

# RSC Analytical Briefing Developments in Armenia & South Caucasus Region

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5 November 2025

## RSC Online Briefing Issues

#### Foreign Policy Issues

- Armenia-Azerbaijan diplomacy
- Bilateral peace treaty & TRIPP
- "Normalization" with Türkiye

#### Domestic politics

- Church and State
- State of the political opposition
- Pre-election year preview

## Armenia-Azerbaijan Diplomacy





- March 2025: negotiations over post-war bilateral peace treaty closed
- July 2025: Abu Dhabi bilateral summit
- August 2025: "peace summit"

# Personal Chemistry









# The Washington "Peace Summit"



# August 2025 Washington Peace Summit

- US presidential initiative: broader context of positive momentum
- US interest and commitment: perception vs. reality
- Bilateral peace treaty initialed
- Connectivity framework signed

# Armenia-Azerbaijan Bilateral Peace Treaty

- Negative elements
  - Punitive peace as premise
  - Flawed premise & dangerous precedents
  - The "day after" & no international guarantee or guarantor
  - Does little to address roots of conflict

# Armenia-Azerbaijan Bilateral Peace Treaty

- Positive elements
  - Renounces territorial claims & recognizes current borders
  - Commits to no use of force or threat of use of force
  - Combats intolerance & extremism
  - Calls for diplomatic recognition

# Trump Route for International Peace & Prosperity (TRIPP)



#### TRIPP Obstacles

- Rival railway routes: threat of bypassing Armenia vs. Kars-Gyumri railway
- Three-part project challenges
  - Financing
  - Construction
  - Operational management

# Regional Repercussions

- Russian reaction uncharacteristically passive & pensive
- Iran's sole "red line" respected
- Georgia as "loser state"
- Positive outlook for Armenia-Türkiye "Normalization"
- European engagement will be key (not American)

# Outstanding Issues

- Status of Armenian prisoners and detainees: total of 23 (including 8 former Nagorno Karabakh officials)
- Prisoner exchange: planned release of 10 Armenian detainees for 2 Syrian mercenaries; last prisoner release was December 2023, 32 Armenians freed for 2 Azerbaijani soldiers

# What Next for Armenia-Azerbaijan Diplomacy

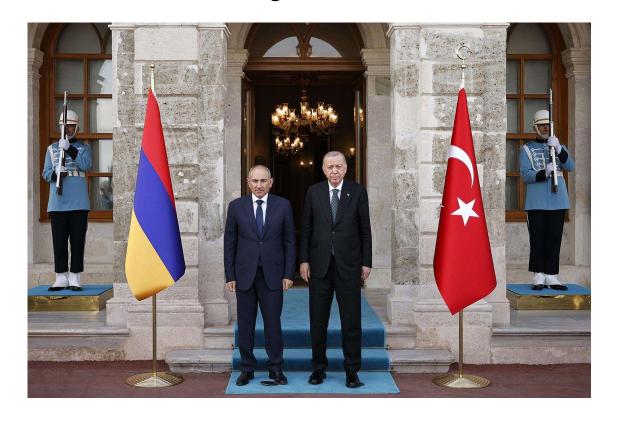
- Inter-agency dialogue & negotiations on deputy ministerial level
- Border demarcation talks
- US initiates two separate bilateral tracks of discussions

#### Armenia-Türkiye "Normalization"



- Establishing diplomatic relations
- Re-opening the closed border

### Armenia-Türkiye "Normalization"



#### The Turkish position: guarded optimism

- Wary of Azerbaijan
- Caution & half measures

### Armenia-Türkiye "Normalization"

- Renewed Turkish interest: regaining regional role
- Looking beyond "Zangezur" with focus on broader connectivity
- Türkiye waiting for political cover from Armenia-Azerbaijan progress
- Tension between Ankara & Baku

## Domestic Political Implications

- Winning political message: moving
   Armenia closer to peace and further
   away from war; agreements as
   diplomatic deliverables
- Opposition deeply discredited by lack of alternative strategy
- Advantages of incumbency boosted by budget priorities & reducing conscription

### No More Smiles



#### Church and State

- Vendetta-driven campaign against Church leadership
- Political confrontation targeting legacy
- But more personal more than political
- Attempts at mediation, compromise & consensus have all failed
- Distressing distraction from priorities

# Church and State: Shared Guilt

- Escalation from conflict to confrontation to crisis
- Pashinyan's "Real Armenia" concept
- Emotional, impulsive & emboldened
- Politicized theology & doomed foray into politics

#### Political Opposition

- Still no leadership alternative to Pashinyan
- Opposition parties more discredited and marginalized than ever
- Politics of personalities over policies
- Failure to present strategy or vision
- Favoring incumbency: Russian factor as crucial & critical determinant

#### **Opposition Trends & Triggers**

- Opposition fragmentation
  - Traditional parties: former presidents
  - Ambitious contenders: Tatoyan, Vanetsyan
  - Third force: Karapetyan
- Lacking Russian support, utility of oligarchs limited or lost
- Open playing field after June 2026
- Over the horizon: new opposition?

#### Third Force?



# The Political Utility of Oligarchs









# Conclusion: Three Trends & Triggers

- Positive momentum of diplomatic engagement with Azerbaijan & Türkiye
- Storm on the horizon: Resurgent Russia tempted to intervene & interfere in 2026 elections
- Economics & local politics will define Armenia's 2026 parliamentary election



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