in NATO training programs that could address the doctrines that plagued the Armenian military²⁶. Lastly, Serzh Sargsyan's comments at the Ministry of Defense on the right to pre-emptive strike already highlighted that the Government was aware of these deficiencies. However, responses by Sargsyan, such as why *Iskanders* were not used in the 2016 Four-Day War during the post war investigative commission – “*since it was not a large-scale war, their use would be like shooting at sparrows with cannons*” – either highlights a gross misunderstanding of the situation and military doctrine, a large

²³ 3rd President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan 2020, *Remarks by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Ministry of Defense*, <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/01/26/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-in-the-Ministry-of-Defence/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

²⁴ A high-ranking official under the condition of anonymity in an interview with the author April 20, 2023, mentioned that experts mentioned concerns about the defensive nature of the 2016 Four-Day War battles in closed meetings between high-ranking officials.

²⁵ Ingilizian M. Chapter 4 *Failures in Armenian Ground Force Preparations and Defense Policies*. Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., ‘44-Day War Report’, unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

²⁶ Interview with the author soldier from the South of Artsakh, March 29, 2024.

disconnect between leaders and military planners, or an attempt to defend the weak political will and decision-making impetus on the lack of their use and the absence of suggested reforms.

Again in 2018, Azerbaijan's advancement into the Nakhichevan's borderlands encountered no Armenian response, a testament to the entrenched, static, and hierarchical defense doctrine that influences Armenian operational warfare²⁷. This Azerbaijani tactic came directly after N. Pashinyan, and I. Aliyev vowed to reduce tension on the frontline in an October meeting in Tajikistan – again highlighting Azerbaijan's careful approach to escalation and Armenia's hesitancy to retaliate. This came right before D. Tonoyan's *Pre-Emptive Strike doctrine* in 2019 that attempted to alleviate the weakness in battlefield doctrine.

The incursion into Nakhichevan likely instigated D. Tonoyan to use the previous military thought mentioned by Serzh Sargsyan to create a doctrine for the Armenian Armed Forces²⁸. This newly designed doctrine was expressed by experts as a solid step in the right direction. However, the doctrine itself was never really translated to military protocol and needed to be embedded into the system. With this point in case, the Armenian pattern of reticence to retaliate subverted the doctrine that had just been developed to counter future threats; it continued into the Tavush escalations and the 2020 44-Day War. Furthermore, despite the obvious trickery played by Azerbaijan along the Nakhichevan front, Armenian forces again continued not to execute the newly reformed military doctrine and refrained from conducting pre-emptive strikes during the Tavush escalation remaining static and continuing defensive battles, albeit this time achieving success in taking the mountaintop²⁹. By this stage it was clear to Azerbaijani military planners that any Armenian defense would entail a weak and hesitant response and a static approach to the battles, leaving it wide open for Azerbaijan to take what they pleased. Furthermore, it became obvious that the integrated air defense between Russia and Armenia did not entail an early warning mechanism to track targets headed towards Armenia – something that Azerbaijan needed to ensure – that was not part of Russian–Armenian bilateral agreements during the Tavush escalation³⁰. Lastly, the

²⁷ Ingilizian M., *Azerbaijan Pushes Into Nakhichevan Borderlands*. Bellingcat. 2018, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2018/11/08/azerbaijan-pushes-nakhichevan-borderlands/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

²⁸ Abrahamyan E., *Rationalizing the Tonoyan Doctrine: Armenia's Active Deterrence Strategy*. Jamestown, 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/rationalizing-the-tonoyan-doctrine-armenias-active-deterrence-strategy/> (download date: 05/04/24). See also Armenian MoD and MFA websites for the doctrines: <https://www.mfa.am/en/>, <https://www.mil.am/en/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

²⁹ Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

³⁰ Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., Kalayjian Z., Chapter 3 *Air Force and Air Defense Preparation and Performance before and during the Second Karabakh War*. Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024). Describes the importance of exploiting reaction time.

defensive battles of the Four-Day war do not count as doctrinal retaliation and only served a defensive posture which not only continued the static warfare formation but also lacked any deterrence value and further solidified Azerbaijan's confidence to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through a last-ditch military effort in which it had already gained the upper hand.

