

## RISKS OF MILITARY CONFRONTATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the key issues surrounding the formation of new military-political platforms in the South Caucasus region, which have influenced the shifting balance of power and the regional security agenda. Key issues discussed include the new military-based cooperation existing in the region and the potential geopolitical implications it may have. One thing is certain: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and subsequently the 2020 war, is impacting regional military cooperation. Therefore, it is imperative to examine a variety of new scenarios and current dynamics. The South Caucasus remains a strategically important yet volatile region, where military cooperation and security dynamics are shaped by evolving geopolitical developments. This article analyzes the military strategies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, examining their evolving defense strategies, alliances, and regional security interactions using balance-of-power theory and regional security complex theory. This study contributes to an understanding of how small states in contested regions adapt their military strategies in response to emerging geopolitical realities. In this context, regional stability presupposes a joint determination of common threats to national security, the possibilities and limits of joint efforts to achieve certain political goals, and ways to ensure peace and security in the South Caucasus.

**Keywords:** *South Caucasus, small states, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, security platform, regional security, military balance, military exercises, military partnership, power diversification.*

### **Introduction**

The South Caucasus is strategically important due to its location between Europe and Asia, and it serves as a transit route for energy resources. This attracts interest from various countries, including the U.S., EU, and Iran, complicating the security landscape. South Caucasus plays a crucial role in the transportation of Caspian resources to Western Europe. In particular, the region is of highest importance for the

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European energy security. Additionally, it can be seen as an increasingly attractive transport route between Europe and Asia. The Caucasus is closed to the Middle East. And some of the countries of the region share a border with Iran and Türkiye who are local geopolitical players. This makes the South Caucasus an important transportation hub between West and East as well as between South and North. military component is one of the most important interest and vital core of cooperation for South Caucasus countries, for local and geopolitical players. If we look at the military balance and statistics of the world, we can note that in 2023-2024 it is a year of active wars in the world, and I consider the study of the military component to be relevant, from the point of view of analyzing a number of military cooperations and assessing the situation. General studies, regional and global trends document that, in contrast to previous years, when the emphasis on other components of security gained momentum in the world, currently countries rely heavily on armaments as a major security issue, nowadays military security is dominant and countries do not hide their obvious militarization process, moreover, studies in the process we understand that this is also done in a certain demonstrative way (Öztiğ 2023).

In recent years, a number of new agreements have been signed in the military sphere in the South Caucasus region, a reality of a new military balance has been created. In order to analyze the situation, I separately referred to the military security issues, challenges, and cooperation of the countries of the South Caucasus.

The study is based on Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003), as this theory, based on realism, shows how states seek to prevent the excessive dominance of any one actor by forming alliances and adjusting their military capabilities, creating effective military partnerships to protect national and inter-state interests (*Farzayee 2023; Walsh 2020; Buzan 2003*). Given the South Caucasus' complex geopolitical landscape where Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan navigate relations with regional active players Russia, Türkiye, Iran, and Western actors this theory can help analyse how these states balance external pressures through military cooperation with different actors and advancing their own security interests (Amable 2022; Kalbizada and Jafarov 2025).

The RSCT focuses on how regional security dynamics are shaped by interdependent threats and alliances, which has significant implications for evolving military partnerships in the South Caucasus (Sharova and Cohen 2025; Sharova and Cohen 2026).

In this article, we address the following questions: 1) How have military balances and new military cooperation influenced and continue to influence the regional and national security agendas of the South Caucasus? 2) What are the possible future scenarios for the military developments of the South Caucasus countries?

In this context, it is most important to understand the implications of military cooperation and the new military balance for changing relations between the countries of the South Caucasus.

The event analysis approach allows us to examine the current facts within the sequence of events. The next method of our research is scenario analysis, which will provide an opportunity to understand how the The military balance in the South

Caucasus can affect the agenda of security of the South Caucasus, what possible scenarios of development can be awaited at the region.

The study has been conducted concurrently with the unfolding events, primarily aiming to establish an accurate timeline using content and event analysis, and subsequently to forecast their future developments. Therefore, official meetings, documents, agreements, announcements, reports, and speeches were mainly the sources for the study. And some research-analytical materials helped us to study the allows you to assess the military security situation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which creates the overall security situation in the South Caucasus (Kalbizada and Jafarov 2025; Öztiğ 2023).

