CRITICAL EVALUATION: STRATEGIC DEFICIENCIES IN THE 2026 EXTERNAL SECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT OF ARMENIA

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Category: Opinions

By David Davidian, Shadow Diplomat, Yerevan, 22 January 2026

The most consequential shortcoming of the report is that it fails to situate Armenia within a clearly articulated grand strategy that encompasses, but is not limited to, territorial integrity, economic security, political stability, and alliances. While the document provides situational assessments and probabilistic judgments, it fails to answer basic strategic questions, such as: What kind of state Armenia seeks to be in the evolving international order, and what are the dynamic elements of that order? What core trade-offs is Armenia willing or unwilling to make within a context? What strategic end-state is Armenia aiming for in the South Caucasus? By not addressing these questions, the risks are described in isolation, rather than as deviations from or threats to a defined strategic trajectory. Intelligence assessments should ultimately serve strategy, but such strategy is a mystery.

With an overreliance on tactical probability assessments, such as "highly unlikely," "likely", at the expense of structural analysis, the report does not sufficiently analyze why underlying structures persist.

While the report documents Azerbaijan's belligerent narratives and increased military spending in detail, it stops short of assigning a strategic intent model, nor does it mention two hundred plus square kilometers of Armenian land occupied by the Azerbaijani army. Armenia's Foreign Intelligence Service acknowledges the ambiguity but does not propose analytic hypotheses or decision trees, which are standard in mature intelligence products. This limits the report's utility for policymakers who must plan under uncertainty rather than merely observe. However, this report will be interpreted by regional and global powers. What it lacks will not be justified as being limited by claims of national security, but quite the opposite.

Hybrid threats are presented as something that happens to Armenia, not as challenges that test specific weak points in state capacity. With everything appearing important, therefore, nothing is strategically decisive. This dilutes the report's value as it appears more of a year-end report, considering its lack of strategic redlines and constraints.

Technology is described as a global phenomenon rather than as a determinant of Armenia's survival strategy. Is all technology equally welcome as a harbinger of prosperity?

The report lacks strategic realism. It fails to confront Armenia's narrowing margin for error in foreign policy or the limits of diplomacy without credible deterrence. Moreover, it overlooks the risk that prolonged pressure and constrained resources may gradually wear down the state's ability to sustain its tactical, transactional foreign policy. In an intelligence culture, accuracy is necessary, but strategic usefulness requires uncomfortable conclusions.

The report answers what is happening and what might happen to Armenia, from an external viewpoint, but not what Armenia must become to survive what is happening. Instead, this report demonstrates that Armenia's response to external threats is taking a fetal position, with peace being

merely the absence of war and framed by a Washington declaration. Without defining peace as a condition to be secured and defended, the report implicitly treats it as externally granted and internally consumed, rather than actively produced and protected by the state.

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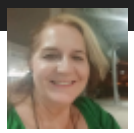
David Davidian is a Lecturer at the American University of Armenia. He has spent over a decade in technical intelligence analysis at major high-technology firms. He resides in Yerevan, Armenia. A compendium of his articles can be seen on shadowdiplomat.com

Comments

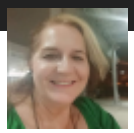
David Davidian – 2026-02-01 10:59:31

Dear Nurnisa, Thank you for your careful and articulate responses. You accurately discerned the intent of my article. The issues I addressed were intentionally framed at a high level, as they are strategic in nature and relate to the broader consequences for a nation that fails to acknowledge its existential challenges. Rather than offering an exhaustive critique of the FIS document, I focused on select overarching concerns, with the aim of highlighting their potential impact on national resilience and long-term strategic outcomes.