Current Models in Comparison

The tit-for-tat escalation between Iran and Israel garnered fascinating insights into both nations' doctrines and military strategies and is a model for contrasting Armenia's failed approaches. Iran has used a strategy of deception, playing games against military planners in the West. The strategy here is simple: to show weakness as a sign of strength or strength as a sign of weakness, a very innovative strategy as one part of a larger deterrence doctrine³¹. One example is military parades with dummy equipment showing off military hardware not yet in its inventory; in this case, experts are well aware that these pieces of equipment do not exist in the Iranian inventory, but it makes the military brass in the West second guess themselves³². A second example is Iran's claimed quantum processor that turned out to be a development board³³. Again, we see mind games that are more than capable of instilling hesitation in the enemy. On the other side, Israel has massively propagated the perception of its *Iron Dome* system and its conscription of women as a deterrence in their military power. All these tactics are part of larger military thought that contribute to deterrence³⁴. Moreover, Iran and Israel explicitly understand and practice these types of deterrence strategies, including proportionate escalation upon being attacked, which are often known as “*horizontal escalations*”; both nations are expert in these military concepts³⁵.

A quick examination of how the recent Iranian and Israeli tit-for-tat played out can give insights into Armenia's general failures over the last 10–15 years. Israel struck the

³¹ Kam E., *Strategic Assessment*, 2021, https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/irans-deterrence-concept/ (download date: 24.07.2024).

³² *Iranian army displays Damavand dummy S-300 air defense system in military parade*. Global Defense News, 2022, <https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2022/iranian-army-displays-damavand-dummy-s-300-air-defense-system-in-military-parade> (download date: 24.07.2024).

³³ Wickens, K. *Iran finally admits it's 'quantum processor' was in fact not quantum at all*, 2023, <https://www.pcgamer.com/iran-finally-admits-its-quantum-processor-was-in-fact-not-quantum-at-all/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

³⁴ *What is Israel's Iron Dome defence system - and why is it so effective?* 2024. Sky news, <https://news.sky.com/story/what-is-israels-iron-dome-defence-system-and-why-is-it-so-effective-13114992#:~:text=Israel's%20air%20defence%20system%20is,of%20Gaza%20the%20following%20year.&text=It%20uses%20radars%20to%20detect,range%20rockets%2C%20missiles%20and%20drones.> (download date: 24.07.2024).

³⁵ Kam E., *Strategic Assessment*. 2021, https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/irans-deterrence-concept/ (download date: 24.07.2024).

Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing Iran's top soldier, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, and other Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders³⁶. A long-time Israeli strategy is to take out leading figures in both military and science, as seen with the killing of nuclear scientists in Iran³⁷. Iran's retaliation after the consulate bombings follows strict doctrinal protocol, with proportionate escalation to instigate deterrence. Using proportionate escalation is a method of preserving the current level of tit-for-tat escalation, ensuring that Israel's counter-retaliatory response will also be proportionate. Iran's retaliation itself solidifies Iran's ability to respond. In retaliation to this, Israel took its time and mounted a smaller scale counter attack, again ensuring that a counter Iranian retaliatory response would also be limited [in scale](#)³⁸. These actions highlight military and doctrinal concepts that support deterrence value in both nations, something that Armenia failed to formulate and abide by over the last 15 years³⁹.

In Serzh Sargsyan's 2020 opening speech at the Investigative Commission into the Four-Day War in 2020, he reiterated that the war was a victory⁴⁰. This emphasizes that although defense experts were aware of where failures from the defensive battles in 2016 would lead to, some leaders, or at least Serzh Sargsyan himself, were still convinced that Armenia's counter response was deemed sufficient against the attack in 2016, unless this was just a ploy by the Sargsyan government to convince otherwise during the commission's interview. There is insufficient evidence to prove the exact mindset of Serzh Sargsyan at the time, but there is enough to establish that experts were well aware of the situation and the doctrinal weaknesses⁴¹. To add, the recognition of Artsakh as Serzh Sargsyan's main deterrent value should be considered and at the very least be mentioned however it is still debated the effectiveness of this strategy and this paper will highlight that nothing can supersede battle grown deterrence value. In

³⁶ *The Israel-Iran Conflict through an Intelligence Lens*. Flashpoint, 2024, https://flashpoint.io/blog/israel-iran-conflict-intelligence-lens/?utm_campaign=Blog_Israel-Iran_Conflict&utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=organic-social (download date: 24.07.2024).