### **New Military rearrangements in South Caucasus countries**

In the context of the geopolitical events of 2020-2024, the South Caucasus has become a field of overlapping and opposing interests, where new rearrangements are taking place, as well as new actors and players are appearing and trying to promote their own interests. The military situation in the South Caucasus is changing very quickly, parallel to the military escalations and conflicts taking place in the world, a number of power centers are increasing their military role in the South Caucasus, and new ones are also appearing (Babayev 2020).

Overall, the South Caucasus has witnessed evolving alliances, with Armenia strengthening ties with Western nations and India, while Azerbaijan continues its partnerships with Türkiye and Israel. These shifts reflect broader geopolitical changes and influence the military dynamics within the region. It also continues to expand military cooperation in various directions (Sukiasyan and Davtyan 2025; Omidi 2025).

The three republics in the South Caucasus have taken different paths since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, the South Caucasus is very divers in political as well as military terms The 44-day war over Nagorno Karabakh in 2020 changed the geopolitical landscape, Russia's war against Ukraine has changed the nature of the caucasian security architecture (Aleksanyan 2025). Moscow's leverage in the region before and since the war in Ukraine obviously has changed. General studies, regional and global trends document that, in contrast to previous years, when the emphasis on other components of security gained momentum in the world, currently countries rely heavily on armaments as a major security issue, nowadays military security is dominant and countries do not hide their obvious militarization process, moreover, studies in the process we understand that this is also done in a certain demonstrative way (Amoris 2026).

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Here it is necessary to pay attention to the following:

- In the framework of **the Balance of Power Theory** we need to understand South Caucasus countries and players form alliances and adjust their military strategies to prevent any single power from dominating the region (Avdaliani 2022, 19-25; Meister 2024).

- **Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT):** RSCT proves a viewpoint to analyze how security interests in the South Caucasus are coherent, forming a distinct regional security complex influenced by both internal dynamics and external actors (Stivachtis 2021).

### **Military diversification processes in Armenia**

The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan changed the balance of power not only in the entire South Caucasus but also in the Black Sea region. Armenia began new military cooperation with France and India. While previously weapons were mainly imported from Russia, Armenia now has new military partners, which can be considered the beginning of a phase of arms diversification. It was precisely this opportunity that made new military cooperation and the process of diversifying Armenia's military arsenals a reality.

Following the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers, the Armenian government has long been absent from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Manukyan 2024).

Amid the deteriorating relationship between Russia and Armenia, new formats for military dialogue and partnership have emerged with China, Georgia, Greece, Cyprus, the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and other countries. One example is the signing of a military pact with India for the purchase of weapons, thereby becoming one of Armenia's main suppliers.

For the last three years, the intensity of the cooperation between India and Armenia has increased at an active pace, strengthened by the establishment of a growing defence and security partnership (Vasilyan 2023; Vasilyan 2026). Given its expanding contribution to Armenia's efforts to promote its defence capacities and its potential to support Armenia's strategic and military growth, India has become a valuable emerging partner for Armenia in foreign policy and military cooperation. 2020-2024 has been quite an important period, especially for Armenia-India military cooperation, as several events, meetings, purchases of military capital, mutual cooperation in various military defensive directions marked this new phase (Melikyan 2024).

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Importantly, India has expressed an explicit desire to partner with Yerevan in the South Caucasus given their aligned strategic interests in the region. By cooperating with India in bilateral and multilateral arrangements, such as Armenia-India-Iran and Armenia-India-France-Greece formats, Armenia gains a strategic partner in a region that otherwise faces Turkish hegemony (Melikyan 2024). If we analyze the geopolitical and regional significance of Armenia-India military cooperation, especially from the perspective of the balance of power theory, we can note that (Lakshminarayanan and Yepremyan 2023).

The cooperation shows a shift in regional arrangements, potentially impacting Russia's and Türkiye's huge influence in the South Caucasus. The cooperation means a message for regional players that Armenia is not isolated and can build alliances beyond traditional partners. From the view of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT): The South Caucasus is becoming more interconnected with external security dynamics involving India, modifying a shift in regional security standards. While Russia was Armenia's traditional security guarantor, was not active attitude in recent military aggression against Armenia is pushing Yerevan to seek new partners, challenging Russia's influence (Balian 2026).

Armenia and France have been strengthening their military cooperation in recent years, reflecting a deepening strategic partnership. This collaboration encompasses various aspects, including defense agreements, military education, and joint training programs. Armenia and France will continue cooperating in the field of defence. Agreements on military cooperation between Armenia and France were signed in the fall of 2023, after which Armenia received the first batch of defence weapons.

