GEOPOLITICS OF THE "TURAN CORRIDOR" AND THE GREAT POWERS

Posted on October 25, 2024 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

"Washington, Brussels, London, and Moscow were fully aware of the devastating impact that the genocide in Artsakh would have on the Republic of Armenia's security and future viability," says Dr. Armen Ayvazyan, a military historian and expert on international security, in an interview with "Golos Armenii" on 12th October 2024.

Golos Armenii (GA): - What stance do the major powers take regarding the proposed transport corridor through Armenia's Syunik region, which aims to link Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan and, subsequently, Turkey?

Armen Ayvazyan: - The issue of the corridor is intrinsically tied to the fate of Syunik, and in turn, Syunik is critical to Armenia's survival as both a nation and a state. In a context where Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev is pursuing a genocidal policy against Armenians and all things Armenian, with support from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the establishment of transport corridors through Armenian territory poses a grave threat to Armenians and Armenian statehood.

Azerbaijan and Turkey aim to undermine Armenia's sovereignty in Syunik through the creation of an extraterritorial "Turan corridor," which they misleadingly refer to as "Zangezur corridor." This initiative is a step toward annexing the southern part of Armenia. Once this corridor becomes operational, these two existential enemies of Armenia will gain new tools for provocations and increased pressure, aiming to displace the Armenian population from Syunik and other border regions and repopulate Armenian territory with Azerbaijani settlers.

GA: - And then…?

Armen Ayvazyan: - Then, under the pretext of protecting these settlers from 'Armenian nationalists,' they will likely call for the introduction of an 'international peacekeeping contingent' into Armenia.

With the launch of the 'Turan Corridor,' Armenia's connection to Iran will be effectively severed, just as it was in 2021 with the Goris-Kapan national highway. The government of Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan misled us with promises of joint control over this route by Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani border guards. What transpired? The Russian and Armenian border guards withdrew, ceding full control of this strategic highway to the Azerbaijanis, who promptly closed it off. A similar fate befell the 'road of life' to Artsakh — the Lachin corridor — where the Russians handed it over to the Azerbaijanis and left permanently.

The same scheme is now being employed to gain control over the "Turan Corridor." Initially, it is proposed that this corridor be handed over to a third party — Russia — which will then swiftly cede it to Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey. Over the past three and a half decades, Russia has repeatedly shown a willingness to sacrifice its long-standing conquests and strategic interests for short-term gains, whether financial, economic, or image-related.

Consider how Russia "withdrew" from all of Eastern Europe—East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia,

Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, followed by the Baltics — Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, then from Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Why, then, wouldn't it abandon Syunik and ultimately all of Armenia and the South Caucasus? The surrender of Artsakh, which holds paramount military and strategic importance, illustrates that Russia, contrary to its commitments, has not only acquiesced but has effectively taken on a covert obligation to transfer control of Armenia and all of Transcaucasia to Turkey, and by extension, NATO.

It is worth noting that, having quickly forgotten the fate of the Lachin corridor, Moscow — through the press secretary of the Russian President, Dmitry Peskov, known for his pro-Turkish stance — has recently officially used the false term "Zangezur corridor." In the future —be it in ten, twenty, or even fifty years — the secret agreements between Russia and NATO regarding Armenian Artsakh and the grim fate awaiting the Republic of Armenia will eventually come to light. But until that time, Armenia must find a way to endure and survive. A comparable scenario occurred after the Russian October Revolution of 1917, when the Bolsheviks disclosed the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement from May 16, 1916, which defined how the territories of the Ottoman Empire would be divided among the British, French, and Russian empires after World War I.

GA: - Do you think that Russia will leave Armenia?

Armen Ayvazyan: - It has already left Artsakh, that is, that part of post-Soviet Armenia that formed the backbone of its military security system, and at the same time the primary lever of the Russian influence over both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In military-strategic terms, Russia is indeed withdrawing, as evidenced by all recent events and decisions. Despite the substantial Russian economic presence in Armenia, it cannot offset the military aspect. Once Russian troops withdraw, both Russian business interests and influence in Armenia will likely decline sharply.

Recall President Lukashenko's statements about Moscow and Minsk's keen interest in Azerbaijan "controlling" all of Transcaucasia and positioning itself as the "leader" of the region. The West has echoed this sentiment, albeit in more veiled and subtle terms, suggesting essentially that Turkey should play the role of the "big brother" in Transcaucasia. But Turkey and Azerbaijan currently function as close military-political allies, forming almost a confederation. Consequently, both the collective West and the Russian Federation, dancing to its tune in Transcaucasia, are both pushing Armenia towards becoming a vassal of Turkey—an effort intended to appease the West yet paradoxically undermining Russian interests.

GA: - From what you have said, it follows that it is the collective West who is primarily interested in opening the "Turan corridor" and promoting pan-Turkism?

Armen Ayvazyan: - Exactly! Following the collapse of the USSR, the West swiftly sought to advance Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Pan-Turkism serves the West's interests by allowing it to exert pressure on Russia, Iran, and China, with the hope of destabilizing these nations

and achieving their collapse. The methodical strengthening of fascist Turkey has evolved into a strategic objective for Western globalist elites.