³⁷ Gardner F., *Mohsen Fakhrizadeh: Iran scientist 'killed by remote-controlled weapon'*. BBC, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55128970> (download date: 24.07.2024).

³⁸ Hafezi P., *Tehran plays down reported Israeli attacks, signals no retaliation*. Reuters, 2024,, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-missiles-hit-site-iran-abc-news-reports-2024-04-19/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

³⁹ Ingilizian M., *A look to the future: key takeaways from Armenia's recent political & military failures*. ARVAK (03.04.2024), <https://arvak.am/en/recent-political-military-failures-of-armenia/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

⁴⁰ 3rd President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan 2020, *Introductory remarks by Third President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the meeting of the National Assembly Investigative Commission, which investigates the circumstances of the 2016 April hostilities*, <https://www.serzhargsyan.com/en/article/serzh-sargsyan-press-conference-introduction-2020> (download date: 24.07.2024).

⁴¹ Abrahamyan E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

Armenia's case, the difference between it and the Iran–Israeli escalation is twofold: unlike Iran, which is did not match the technological superiority of Israel, Armenia had the upper hand at least until 2013; secondly, Armenia failed to distinguish between retaliation based on static defense and a horizontal or vertical doctrinal response. It can be argued that NATO doctrinal approaches did not enter Azerbaijani operations until 2015 with Turkish support, which left plenty of time for Armenia to maintain its superiority⁴². Armenia's defense policies remained stagnant both in military doctrinal thought and in the political arena, with a lack of worst-case scenario planning. Serzh Sargsyan's opening speech to the Investigative Commission into the 4-Day War stated:

“Because Azerbaijan was not ready to accept any compromise acceptable to us, I am convinced that they are not prepared to acknowledge the right of the citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh to determine the status of their country by free will. Thus, there was only one way to avoid war: unilateral concessions, which, of course, was not even discussed as it was unacceptable for us”⁴³.

Iran's response to the consulate bombing thus indicates that a deterrence value is necessary. S. Sargsyan's comments confirm that our governments throughout time have been well aware of Azerbaijan's objectives in the region and the accompanying pressures not just by Azerbaijan but by the international community. Further evidence after *Justice Armenia's* post-war investigation also supports the idea that successive governments were aware of the pressures to accept Azerbaijan's territorial integrity⁴⁴. Regardless, if there were gaps to exploit for Artsakh's independence, the key issue here is military doctrinal concepts, as the political pressures surrounding the Armenian government, and the efforts or lack of efforts made by them according to these pressures are out of scope of this discussion. What we have here is a lack of worst-case planning of a government which was well aware of Azerbaijan's objectives and presaging of war, but which chose to maintain the *status quo* rather than turn the tide of Azerbaijani military capability.

The main point in comparing the Iranian and Israeli tit-for-tat escalation with Armenia is that Iran's deterrence value counterstrike was made due to the limiting

⁴² Erickson E., *The 44-Day War in Nagorno Karabagh Turkish Drone Success or Operational Art?* <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2021-OLE/Erickson/> (download date: 24.07.2024).

⁴³ 3rd President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan 2020, *Introductory remarks by Third President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the meeting of the National Assembly Investigative Commission, which investigates the circumstances of the 2016 April hostilities*, <https://www.serzhsargsyan.com/en/article/serzh-sargsyan-press-conference-introduction-2020> (download date: 24.07.2024).

