A SEERING CONVERSATION

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While countries (Georgia, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Israel) are in flames or are being threatened by war, Armenia is paralyzed and seemingly cowers in fear of imminent invasion by Turkic Azerbaijan. **Keghart** spoke to David Davidian, lecturer at the American University of Armenia, about Armenia's security status and its relations with Russia, the West, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and several leading Arab countries. American-born Davidian has spent over a decade in technical intelligence analysis at major technology firms. His articles appear in **World Geostrategic Insights, Shadow Diplomat, The Times of Israel, Keghart,** and other media outlets. Davidian lives in Yerevan.



KEGHART: Feridun Sinirlioğlu, a career diplomat and Erdogan loyalist with alleged "ties to secret ISIS talks," was recently appointed as secretary general of the OSCE. Armenia consented to the appointment.

1. Was Armenia's concession intended to ameliorate relations between Armenia and Turkey? And do you think a *quid pro quo* or threats were involved?
2. The Nordic Monitor stated "the role of OSCE secretary general grants Sinirlioğlu unique access to leaders and institutions at the national, regional and international levels, positioning him to gather intelligence on behalf of the Erdogan government and potentially influencing decisions behind closed doors." Do you agree with the statement, and if so, doesn't Sinirlioğlu's appointment put RoA (and other countries at odds with Turkey) at a disadvantage?

Davidian: Armenia's consenting to the appointment of Feridun Sinirlioğlu as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) secretary general appears to be one in a long line of concessions to Turkey and its brother state, Azerbaijan. However, this concession is ephemeral, unlike many others. With ISIS essentially the creation of the West (US) and Turkey being a partial NATO ally, Turkish diplomatic relations with ISIS are to be expected. Further, the Turkish-ushered insurgency that ousted Assad of Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is an ISIS derivative. Azerbaijan consistently rejected any interference from the OSCE in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By conceding a Turkish diplomat to this OSCE position, Armenia enables any question of Nagorno-Karabakh to remain off of immediate OSCE mandates.

Armenia lacks a coherent strategy that prevents further erosion of its sovereignty: Armenian villages in Tavush relinquished to Azerbaijan, changing Armenia's constitution, national anthem, national symbols, history books, etc. Much of this de-patriotization is an attempt to appear meek, as if appearing meek will not attract aggression. This leaves us with the impression that Armenian leaders may not have experienced schoolyard dynamics.

Sinirlioğlu in the OSCE will not provide Turkey with significant additional intelligence or access to vital data it does not already have on Armenia. Conceding Sinirlioğlu's appointment to the OSCE does not serve the interest of Armenia's sovereignty but rather the interests of Armenia's leadership. I suspect no quid pro quo or diplomatic threats were necessary for this Armenian approval. As for other states, such as Greece, there may be a different dynamic between Greece and Turkey, the latter technically a NATO member.

KEGHART: Some pundits claim that Russia is so weakened economically and militarily that it has effectively abandoned the Caucasus, including Armenia. Others maintain it's a transient situation; once the Ukraine war is, in one way or another, over, Russia will return. What's your assessment?

1. Should Armenia proceed cautiously and try repairing the strained relationship with Russia, and if so, how?
2. Following the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) experience of people being forcefully removed while Russian forces were present, will people in Armenia accept a reversal?

Davidian: The missing piece here is this:, "Russia is so weakened." Based on GDP and other economic indicators, Russia is not weakened. It's as if the creation of BRICS never happened. One can play with statistics, but Russia's economy has surpassed that of Japan and Germany and is the world's fourth-largest economy, based on World Bank numbers. Armenia's incremental rise in economic performance is based on its being intertwined and interdependent with Russia's.

Russia's Special Military Operation started in early 2022, whereas the Second Karabakh War began in September 2020. Since the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, Russia has had enough military and economic bandwidth to have a special defense agreement (perhaps not a hard alliance) with Iran, trading military technology and hardware. Even during the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, Russia was prepared for military activity in Syria in December 2024.

