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Russian-Armenian cooperation in ensuring regional security in the South Caucasus

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the identification and analysis of the key priorities of cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia in the sphere of regional security in the South Caucasus. The authors of the article point out the relevance of this interaction and examine its international legal basis in both bilateral and multilateral formats. The analysis identifies five key areas of Russian-Armenian cooperation in the military-technical sphere. Having studied Russian-Armenian cooperation in ensuring regional security in the South

Caucasus, the authors come to the conclusion about the significance and prospects of further interaction between Russia and Armenia in the field of regional security in the South Caucasus.

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Russia, Armenia, security, cooperation, South Caucasus.

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region of the South Caucasus became a serious hotbed of geopolitical instability for a long time, which manifested itself in the escalation of a series of armed conflicts: the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation in Nagorno-Karabakh; the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts; the Russian-Georgian Five-Day War in August 2008; counter-terrorist operations in the Pankisi Gorge (Georgia), etc. Such instability in the South Caucasus region is caused by a number of political, socio-economic, ethnic and historical circumstances.

First of all, the huge ethnic diversity and, as a consequence, the existence of a number of long-standing territorial conflicts and intercultural contradictions. During the existence of the Soviet Union these conflicts were smoldering, but with the collapse of the USSR and the formation of new independent states – Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan – unresolved contradictions flared up with renewed force, which led to an escalation of violence in the region.

Second, an extremely important factor in the geopolitical instability of the South Caucasus was the deep economic crisis that engulfed the entire region (and the entire post-Soviet space) in the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The lack of material and financial resources, combined with the destruction of the former economic and trade relations, made the contradictions between different peoples, ethnicities, and social groups even more acute.

Third, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to an outbreak of separatism in virtually all the newly formed states – and the South Caucasus countries were no exception. This phenomenon was caused by the fact that the formation of the new independent states triggered a kind of chain reaction, which manifested itself in the fact that many former autonomous republics, appealing to the experience of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, sought to further expand their own legal personality and, as a result, claimed the status of independent states.

Fourth, and finally, the overall geopolitical tension in the South Caucasus was due to intense competition and the clash of interests of a number of global international actors in the region – Russia, Turkey, Iran, the United States and the European Union.

Under such circumstances, ensuring military-political, economic, and energy security in the South Caucasus required increased cooperation between key regional and extra-regional (global) actors. Each of the South Caucasus states had its own priorities for geopolitical cooperation: Georgia, at least since the 2003 Rose Revolution, had focused on close cooperation with the EU and US; Azerbaijan, on cooperation with Turkey; and Armenia, on military and technical cooperation with Russia. In essence, these three vectors of cooperation were both pivotal elements of security in the South Caucasus and competing geopolitical projects.

It is because of the above circumstances that the study of the main areas of military-technical cooperation between Russia and Armenia is an extremely important and relevant topic from both the scientific-theoretical and practical points of view.

The regulatory framework for Russian-Armenian cooperation in regional security in the South Caucasus

The international legal and conceptual foundations for cooperation between Russia and Armenia in the military-political and technical spheres began to take shape immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As early as September 1992, the two countries concluded a treaty on the legal status of the Russian Armed Forces stationed on the territory of the Republic of Armenia (see the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Status and Operating Conditions of the Border Troops of the Russian Federation on the Territory of the Republic of Armenia). Under this agreement, the 102nd Russian military base was deployed in Armenia (in Gyumri and Yerevan), which was an extremely important factor in ensuring the security of the South Caucasus during the acute phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1991-1994, associated with active hostilities in the region. Subsequently, the status of the Russian armed forces was confirmed by the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of Armenia of March 16, 1995 and the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on a Joint Group of Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia of November 30, 2016.

The most important impetus for the intensification of military-technical cooperation was the signing of the comprehensive Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in September 1997, in which a number of articles (2-8) deal directly with military-technical cooperation. In particular, the text of the treaty spoke directly about direct interaction between the armed forces of both states in the event of an external threat, as well as about the obligation of both sides to share their advanced military-technical know-how with each other.

In addition, close cooperation between Russia and Armenia was regulated not only by bilateral, but also by multilateral agreements. In this context, it is worth mentioning the Collective Security Treaty, signed in May 1992 by six states (including Russia and Armenia) and which laid the foundation for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Key priorities for Russian-Armenian Cooperation in regional security

Russian-Armenian cooperation in the military-technical sphere in 1991-2021 was complex and all-encompassing, and it developed in several key areas at once. Let us briefly examine each of them.

Joint measures to counter international terrorism. This area of cooperation became especially relevant at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries – after the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya, as well as the global war against international terrorism that followed the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. A distinctive feature of the joint counter-terrorism activities of Armenia and Russia was the participation of a number of external actors – other CSTO and CIS states (Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, etc.), European Union countries (primarily Germany and France), the US and states of East, South and South-East Asia (India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, etc.) [Broers, 2021].