⁴⁴ Justice Armenia 2023 Analysis from the 44-Day War investigation uncovered many high-ranking officials revealing the immense pressures on Armenia surrounding the negotiations and the preferred outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

capacity it would have had in the future against larger Israeli strikes. This military decision to retaliate is based on risking all-out war with the chance of potentially deterring or delaying a strike in future. Armenia refrained from risking all-out war, an indication of its weakness⁴⁵. When all-out war did arrive, it was not prepared for it technologically, strategically, and doctrinally, highlighted by the limited capacity of fighting Azerbaijan from the enclave rather than using Armenia as a second-strike platform which conventional doctrine would have dictated⁴⁶. Without deterrence, the likelihood of a larger strike against Iran would have become greater. In Armenia's case, it chose to limit the risks rather than play the hand of deterrence, especially when it was aware of Azerbaijan's stance on not compromising in negotiations. Military doctrinal thought as exemplified by both Iran and Israel has been absent from Armenian military operational actions in the tit-for-tat escalations seen over the last 20 years. It seems that the objective of maintaining the *status quo* was the prerogative over future planning and objectives rather than adhering to the newly devised military doctrine which was considered to be a step in the right direction. The goal of retaining territory rather than a calculated risk to provide the all-important deterrence value on the battlefield was not existent. This has contributed to the greatest failure in defense policy over the last 15 years. Such mentality, without assessing future hazards, is common in Armenian political and military planning after the transition phase in the 2000s.

Iran will continue to provide deterrence value through a combination of vertical and horizontal escalations as a part of its doctrine, depending on the situation and the factors surrounding it. However, Armenia, even after its humiliating loss in 2020, continues to lack innovative strategies to deal with pressures from superpowers and Azerbaijan. Deterrence value can come in any shape or form, as seen with Iran's fabrication of a new designed quantum processor, but battlefield doctrine has by far the strongest value. Alternatively, other tactics can be utilized and still cause deterrence. In Armenia's case, deception will not be an effective strategy, with the Iranian example effective due to the factors surrounding Iranian advancements in various technological and military fields.

The future for Armenian doctrine lies in military science and military education, including an understanding of the failures of the 44-Day War and other conflicts. Furthermore, misunderstandings can severely impede politicians, military planners, and defense experts. Drawing false conclusions from observation or misinterpreting evidence, as happened in the case prior to the 44-Day War led to complacency and

⁴⁵ Ingilizian M., *Iran, Israel and Armenia*. ARVAK (14.05.2024), <https://arvak.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/iran-israel-and-armenia.pdf> (download date: 24.07.2024).

⁴⁶ Ingilizian M., Chapter 4 *Failures in Armenian Ground Force Preparations and Defense Policies*, Abrahamian E., Ingilizian M., '44-Day War Report', unpublished report (forthcoming 2024).

building strategy based on perception rather than on real research⁴⁷. The key here is causation not correlation.

Unfortunately, experts note that the exact same reticence to retaliate continues into 2024. With evidence always reaching researchers further out in time, and without solid information from the current negotiations between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia and with little evidence available, one would hope for deterrence value through the negotiations or diplomacy. Few experts can see the deterrence value in handing over the villages in Tavush and why such a handover should even take place. One side of the argument might be that peace will provide the opportunity for the Armenian nation to rebuild and reform its military for the next battle this idea of concessions by the current government can indicate the immense pressure presented by the world who favors Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The research is very clear that, without a deterrence value, the only achievement from relinquishing the villages will be short-term peace without working toward a long-term viable and strong existence for the Armenian nation. The fact that these types of demand have been put to Armenia after its loss of the 2020 war shows that only battlefield deterrence will work. Furthermore, the fact that no government previous or otherwise was not and is still not prepared technologically and doctrinally to take down the oilfields of Baku, these weaknesses depicts the lack of will and lack of doctrine to deter a real war let alone an attempt to win and battle for Armenia's rights such as Artsakh. Even in such cases if the military objective from the deterrence value doctrine point of view is a failure, such determination itself will have affected how Azerbaijan formulated policies and will affect how Azerbaijan will formulate future policy towards Armenia. The research is clear that Armenia's reticence to escalate on a doctrinal level was its biggest failure pre-2020 and is still its biggest weakness, translating into everything from policy to battlefield scenarios.

⁴⁷ Ingilizian M., *A look to the future: key takeaways from Armenia's recent political & military failures*. ARVAK (03.04.2024), <https://arvak.am/en/recent-political-military-failures-of-armenia/> (download date: 27.07.2024).