Russia didn't randomly decide not to intervene in the 2020 Karabakh War because they somehow didn't like Armenians, liked Azerbaijan more, or stabbed Armenians in the back. Geopolitical events are not so unpredictable as to attribute a personality to them. One must remember two items: (1) Pashinyan entered the political scene backed by Western NGOs and supported by the US and EU. It had an anti-Kremlin flavor. It was a light-color revolution. It could not reach the intensity of the Maidan-like revolts since Russia could not be summarily rejected, considering its economic role in Armenia's infrastructure. With the West overtly working to dismember Russia, Pashinyan's 2018 entry on the political scene, having won the Prime Minister's position on the promise of neutralizing oligarchs, typical of post-Soviet republican campaigns, was viewed negatively by the Kremlin. (2) Russia and the West may have lost patience with the two previous Armenian leaders, Kocharian and Sargsyan, who were unable to come to an agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan. We are missing many puzzle pieces that would allow one to reach a non-hypothetical conclusion about Russia and strained relations. The fact that neither Russia nor the West intervened or sanctioned

Azerbaijani during or after the 2020 Karabakh War leads one to tentatively conclude the 2020 Karabakh War and subsequent ethnic cleansing in the fall of 2023 were not contrary to the interests of regional and global powers. The West couldn't project power into the Southern Caucasus, and Russia conveniently claimed Nagorno-Karabakh is not part of Armenia, thus providing an excuse for CSTO inaction. There may have been a quid-pro-quo between Turkey and Russia on one side and Armenia and Western promises on the other. Subsequently, all Armenian errors (and there were many) were blamed on Russia, treacherous Armenians, Israel's support of Azerbaijan, etc. A leading hypothesis for the ultimate loss of Nagorno-Karabakh was that it was an engineered defeat, fitting nicely with its demise being in the interest of others.

Statecraft is difficult; staying in power is tougher. Even though Armenia lacks a path to a strategic goal (peace and economic prosperity are nice but are mere words), it must recognize and work with all regional powers, especially Russia. Russia functions in its interests; Turkey functions in its interests. Upon looking at Syria, it represents a lot more than Armenia, yet Russia hastily ended operations when it was clear the Syrian army wasn't going to fight. In contrast, Armenia and the Southern Caucasus have a long relationship with Russia. Russia prefers not to strangle Armenia economically, considering Russia controls much of Armenia's energy and other key sections of its economy. To reiterate, Russian military arrangements with Iran may open the door to addressing Armenia-Russian strained relations. While this opportunity is available, it is not in the interest of the West, and with Armenia making itself look like an EU aspirant, it will not engage in actions that might be in its interest while serving others. The former includes increased Armenian trade and transport synergy with China. Perhaps Armenian should speak with Georgia to its north about the effects of Chinese investments.



(L-R) ***David Davidian, Vahram Aghajanyan, Dikran Abrahamian and Gevorg Yazichyan***

KEGHART: Donald Trump, the president-elect of the US, opposes getting involved in conflicts that do not directly threaten American interests. He has already stated that he would let the Europeans deal with their disputes; he voiced a similar opinion about the regional powers looking after the situation in Syria.

1. Given the presence of three "pro-Armenian" individuals in U.S leadership positions, especially Mark Rubio, who has criticized Azerbaijani actions on several occasions, how likely is it that the new administration will effectively interfere in favor of Armenia in case of a re-escalation of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan?
2. If Trump's administration intervenes, what should, can, and what would Armenia do?

Davidian: If Trump wants the Europeans to deal with their disputes, there will be no US intervention in hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Unless things change, Turkey is the US/NATO's local representative. US administration members being 'pro-Armenian' is irrelevant if there is no material support for Armenia. Why should any US administration support Armenia? Other than being potentially anti-Russia, we don't offer much right now. Armenia can only work with the resources it has, even to please the West.

It must be mentioned that Armenians could offer more, but such is not in the interest of those in power in Armenia. Armenia's best resource is its diaspora; it's no wonder Armenia's enemies actively pursue the division of the homeland from its diaspora.

