

RSC Analytical Briefing Developments in Armenia & South Caucasus Region

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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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