Note: Turkey and Azerbaijan are being absolved of all wrongdoing, including acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing, along with egregious violations of human rights, freedom of speech, and the fundamental anti-democratic nature of these genocidal states. For reasons that are still not entirely clear, Russia has agreed to implement Western plans that bolster Turkey — through initiatives like the construction of nuclear power plants and concessions to Azerbaijan — and its advance eastward. Armenia, standing in Turkey's way and abandoned by both Russia and the collective West, has lost Artsakh and finds itself in an extremely precarious situation that threatens its very existence. Washington, Brussels, London, and Moscow have been undoubtedly aware of the implications that the genocide in Artsakh holds for the security and survival of the Republic of Armenia. They understood this fully, yet allowed and even facilitated the next phase of the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the fascist heirs of the Young Turks.

GA: - If the positions of the West and Russia are relatively clear, what can be said about other major powers that might positively influence our region in these geopolitical matters? I'm referring to China, India, and Iran...

Armen Ayvazyan: - Let's go through this sequentially. Today, the most influential global player after the United States is China, and its voice could have significantly impacted Armenia's fate, particularly in preventing the de-Armenianization of Artsakh. However, judging by the remarks made by the Chinese representative at the special sessions of the UN Security Council in 2023 regarding the unblocking of Artsakh, China has adopted not even a neutral stance, but a clearly pro-Azerbaijani one. In contrast, the statements from ambassadors of several other countries, particularly India and France, condemning the inhumane siege of Artsakh, were far more objective than those of the Chinese ambassador. Together with the collective West and Russia, China effectively signaled to Azerbaijan a green light for carrying out ethnic cleansing in Artsakh.

GA: - How can we explain this?

Armen Ayvazyan: - Let me provide some context. Since the 1990s, many of us in Armenia believed that China would have an interest in preserving a sovereign, independent Armenia as a natural bulwark against pan-Turkism. After all, Beijing was confronted with the issue of separatism among the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs in its northwestern province of Xinjiang, who received support from Turkey, both rhetorically and often through actions. Notably, thousands of Uyghur separatists, extremists, and Islamists have fled to Turkey, where they were warmly welcomed and found refuge for their further subversive activities. This situation even led to diplomatic démarches between the two sides.

However, China has since largely resolved the Uyghur issue. Without delving into specifics, I'll just mention, that Xinjiang is now nearly half (43 percent) ethnic Chinese, a figure comparable to that of

the Uyghurs themselves. Since the 2010s, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Uyghurs have undergone large-scale "reeducation" through "voluntary-forced" measures aimed at fostering loyalty to China. Beijing is so confident in its ability to overcome the threat of Uyghur separatism that, in June of this year, it invited Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, formerly the head of Turkey's intelligence and security service, to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The highly publicized visit was unprecedented, as no high-ranking Western government official had ever received such an invitation. Fidan's three-day (!) official visit to China signifies a fundamental shift towards improved and strengthened relations between Ankara and Beijing. It can be assumed that such results have come at the expense of the Uyghurs, as well as Armenia and, specifically, Artsakh, to the blockade and destruction of which Beijing (like Moscow, Washington and Brussels) simply turned a blind eye.

GA: - So it's essentially a matter of mutual benefits: Turkey silences the Uyghur separatists, and China doesn't react to the de-Armenization of Artsakh?

Armen Ayvazyan: - That component is likely present. However, I believe the decisive factor behind China's support for the "Turan Corridor," which is deadly for Armenians, is its long-term strategy focused not so much on our region but rather on Siberia and the Russian Far East."

GA: - What do you mean by this?

Armen Ayvazyan: - As I mentioned earlier, China is not afraid by pan-Turkism or Turkish political and economic expansion in Central Asia, where its position is extremely strong and poised to strengthen further through substantial investments, numerous development projects, and geographical proximity. In the short term, pan-Turkism poses a genuine threat to Russia and Iran. For Russia, the rise of Turkish influence could have devastating implications in the North Caucasus, the Volga region, Tatarstan, and Bashkiria, as well as in Moscow and St. Petersburg, where millions of Turkic people, mostly Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Kazakhs, already reside. The Russian state could potentially falter under such pressure.

Perhaps there are, if not explicit agreements, then at least a "mutual understanding" between China and the West regarding the possible future division of a demographically and economically weakened Russia. As a result, part of Siberia and the Far East could go to the West, and part to China, for example, in the form of new puppet states.

It's important to note that while China is assisting Russia in withstanding the Western economic blockade and avoiding defeat in the Ukrainian war, it is doing so with remarkable restraint and moderation. This support does not compromise China's economic interests; on the contrary, it seems to enhance them without jeopardizing its relations with the US and the EU. For instance, France and Switzerland, countries that actively support Ukraine, were recently invited to the international platform "Friends of Peace" on Ukraine, organized by China and Brazil. This move has elicited discontent even from Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

At this stage, Russia's defeat is not advantageous to China, since the issue of Taiwan's forcible

annexation has already matured and become a strategic necessity. If the West finishes off Russia, it will completely focus on China. However, Russia's victory is not in China's interests either.