KEGHART: In 2020, Azerbaijan attacked Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and used Israeli armaments, particularly drones against which Artsakh was not prepared. In case war breaks up between Azerbaijan and Armenia Israeli armaments will likely be used again.

1. What diplomatic means are available to prevent the use of Israeli armaments against RoA?
2. Based on available open information, how well is Armenia equipped to defend itself against Azerbaijani aggression or any aggression by any party, such as Turkey?

Davidian: Armenia does not have the resources or foreign policy initiatives to prevent Azerbaijan from using any weapons it wants, especially those from Israel, considering the latter supports a globalist agenda currently targeting Iran. Armenia would have to position itself with those who have the power of persuasion and whose interest it would be for Azerbaijan not to attack Armenia, no matter what weapons they have. Such an effort requires statesmanship and is not for the faint of heart.

While simplistic, if there is a war between Iran and Israel, Azerbaijan may be used as an Israeli forward logistics hub. If Iran is losing the war or is disintegrating, Azerbaijan may militarily support the Israeli attack yet keeping in mind this would be against Russian interests. Conversely, if Iran is winning the war, Baku may be silent, hoping its oil fields stay intact. I suspect the Armenian government believes the West will protect it against any direct or collateral damage in such a war. If so, such a position goes beyond incompetence.

It is unclear what Armenia's military capabilities would be if invaded by Azerbaijan. Valid open-source intelligence along these lines is few and unreliable. Armenia would be well advised not to be on the receiving end of direct Turkish aggression, especially with Armenia's frozen CSTO status. Given new dynamics created by the loss of Syria and a Ukrainian loss to Russia, Russia's base in Gyumri could take on heightened importance. With too many variables in flux, it's unclear what efforts the Armenian government is engaged in to address domestic or foreign security issues and its military posturing. Purchasing Indian and French weaponry is no guarantee of success in defending against an aggressive Azerbaijan. Quoting US General George S. Patton, "Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men."

KEGHART: In a recent interview by 168.am, Christine Arakelian, a senior economic and management consultant, highlighted the grave concerns that the situation in Syria has caused for Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. She suggested forging strategic relationships with these countries.

1. There are no such relationships now. Should there be, and
2. What benefits would they have for Armenia?

Davidian: Christine Arakelian fell into the trap of trying to solve tactical issues, dragging Armenia into a complex geopolitical earthquake in the Middle East, whose short-term outlook is unclear, while the rest of the discussion was on geopolitical large-scale problems. Let's not kid ourselves; Armenia has limited strategic value for Egypt, the Saudis, or the UAE. Given Armenia's status, if it were to disappear, it would not make much of a difference to these three Arab states. Excuse my candor.

KEGHART: Some Pashinyan supporters say Pashinyan is a far-thinking politician who is prepared to erase the past, such as the Armenian Genocide, to deny Azerbaijan and-Turkey the excuse to occupy Armenia. Do you agree with that interpretation?

Davidian: No. This is a fallacious argument that brings us back to schoolyard dynamics. A bully does not need an excuse for aggression. The weaker someone appears, the more vulnerable they are. Conversely, the stronger one appears, the lesser the chance of being attacked. Everybody in the schoolyard knows this. Pashinyan is not a politician; he is way over his head and applauds the fact that he came to power on the backs of Western-sponsored NGOs, having made such a statement five years ago in a CivilNet interview. Taking this fallacious argument to its conclusion, Armenians could assimilate into a Turkic culture and survive as human beings, but as non-Armenians. Would Pashinyan be applauded for this as well?

KEGHART: Thank you Mr. Davidian.

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Comments

S. N. – 2024-12-26 14:41:16
Tens of thousands of Russian citizens are currently roaming the streets of Yerevan, fleeing from the horrors of the "fourth world economy" to Armenia, because even Armenia's economy seems like a paradise compared to Russia's.They will tell a lot of fascinating things about the "4th economy" and about its "successes". And to get an accurate picture of the state of the Russian economy, I suggest to listen to Russian economists and commentators, and not read the nonsense of some crazy IMF.