In October 2023, Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan and French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu signed significant documents to enhance bilateral cooperation. Discussions focused on acquiring defense systems, military education, training programs, and experience exchange, highlighting the commitment to strengthening defense relations (The Armenian Report 2023). However, the partnership has intensified since October 2023. Following contracts signed on October 3, France delivered defensive weapons to Armenia. The partnership between France and Armenia extends to military training as well. However, France's arms sales policy has historically been opportunistic, including in the Caucasus region, which has sometimes complicated the otherwise positive outlook of military cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

It is a fact, that France has historically maintained strong ties with Armenia due to historical, cultural, and diaspora-driven connections, By increasing military cooperation, France is asserting itself as a key Western power in the South Caucasus, challenging Russian dominance in the region. On the other hand, Armenian-French military cooperation also fits within the framework of Armenia's Euro-Atlantic cooperation. It is clear, that France's deeper involvement in Armenia could lay the groundwork for stronger EU and NATO engagement in the South Caucasus, an area traditionally under Russian geopolitical influence, it is a clear counterbalance and stems from the interests of the EU (Vasilyan 2023; Vasilyan 2026).

The Armenia-France military partnership is a strategic shift with significant geopolitical ramifications. It represents Armenia's growing independence from Russia, France's increasing assertiveness in the South Caucasus, and a potential realignment of regional power balances. While this cooperation strengthens Armenia's defense posture, it also raises the stakes in an already volatile region.

In summary, from the view of the theory of neorealism, Armenia's to seek aspire of new partners and India's and French strategic partnerships reflect their efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister of the RA. 2026. "Press releases: Armenia and France sign joint declaration on establishing strategic partnership, exchange several documents." May 5, 2026. Accessed April 16, 2026. <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2026/05/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Emmanuel-Macron-Declaration/>.

navigate the structural realities of the international security system (Omidi 2025). However, these actions also contribute to an intensifying security dilemma in the South Caucasus, illustrating the complex interplay of state behaviors in the quest for security (Sharova and Cohen 2025; Sharova and Cohen 2026).

### **Georgian Security platform**

Georgia is mainly seeking a Euro-Atlantic integration to have closer ties with NATO and other western partners. Therefore, Georgia plays an important role in regional connectivity and coordination because of its advanced relationships with Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Armenia. Georgia's military cooperation is characterized by its strong aspirations for NATO integration, partnerships with Western countries, and regional security initiatives (Kalbizada and Jafarov 2025). Here are the key aspects:

It is an important regional military event Türkiye-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral military cooperation is considered an active platform of military collaboration in the South Caucasus. The cooperation platform established by these three countries covers very relevant security fields like transport, energy, and military sectors. Even though it seems too early to foresee a proper integration scheme, the mutual interest in safeguarding their trade structures already produces practical implications. Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia have conducted several joint military exercises over the years to enhance interoperability and strengthen regional security cooperation (Balta and Bal 2026; Neset, Aydin, Ergun et al. 2023).

The exercise has been hosted since 2000 on a rotational basis. These exercises underscore the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia, aimed at enhancing military readiness and addressing regional security challenges. Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia have conducted several joint military exercises over the years to enhance interoperability and strengthen regional security cooperation. Here are some notable exercises from different years: The exercise has been hosted since 2000 on a rotational basis. These exercises underscore the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia, aimed at enhancing military readiness and addressing regional security challenges (Shahbazov 2026).

Analyzing the geopolitical and regional significance of this military platform in the South Caucasus, it can be noted that while Georgia maintains partnerships with NATO and the West, this cooperation demonstrates its ability to manage regional security dynamics without alienating its neighbors. It can also be analyzed that this military platform could become a tool for expanding Turkey's soft power, as, as a regional leader, Türkiye is strengthening its influence in the Caucasus through military cooperation, bolstering its political and military presence. The trilateral Türkiye-Georgia-Azerbaijan military cooperation is a strategic platform that enhances regional security, strengthens military ties, and positions the South Caucasus in the changing geopolitical landscape and agenda. It highlights a redistribution of power, with Türkiye playing a leading role, Azerbaijan strengthening its military advantages, and Georgia ensuring the security of its transit routes while maintaining strategic flexibility.

Between 2020 and 2025, Georgia has undertaken vital military initiatives to enhance its security framework and expand military collaboration. In October 2021, the Government of Georgia approved the "National Cybersecurity Strategy and Action

Plan for 2021-2024.” This strategy outlines four primary objectives: The Strategy was developed inclusively, involving government agencies, civil society, and the private sector, with support from the British Embassy in Tbilisi and UK experts. It aims to build upon previous cybersecurity strategies to strengthen Georgia's resilience against cyber threats.<sup>2</sup> This was a crucial strategic step for Georgia's security agenda, as well as the best platform for cooperation with the UK.

