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The Geopolitical Aspects of the India-Armenia Partnership

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Abstract

The South Caucasus region—comprising Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—is a critical geopolitical hub due to its strategic location at the intersection of Asia and Europe, where India has emerged as a new player. This report explores the current India-Armenia partnership in the context of evolving geopolitical dynamics and regional power shifts. It focuses on understanding how Armenia’s strategic

importance can serve India’s broader geopolitical and economic interests, particularly amid the declining influence of traditional powers such as Russia and the rising prominence of regional players like Türkiye. The report analyses the challenges posed by the Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Pakistan alliance, the defence partnership between India and Armenia, the new communication routes to enhance connectivity between India and Europe, and the potential of the India-Armenia bilateral.

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Introduction

The South Caucasus is an important Eurasian political and economic hub, as its transport networks have the potential to facilitate travel across the continent. Control over the South Caucasus grants access to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea basin, serving as a gateway to Central Asia and the Greater Middle East. Given its strategic importance, regional powers such as Russia, Türkiye, and Iran have vied for influence in the South Caucasus for centuries.

In recent years, the demand for alternative transport corridors has surged amid the ongoing Ukraine war, sanctions on Russia, conflicts in the West Asia (Middle East) region, and the resulting difficulties with traditional supply routes such as

the Suez Canal. Consequently, the South Caucasus has become increasingly important as a link between Asia, Europe, and Russia.

At the same time, the region has experienced volatility from ethnic conflicts and wars. Russia has historically had the greatest influence among the three regional players. However, after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war—which in 2023 resulted in total Azerbaijani control over the region, forced displacement of the Armenian population,¹ and the subsequent withdrawal of the Russian peacekeepers in the spring-summer of 2024²—Russia's influence and its role as a security provider has declined.³ This has resulted in a power vacuum, which several regional powers, primarily Türkiye, are striving to fill. The situation has also created favourable conditions for new players outside the region.

For India, there is a unique opportunity to contribute to stability in its extended neighbourhood and to ensure its presence in the strategic communication routes that could be a game-changer in the future. Based on geopolitical considerations, India has prioritised its relations with Armenia, with which it shares interests

such as connectivity projects, and common security challenges emanating from the Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Pakistan alliance. It is thus important to analyse the geopolitical rationale behind the emerging India-Armenia relationship.

Armenia: An Important Partner for India

India and Armenia are ancient civilisations with histories dating back millennia. Armenians' historic role as merchants ensured trade between India, West Asia, and Europe, and the existence of a vibrant Armenian community in India dating back to the seventeenth century highlights these deep-rooted connections.⁴ Armenia, like India, is a democracy,⁵ and the two countries also share similarities in terms of societal and family values. Armenia is home to tens of thousands of Indian students and a growing number of labour migrants.⁶

India's vision of the world as one family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) and its stance against legitimising the use of force strongly resonates with the Armenians. Despite numerous attempts

at conquest and the Armenian Genocide under the Ottoman Empire, Armenians have managed to maintain their statehood in a highly hostile neighbourhood. This is particularly significant today as neighbouring Azerbaijan is an authoritarian regime that advocates for the use of force to solve conflicts.⁷ Ties with countries like Armenia are important for India, as it aims to position itself as a global player and a civilisational power that brings forth its unique vision in international politics and acts as a peace broker.

Armenia and India have always maintained friendly political relations. Armenia has consistently supported India's position on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in the United Nations (UN) and other international platforms. In turn, India supported Armenia in the UN Security Council following the September 2022 aggression by Azerbaijan.⁸

Today, Armenia is the largest buyer of Indian indigenous weapons,⁹ and bilateral defence cooperation is growing. Armenia's success in this regard is also important for India to position itself as a player in the global defence market. Given the growing sectors of Armenia's economy and its competent workforce, there is ample room to develop mutually beneficial economic ties. Armenia, the only South Caucasus member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU),¹⁰ can also act as a bridge between India and the larger Eurasian market.