David Davidian – 2024-12-26 06:26:53
To Susanna, who asked about the status of the Russian economy, see: https://internationalbanker.com/finance/sanctions-notwithstanding-russias-economy-continues-to-outperform/. I assure you I don't make up such things.

DAY – 2024-12-25 16:10:09
The leadership of Armenia is fooling itself if it believes the west will come to its rescue. The west has poured hundreds of trillions of dollars into Ukraine, only to see Russia continually advance. Will the west even put a fraction of this amount toward Armenia? And if it does, do we expect the outcome to be better for Armenia than Ukraine? The questions answer themselves. The only path for small countries is to make peace with its more powerful neighbors. For Armenia, first and foremost this means Russia and Iran. I see no other path to securing any semblance of security for the Armenian state, and, therefore, the Armenian nation.

Jirair Tutunjian – 2024-12-25 10:43:55
Stockholm Syndrome is a coping mechanism to a captive or abusive situation whereby sufferers develop positive feelings toward their captors and abusers. Gofer Pashinyan suffers from the syndrome.

Garbis Korajian – 2024-12-25 03:05:03
Excellent Interview! Thank you Dr. Dikran Abrahamian and David Davidian. Have a Happy New Year. Garbis Korajian



S. N. – 2024-12-25 01:07:33

Mr. Davidyan, do you really think that the West brought Pashinyan to power? But the President of Russia does not agree with you... *** VLADIMIR PUTIN:"IT IS WRONG TO CALL PASHINYAN A TRAITOR, WE MUST SUPPORT HIM AND HIS TEAM" According to the Russian president, the surrender of the ancient Armenian Artsakh-Karabakh, which was part of Armenia for thousands of years, to the centenary Azerbaijan, turns out to be in the... interests of the Armenian people. Putin is confident that the decision to surrender Artsakh-Karabakh to neighboring Azerbaijan demanded from Nikol Pashinyan, we quote, "great personal courage." He called on all CSTO countries to support "Agent Soros Pashinyan" and "his team of agents of the West" - that's what Kremlin propagandists call Pashinyan and his supporters. And why should they be supported? And to bring the matter to an end. However, read the statements of the President of Russia for yourself... Moscow, December 2, 2020 INTERFAX.RU - Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was forced to make painful but necessary decisions on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian President Vladimir Putin said. "The Armenian leadership and the Prime Minister had to make very difficult, but necessary decisions for the people of Armenia. I must say that these decisions are, of course, painful, but, I emphasize once again, necessary and required great personal courage from the Prime Minister," Putin said on Wednesday at a session of the CSTO Collective Security Council. According to Putin, "everyone present at the meeting today assumes a degree of responsibility when making decisions of this kind." "He (Pashinyan - IF) has assumed this responsibility, and our task is to support the Prime Minister himself and his team now in order to establish a peaceful life, ensure the implementation of all decisions taken and help people who find themselves in a difficult life situation," Putin said. In turn, Pashinyan called the Russian peacekeepers the guarantor of maintaining peace and security in Nagorno-Karabakh. "The Russian peacekeeping contingent is the guarantor of maintaining peace and security in the region. I would like to emphasize the exceptional role of the President of Russia. Throughout the 44 days of hostilities, we have been in constant contact and discussed the necessary measures to stop the bloodshed and protect people," Pashinyan said at a session of the CSTO Collective Security Council via videoconference. To all those who doubt the reliability of the information provided, we suggest reading the publications of the Russian media at the following links: https://www.interfax.ru/world/739572



Susanna – 2024-12-25 00:45:41

I can imagine how merrily and loudly the citizens of Russia would laugh if they read this interview. "Is Russia the fourth largest economy in the world?"? You must be joking. This "fourth economy" of the world is not even able to produce shells for guns, so it buys them from... North Korea! And she buys drones from... Iran! Where do you get this information about the economic situation in Russia, which is close to catastrophe? Russian officials or Russian television, which the whole of Russia is laughing at, do you take them? I kindly advise you not to utter such thoughts in the presence of Russian citizens; they may think that you are laughing at them.