In November 2019, Georgia and the United States signed a framework agreement to elevate defense and security cooperation. This agreement outlined priorities for the next three years, focusing on enhancing Georgia's defense capabilities and interoperability with partner nations.<sup>3</sup> It's safe to say that Georgia has maintained its Euro-Atlantic military orientation in recent years, thereby becoming a crucial platform for the West to maintain a military presence in the South Caucasus. Beyond its own national security, Georgia's military partnerships contribute to broader regional stability. As a vital transit corridor for energy resources and military logistics, Georgia's stability is directly linked to the security of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region. This underscores its importance not only to Western interests but to the entire global security architecture.

### **New Security trends and ongoing military partnerships of Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan has significantly modernized its military capabilities, particularly after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. This includes advancements in drone warfare, artillery, and air defense systems. Azerbaijan maintains a relatively high defense budget compared to its regional neighbors, allowing for continued procurement of modern weaponry, including from Türkiye and Israel (Asgarov 2026; Babayev and Spanger 2020; Freedman 2023). After the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war, a new phase began for Azerbaijan in terms of expanding military cooperation, carrying out military exercises, and engaging with various military platforms.

Azerbaijan and Türkiye have significantly strengthened their military cooperation between 2020 and 2025, building upon a basis of shared strategic and regional interests. This collaboration encompasses various dimensions, including joint military exercises, defense industry partnerships, official meetings, military education and formal agreements enhancing their strategic alliance. Strong military ties with Türkiye, including joint exercises and defense collaborations, enhance Azerbaijan's military capabilities (Yemelianova 2023). One of the most important dimensions of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations is the two countries' military relationship. Over the course of 30 years, many agreements and protocols have been signed between the two countries, which have contributed to the development of their military relations. The founding principle of this military relationship was to meet the officer training needs of the Azerbaijani army. The two states have conducted numerous joint military exercises

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defence of Georgia. 2021. “Cyber Security Strategy 2021-2024.” Accessed April 16, 2026. [https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/Cyber\\_Security/Cyber\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_of\\_the\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Defence\\_of\\_Georgia\\_2021-2024“.pdf](https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/Cyber_Security/Cyber_Security_Strategy_of_the_Ministry_of_Defence_of_Georgia_2021-2024“.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2019. “Joint Statement of the U.S.-Georgia Security Working Group.” Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Accessed April 16, 2026. <https://2021-2025.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-u-s-georgia-security-working-group/>.

aimed at improving interoperability and readiness. These exercises serve as practical demonstrations of their strategic partnership and mutual commitment to regional security (Hovsepyan and Tonoyan 2024; Shahbazov 2026; Cheterian 2024).

Between 2020 and 2024, Azerbaijan has actively expanded its military partnerships with several countries, notably Pakistan, Israel, and Italy, Serbia, Qatar and so forth, to enhance its defense capabilities and strategic collaborations. We want to mention and analyse this important cases.

- In September 2024, Pakistan signed a contract to supply JF-17 Block III fighter jets to Azerbaijan. This agreement aims to bolster Azerbaijan's air force capabilities. The deal reflects deepening defense cooperations between the two nations (Kumar 2024). There is no doubt that Pakistan will try to make additional inroads into the defense market of Azerbaijan, as it is economically and strategically important for Pakistan to find new means to export aircraft, missile systems, tanks, and other kind of military vehicles. In this, Azerbaijan will be a willing partner (Mumtaz 2023; Dadparvar and Parto 2026).
- Along with all current military cooperation, Israel remains Azerbaijan's main military supplier and loyal partner. Azerbaijan has maintained a loyal defense procurement relationship with Israel, acquiring developed military technology, including drones and air defense systems (Asgarov 2026; Bashirova 2024). This partnership has significantly increased Azerbaijan's military capacities. The two countries have involved in intelligence sharing and technological collaboration, strengthening their strategic alliance in the region and in the world. Israel have supplied nearly 60% of Azerbaijan's major arms imports, underscoring the depth of their defense ties.

Due to the data referred to above, especially as Azerbaijan produces strategic commodities (oil and gas), Israel attached to this country a high strategic value in its foreign policy and sought to deepen relations with it to secure a source of energy and to get closer (Souleimanov, Ehrmann and Aliyev 2014; Cohen and Lev 2023).