Nurnisa Erismis – 2026-01-31 15:44:19

Dear David, I wanted to take a moment to write to you after reading your recent critique of Armenia's 2026 External Security Risk Assessment. I came to the text simply as a reader, but I finished it feeling that it demanded a more direct response than a silent nod of agreement. What struck me most is not any single argument, but the way you insist on drawing a sharp line between threat enumeration and strategy. Security discussions around Armenia are often saturated with data, probabilities, and warnings, yet your piece makes clear—almost uncomfortably so—that none of this amounts to strategy unless it is anchored in a defined political horizon. Your question is deceptively simple and therefore deeply unsettling: What kind of state is Armenia trying to become in order to survive what is happening to it? I found your critique of probabilistic language particularly important. Terms like "likely" or "unlikely" often give the illusion of rigor, but as you point out, without a strategic framework they only describe motion without direction. In that sense, your essay does something rare: it exposes how technical accuracy can coexist with political emptiness. Intelligence can be correct and still be strategically useless. Your observation that hybrid threats are treated as things that merely "happen" to Armenia—rather than as tests of specific institutional weaknesses—also resonated strongly. When everything is labeled a priority, nothing is decisive. The absence of red lines, constraints, and trade-offs does not create flexibility; it produces drift. That diagnosis feels particularly relevant at a moment when Armenia's margin for error is narrowing rather than expanding. The metaphor of the "fetal position" stayed with me. It captures, with uncomfortable precision, a posture that mistakes the absence of immediate catastrophe for security. Your distinction between peace as an externally granted condition and peace as a state actively produced and defended by institutions is, I think, one of the most important contributions of your piece. Without that distinction, diplomacy risks becoming a substitute for strategy rather than a tool within it. What I also appreciated is what your text does not do. You do not offer a ready-made grand strategy, nor do you pretend that one can be improvised in a paragraph. Instead, you leave the reader with responsibility rather than reassurance. In a political environment saturated with slogans—both alarmist and pacifist—that refusal to provide easy answers feels both honest and necessary. I read your essay as an invitation to a more demanding conversation: not about whether Armenia faces threats (that is evident), but about whether it has articulated the kind of political subjectivity required to withstand them. That, to me, is a more difficult and more urgent question than any single policy debate. Thank you for writing a piece that does not seek comfort, but clarity. I hope it circulates widely and provokes the kind of strategic reflection it so clearly calls for. With appreciation, Nurnisa



Nurnisa Erismis – 2026-01-31 15:35:39

Dear David, After reading Mr. Harut Sassounian's article, some questions that had been lingering in my mind for a while resurfaced with renewed clarity. Shortly afterward, I came across your assessment, and inevitably found myself reading the two texts together. One recalls the continuity of intent stretching from the past to the present; the other questions what kind of political posture and strategic reasoning is being produced today in response to that continuity. In this sense, your text speaks from a place that completes the questions left open by Sassounian. Sassounian, drawing on historical documents, reminds us how the language of "peace," "ceasefire," and "normalization" has historically accompanied strategies of deception and weakening, and issues a strong call for caution with regard to present processes. You, looking at the same picture from within, ask a more difficult question: what kind of state does Armenia seek to become in the face of this continuity of intent? Rather than focusing on the mere existence of threats, you make visible a lack of strategy in responding to them. From this perspective, the two texts do not contradict one another; on the contrary, they complement each other. While Sassounian underscores the risks of naive optimism, you show that caution alone is insufficient unless it is translated into a coherent institutional and political strategy. One keeps the possibility of a "trap" in view; the other points to the absence of a map for navigating away from it. Reading the two texts together, it becomes clearer that the core issue is not peace itself, but how peace is defined and under what conditions it is defended. Just as agreements on paper do not in themselves produce security, a constant state of alarm does not produce political agency. The real debate, as your piece implicitly insists, should move beyond simplistic binaries such as "peace versus resistance," and instead focus seriously on which red lines, which institutional capacities, and which strategic objectives make engagement possible. At this point, your text is particularly valuable precisely because it offers no easy answers and instead brings difficult questions into the open. Read together, these two texts make it clear that Armenia's challenge is not whether to place hope in peace or to fear it, but how to define itself as a strategic subject in the face of enduring intent. With appreciation, Nurnisa