Given its strategic location, Armenia is a balancing factor against Turkish expansionist policies and the pan-Turkic agenda in the South Caucasus and beyond, which carry security

implications similarly for India. Due to its location, Armenia can serve as an alternative transit route from India to Europe. As India aspires to be an important pillar in the future multipolar world, having access to the communication routes in this region and passing through a friendly country will be beneficial.

As such, it is important for India that the South Caucasus region remains stable and that Armenia maintains its security and territorial integrity.

Armenia and Azerbaijan: Power Imbalance as a Source of Regional Instability

Following the full-scale war launched by Azerbaijan against the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in 2020 and the ethnic cleansing of its Armenian population in 2023,¹¹ Azerbaijan took control of the entire Nagorno-Karabakh region. “Azerbaijan ensured peace by war,” said President Ilham Aliyev, justifying these actions.¹²

This has shifted the regional balance of power in favour of Azerbaijan. It has left Armenia’s southern regions of Syunik and Vayots Dzor vulnerable as Azerbaijan surrounds them from the east and west. This has further added to the geographic and numerical advantage that Azerbaijan already had over Armenia in terms of territory, population, and military power.¹³ Azerbaijan launched the 2020 war because

it had a qualitative and quantitative military advantage over Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh after investing in its military for years. Notably, Azerbaijan now criticises India and France for supplying arms to Armenia,¹⁴ warning that it may take “serious measures” if threatened. Both India¹⁵ and France¹⁶ have responded by saying it is their right to supply arms to a sovereign country. At the same time, Azerbaijan is continuing its military build-up, steadily increasing its national security and defence budget allocation from US\$1.85 billion in 2018 to US\$3.77 billion in 2024.¹⁷ In 2023, Azerbaijan increased its military spending by nearly 19.6 percent,¹⁸ and in 2024 by 6 percent, which also includes the upgrade of its air defence systems.¹⁹ Armenia’s 2024 defence budget is three times less, at US\$1.37 billion,²⁰ despite increases in previous years.

Azerbaijan also continues posing new territorial and other demands to Armenia pertaining to the country's internal matters,²¹ coupled with a falsification of history to lay claim on Armenian territories,²² the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh,²³ and anti-Armenian propaganda²⁴ both domestically and internationally, even as it continues to occupy around 200 square kilometres of Armenian territory.²⁵ Azerbaijan has also rejected Armenia's suggestion to create a joint mechanism between the two countries²⁶ and has threatened to use force again.²⁷ These trends indicate that Azerbaijan may be preparing for another war or seeking to take control of Armenian territories by other means. If Azerbaijan were interested in peaceful

coexistence with Armenia, it would have signed a peace agreement and opened the border after the takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Azerbaijan continues posing new demands to elicit unilateral concessions from Armenia,²⁸ primarily leveraging its military advantage. Despite ongoing negotiations, no peace agreement has been signed—yet another indicator of an escalation risk. According to the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Azerbaijan’s readiness to use calibrated military pressure to advance its goals in talks with Armenia will remain.”²⁹

Türkiye and Azerbaijan: One Nation, Two States

Azerbaijan's policies are in alignment with those of Türkiye. As such, the alliance between the two countries, often termed 'one nation, two states',³⁰ has been a factor further tilting the military advantage in favour of Azerbaijan. While Türkiye has always backed Azerbaijan politically and militarily against Armenia, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war demonstrated the extent of Türkiye's involvement with Azerbaijan's military. This included, for instance, the participation of the Turkish Air Force, the provision of sophisticated weapons such as attack UAVs or F-16s,³¹ and the direct involvement of Turkish military personnel and advisors as instructors to the Azerbaijani army.³² Türkiye also channelled mercenaries from Syria, Iraq, and Libya into fighting on behalf of Azerbaijan, as documented by official sources from other countries.³³ President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan acknowledged Türkiye's involvement in the war when he said in July 2024 that his country may enter Israel "just like we entered Karabakh, just like we entered Libya."³⁴

The Türkiye-Azerbaijan strategic partnership has now been elevated to the level of an alliance following the Shushi/Shusha declaration in 2022,³⁵ which includes mutual defence guarantees, regular trainings, joint military exercises,³⁶ and new weapons purchases.³⁷ The two countries have announced the joint production of modern and sophisticated weapons.³⁸ Azerbaijan has also been modernising its armed forces to integrate fully with the Turkish army.³⁹ As such, Azerbaijan evidently has a strong backer in Türkiye, which played a role in securing the former's military takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh and continues to provide support. This factor, coupled with Russia's declining role as Armenia's security guarantor, accounts for a significant imbalance of forces favouring Azerbaijan.

The Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Pakistan Alliance

The Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership has been further enhanced by the involvement of Pakistan, forming what is termed the “three brothers” alliance. While Pakistan and Türkiye share a long history of cooperation, this alliance has strengthened since Erdoğan came to power.⁴⁰ Türkiye-Pakistan defence cooperation has intensified in recent years,⁴¹ including collaboration on drones,⁴² small warships, fighter aircraft,⁴³ and the modernisation of Pakistani submarines, which some analysts believe will bolster Pakistan’s navy against India.⁴⁴ Türkiye has also expressed interest in collaborating with Pakistan on acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities,⁴⁵ raising concerns in India and other countries.⁴⁶

Notably, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan have long supported each other’s positions on Nagorno-Karabakh, Cyprus, and Kashmir issues. For instance, Ankara strongly criticised New Delhi’s decision to revoke Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, raising discontent in India,⁴⁷ and has repeatedly called for “dialogue and cooperation” between India and Pakistan.⁴⁸

In 2017, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan signed a trilateral ministers’ agreement to boost the defence and strategic alliance.⁴⁹ The most notable example in this regard was Pakistan’s political and military support to Azerbaijan in the 2020 war, including logistical and technical military support as well as military training.⁵⁰

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also claimed that Pakistan was sending armed terrorists to Azerbaijan.⁵¹ Azerbaijan has also acknowledged Pakistan's involvement by, for instance, flying Pakistani flags in Baku during its victory parade in 2020.⁵²

Since the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Türkiye have made official declarations⁵³ to enhance their relationship. This includes Azerbaijan participating in Pakistan's Republic Day military parade in March 2024,⁵⁴ negotiating to purchase JF-17C Block-III warplanes from Pakistan (worth US\$1.6 billion),⁵⁵

and collaborating in space⁵⁶ as well as the first high-level trilateral summit between Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Türkiye with three heads of state meeting in Astana.⁵⁷ During Aliyev's visit to Pakistan in July 2024, the two sides agreed to boost bilateral trade and develop joint investment projects in energy, infrastructure, connectivity, and defence.⁵⁸

The expansion of the Azerbaijan–Türkiye–Pakistan alliance will strengthen the positions of these countries in the South Caucasus as well as vis-a-vis India.

Implications of the 'Zangezur Corridor' Project

Türkiye and Azerbaijan do not have a direct land connection, and establishing such a link has historically been a common strategic and geopolitical goal. Geographically, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, but with Nagorno-Karabakh now under Azerbaijan's control, only Armenia's southern provinces of Syunik and Vayots Dzor separate Türkiye from Azerbaijan. This narrow section has now become the next potential target.

Azerbaijan has been pushing the concept of the so-called 'Zangezur corridor,'⁵⁹ which implies a land connection between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave bordering Türkiye via Armenia's southern Syunik region. It is important to note that Azerbaijan is seeking an extraterritorial "corridor"⁶⁰ with no Armenian

control, a concept being advanced with a complete disregard for the fact that Syunik is a sovereign territory of Armenia. The Armenian government has repeatedly opposed the idea of such an extraterritorial corridor⁶¹ and has instead offered a road controlled by it within the framework of international law and its 'Crossroads of Peace' project.⁶² Armenia argues that all communications should be under the sovereignty and control of the states through whose territories they will pass.⁶³

However, Azerbaijan continues to make maximalist demands from Armenia and has repeatedly threatened to use force to open the so-called "corridor".⁶⁴ As noted in the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Azerbaijan's demand for access to a land corridor linking Azerbaijan to its exclave will elevate the risk of armed confrontation."⁶⁵