- Azerbaijan has also established high-level military cooperation with Italy. Beyond defense, Italy and Azerbaijan have developed a strategic partnership encompassing political, economic, and energy sectors, further solidifying their bilateral relations. These partnerships underscore Azerbaijan's strategic efforts to diversify and strengthen its military alliances and capabilities through international collaboration. Azerbaijan and Italy have significantly enhanced their military cooperation, particularly in the realm of military-technical collaboration. This deep military cooperation with Italy brings Azerbaijan closer to the borders of the European Union.
- Meanwhile, Serbia also appeared among Azerbaijan's military partners. Azerbaijan and Serbia have been actively enhancing their military cooperation in recent years, focusing on strategic collaboration and mutual interests. Key developments include: In February 2024, representatives from the Ministries of Defense of both countries held their inaugural defense consultations in Baku. During these discussions, officials exchanged views on existing military cooperation and explored avenues for further enhancement. The consultations

culminated in the signing of the Bilateral Military Cooperation Plan for 2024, outlining joint activities and initiatives for the year.

Between 2020 and 2024, Azerbaijan has actively expanded its military partnerships and cooperations beyond its traditional allies and partners engaging with several countries to enhance its defense capacities and strategic alliances. Azerbaijan's expanding military partnerships with countries like Türkiye, Israel, Pakistan, Italy, and Serbia between 2020-2024 reflect a strategic shift in its geopolitical positioning. These partnerships serve multiple regional and global purposes, strengthening Azerbaijan's military, political, and economic leverage (Bashirova 2024; Gülseven 2024). Below is an analysis of the geopolitical and regional significance of these new military collaborations: Azerbaijan's actions can be effectively analyzed through the lenses of Balance of Power Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory. Through its military diversification and strategic alliances, Azerbaijan seeks to maintain regional security by balancing power dynamics against Armenia, Russia, and Iran, ensuring its sovereignty and regional hegemony. In the context of RSCT, Azerbaijan's security is increasingly intertwined with external powers, notably Türkiye, Israel, and Pakistan, which has reshaped the South Caucasus security complex (Ismayilov 2013; Gülseven 2024). Azerbaijan's military buildup and strategic partnerships are reshaping the regional security architecture, pushing back against Russian dominance and integrating more closely with NATO-aligned powers, all while attempting to navigate a complex relationship with Iran and Armenia.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

The South Caucasus region, characterized by a shifting security paradigm, is undergoing significant transformations in its military and defense dynamics. This shifting landscape, shaped by regional alliances and global power competition, highlights the complex interplay of security factors in small states and the ongoing transformation of military cooperation in the South Caucasus. The broader geopolitical impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its long-term security implications continue to shape the security calculations of all parties, further underscoring the need for balanced strategies in pursuit of regional stability (Poghosyan and Martirosyan 2013; Babayev and Spanger 2020).

This study, examining the evolving security paradigm and military cooperation in Armenia and analyzing the relevant legal framework, allows for theoretical conclusions and practical recommendations. The study's findings on the transformation of Armenia's military cooperation and its implementation practices allowed for the identification of challenges, trends, and development directions in the current context, as well as the development of concrete proposals for improving military cooperation. These include:

- The South Caucasus is undergoing significant transformations in its military and defense dynamics, with each of the three key countries adapting to the changing geopolitical landscape in accordance with their national interests.
- It remains a fact that the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and subsequently the 2020 war, continues to impact the security policies of all three countries, further influencing their military cooperation and strategies. The post-

war situation remains a critical factor determining the regional balance of power not only in the military, but also in the economic, social, cultural, and other spheres.

- The development of military cooperation in the South Caucasus highlights the complex security aspirations of states, illustrating the strategic importance of the region and the complex security challenges faced by small states in disputed regions.
- Given current trends, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia will actively continue to diversify their military partnerships to balance regional and global power. This could lead to further geopolitical fragmentation or, conversely, new security alliances. The South Caucasus will remain a contested space, where global and regional powers—such as Russia, Türkiye, the EU, and the US—will compete for influence, shaping military and defense processes in the region.

Going forward, the South Caucasus will remain a dynamic and strategically competitive region, where military cooperation and geopolitical alliances will continue to develop. Deepening military ties between regional and global players suggest that further security realignments, increased competition, and potential security dilemmas may occur in the coming years. Whether these changes contribute to long-term stability or further regional fragmentation will largely depend on how states structure their military strategies and diplomatic relations in this complex geopolitical environment.

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### **Ethics Statement**

The author confirms that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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