GA: - So what does China want anyway?

Armen Ayvazyan: - Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that China is not invested in Russia's defeat or victory, but rather in its strategic weakening. The goal is the "peaceful capture" of Siberia and the Far East in the medium term. Should the Russian Federation experience a sudden collapse, direct military intervention by China cannot be ruled out either. Currently, over a million Chinese citizens live and work in these regions (precise figures are not publicly available), while the local population continues to decline. By gaining control over even a portion of Siberian and Far Eastern territories and their natural resources, China would significantly accelerate its development, turning into an unattainable global hegemon. Curiously, the West appears to underestimate the ramifications of the pan-Turkic project it promotes, which may lead to a dramatic enhancement of China's power!

It is precisely these calculations that underlie the policy of Beijing, which has chosen not to confront Turkish expansionism in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This stance could facilitate Azerbaijan's seizure and annexation of Syunik, potentially leading to Armenia's disappearance from the political map.

Furthermore, Moscow's position on the "Turan Corridor" may have been shaped not only by Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the collective West standing behind them, but also by China. For its friends in Moscow, China likely rationalizes the corridor's opening as part of its broader Belt and Road Initiative.

GA: - So who remains as a genuine and potential ally of Armenia?

Armen Ayvazyan: - Among the great and regional powers, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands at the forefront. Following closely is India, and possibly France.

Tehran belatedly realized that the destruction of Armenia would have catastrophic consequences for itself: along its entire border from Turkey to the Caspian Sea, Iran would face a formidable Azerbaijani-Turkish confederation, which would be directly aiming at annexing its northern and northwestern provinces. Thankfully, the Baku Pan-Turkists do not particularly hide their expansionist ambitions!

Thus, at this historical juncture, Iran emerges as Armenia's most natural and primary ally, even without conclusion of formal agreements, because it has a vital interest in preserving Armenian statehood, at least within its current borders, which have been reduced by a quarter.

GA: - What is India's position on the "Turan Corridor"?

Armen Ayvazyan: - India's “eternal” adversary is Islamic Pakistan—the only country in the world that has yet to recognize the Republic of Armenia (notably, Armenia recognizes Pakistan for some

reason). Pakistan maintains close military ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan while being a long-standing ally of China, which not only considers Pakistan an "all-weather friend" but also has significant territorial disputes with India.

India holds an extremely positive view of Armenia. During special sessions of the UN Security Council addressing the Artsakh issue, the Indian representative clearly condemned the blockade and called for the immediate opening of the Lachin corridor. Yerevan's recent acquisition of substantial modern weaponry from India reflects the high level of bilateral relations. However, India's support, despite being from such a major power (currently the world's most populous country), remains modest.

I hope that as India recognizes Armenia's significance in countering pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism — challenges with which India itself is constantly engaged — Delhi will increasingly prioritize its relationship with Armenia. After all, the fall of Armenia would not only bolster the positions of Pakistan and radical Islamists within India but would also significantly enhance the influence of Pakistan and Turkey in Central Asia, a region Turkey has recently taken to renaming Turkestan. In the medium to short term, the rise of pan-Turkism could weaken Russia, India's historical ally, leading to a substantial strengthening of China's position. I have already described possible scenarios for such development above.

GA: - What about France?

Armen Ayvazyan: - France positions itself as almost the main ally of Armenia. However, as a leading member of the European Union and NATO, it remains part of the collective West, which has supported Azerbaijan in its genocidal actions and plans without imposing significant economic or other sanctions. If Paris can muster the political will to genuinely support Armenia, it could indeed become a strategic ally. Yet, France has often favored rhetoric over action regarding the Armenian issue. Nonetheless, recent agreements for the supply of modern weapon systems, particularly in air defense and artillery, offer hope that a full-fledged strategic partnership with Armenia is still achievable.

Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that only the Chinese leadership is engaged in long-term strategic planning. In contrast, the West focuses on short- and medium-term objectives, while in Moscow, the entire strategy is reduced to obtaining dubious short-term benefits that backfire too frequently.

As pro-Turkish elites and pro-Turkish thinking reign supreme in Russia and the West, it is crucial for Armenia to build a new strategic orientation, guided by the slogan I proposed a year or two ago: "NOT THE NORTH OR THE WEST, BUT THE SOUTH AND THE EAST!"

*****

Dr. Armen Ayvazian is a Senior Researcher in History for the Matenadaran Research Institute in Armenia

*and Director of the "**Ararat" Center for Strategic Research**, Yerevan.*

Comments



Passing by – 2025-01-05 21:36:52
Russia and Armenia drifted apart after Pashinyan was elected following a successful color revolution by the US. His pro west stance didn't get him anywhere did he? He orchestrated the removal of Russian presence in Arnemia and Baku saw the opportunity and took it. Pashinyan's Western 'friends' abandoned him right away. He also refused help from Iran. I don't see self reflection in this article, just constant attacks on other countries.