Russian-Armenian cooperation in the sphere of counter-terrorism was conducted in two main directions – first, identifying and combating already existing extremist groups, and second, eradicating

the socio-economic, political and cultural-psychological prerequisites for their emergence, i. e. countering all kinds of radical and destructive views and ideologies. It would be quite appropriate to say that if the first direction of cooperation was the fight against the consequences of terrorism, the second – the preventive improvement of the social environment, which contributes to the emergence of radical views (poverty, disempowerment, low level of education, inaccessibility of cultural and social benefits, corruption, etc.).

Interaction within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty. This format of cooperation implied the following joint activities: protection of the independence and state sovereignty of Armenia and Russia; joint opposition to external threats; border patrolling and prevention of illegal border crossing (including the socio-economic aspect – combating illegal migration); strengthening of border and block posts; exchange of intelligence information.

Russian arms deliveries to Armenia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been the main arms exporter to the Armenian army. As of today (August 2021) most of the armored vehicles, tanks, aircrafts and small arms in the Armenian army are of Russian origin. At the same time, most of the weapons in question are of Soviet-type, while the overall volume of modern Russian weapon deliveries to Armenia remains at a relatively low level. In the past decade, Russia has supplied only six S-300 and Iskander missile systems, ten armored vehicles, 200 man-portable air defense systems (SAMs) and four aircraft (Su-30 fighters) to Armenia [Kolstø, Blakkisrud, 2021]. To a large extent, that is due to Armenia's economic problems and a lack of funds for the purchase of weapons.

Joint activities to develop advanced military and communication technologies. One of the most important areas of military-technical cooperation between Russia and Armenia is the joint development of such important technologies for both countries as the latest ground and airborne detection equipment (including next-generation radars), innovative materials for the production of heavy-duty armor and other types of protective equipment for the needs of various kinds of troops, and special communications systems based on the CSMA/CD protocol [Modebadze, 2021], etc. Russian and Armenian experts are also jointly developing advanced software to synchronize the activities of their respective units based in Armenia and Russia's Southern Federal District. We should also mention the interaction between civilian specialists of the two countries, which includes the exchange of technological experience and best practices in the field of military-industrial and strategic planning.

Conducting joint military exercises. Between 1991 and 2021, the armed forces of Armenia and Russia conducted more than 20 military exercises of various levels, from local to large-scale, in which more than 15,000 people participated [Paronyan, Elamiryan, 2021]. Similarly, joint training exercises of air defense, aviation and space forces were held many times. As a rule, representatives of the already mentioned above 102nd Russian military base located on the territory of Armenia took part in the exercises.

Conclusion

Thus, between 1991 and 2021 military-technical cooperation between Armenia and Russia was developing quite intensively. The importance of this aspect of bilateral relations was primarily due to the general geopolitical instability in the South Caucasus region, the presence on its territory of a number of unresolved interethnic conflicts and, above all, the acute confrontation in Nagorno-Karabakh, which periodically turned into an acute, armed phase. The confrontation with Azerbaijan and Turkey, which stands behind it, is largely responsible for Armenia's urgent need to establish close military and political ties with Russia.

The 102nd Russian military base in the territory of Armenia is a key factor for intensive military-technical cooperation between the sides. In addition to direct cooperation for the maintenance and upkeep of this base, the main areas of military-technical cooperation between the two countries include measures for protecting Armenia's state border and countering international terrorism, regular joint military exercises, military-technical exchange and arms trade, activities in joint development of advanced military communication technologies and innovations.

At present, with the new escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, the military-technical aspect of Russia's relations with Armenia has become even more important. Moreover, the general geopolitical instability in the South Caucasus and the need for joint provision of regional security set a task for both countries to further intensify military-technical cooperation on a wide range of issues and directions.

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Российско-армянское сотрудничество в сфере обеспечения региональной безопасности на Южном Кавказе

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена выявлению и анализу ключевых приоритетов сотрудничества Российской Федерации и Республики Армения в сфере обеспечения региональной безопасности на территории Южного Кавказа. Авторы отмечают актуальность данного взаимодействия, а также рассматривают его международно-правовую основу как в двустороннем, так и в многостороннем формате. В ходе анализа выявляются пять ключевых направлений российско-армянского сотрудничества в военно-технической сфере. Делается вывод о значимости и перспективах дальнейшего взаимодействия России и Армении в сфере обеспечения региональной безопасности на Южном Кавказе.

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Ключевые слова

Россия, Армения, безопасность, сотрудничество, Южный Кавказ.

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