The Zangezur corridor project also perfectly aligns with the interests of Türkiye, which views it as a means to extend its influence in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia—an expansionist foreign policy for which Azerbaijan’s role as a gateway to the Caspian region and Central Asia is crucial.⁶⁶ Erdoğan has stated that the opening of the Zangezur corridor is a “strategic issue” for Türkiye,⁶⁷ and the Turkish transport and infrastructure minister has said that it will benefit the entire “Turkic world.”⁶⁸ As such, the Zangezur corridor can be seen as part of a larger strategy to ensure connectivity between Central Asia and Türkiye to enhance Türkiye’s role in the South Caucasus and enable its role as the leader of the Sunni Islamic world.

If the borders were opened and connectivity projects in the region were implemented as per the Crossroads of Peace framework—essentially, in good faith and without infringing on any country’s territorial integrity—this would boost economic cooperation and trade, benefitting all countries in the region. However, mistrust, power imbalance, and Azerbaijan’s stated ambitions indicate that

Azerbaijan will likely use its military advantage to implement its version of the project rather than commit to an outcome that will also benefit Armenia.

The Zangezur corridor project presents security risks affecting Armenia, Iran, and India. Iran, concerned about the threat to the Armenia-Iran border and the prospects of Turkish dominance in the region, has expressed strong objection to the project.⁶⁹ It has also reaffirmed support for Armenia’s territorial integrity and noted that any border changes in the region are unacceptable.⁷⁰ Notably, Iran has taken measures to counter the project, such as offering an alternative route through its territory,⁷¹ opening a consulate in Syunik, and conducting military exercises on the border;⁷² it has even implied it may intervene in case of any attempt to alter the status quo.⁷³ Should Azerbaijan attempt to use force to achieve its goals, it may trigger another war in the region with the involvement of multiple actors.

The realisation of this project on Azerbaijan's terms will ultimately lead to the disappearance of the Armenia-Iran border. Consequently, this will block Indian weapons transfer to Armenia through Iran and impact India's prospects for any alternative routes running through Armenia, including the Armenian section of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), leaving no alternatives to Azerbaijani-controlled routes in this region.⁷⁴ In the long run, Türkiye's dominance in the region would change the broader geopolitics of Central Asia

and the South Caucasus. Implications regarding Türkiye's involvement in Kashmir and of fuelling radicalisation in India, about which some Indian scholars have raised concerns, should also be considered from this perspective.⁷⁵ As such, Armenia's, India's, and Iran's interests in preventing infringement on the Armenia-Iran border are aligned.

The India-Armenia Partnership: Defence Ties Take Centrestage

India's defence industry has grown over the past decade as the government has undertaken measures to transform the country from an arms importer to an exporter. Developing the defence industry and boosting exports through the 'Make in India' initiative and indigenisation policies is a high priority for the government.⁷⁶ New Delhi aims to increase defence exports to US\$4.4 billion by 2025.⁷⁷ This is timely as the emerging procurement market will likely expand while the Russian and Western defence industries focus on the war in Ukraine.⁷⁸

Like India, Armenia also strives to diversify its sources of arms imports and, at the same time, develop its production capabilities. As Russian military supplies to Armenia sharply declined in recent years,⁷⁹ Yerevan implemented military reforms and adopted diversification as the pillar of its foreign and defence policy to improve its defence capabilities and reduce the power imbalance with Azerbaijan. Today, Armenia's most notable new sources of weapons supplies are India⁸⁰ and France.⁸¹ The new era in Armenia-India relations began with Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Yerevan in 2021,⁸² followed by Security Council of Armenia Secretary Armen Grigoryan's visit to New Delhi,⁸³ and participation at conferences.⁸⁴

Defence ties between the two countries have scaled up in recent years, as Armenia became the largest buyer of Indian weapons.⁸⁵ According to expert estimates, the concluded contracts total US\$1.5 billion,⁸⁶ with the total volume of weapons purchases by Armenia from India reaching US\$600 million by the start of 2024-25 financial year.⁸⁷ These include Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems, SWATHI weapon-locating radars, anti-tank missiles, Akash anti-aircraft systems, artillery guns, and the Indian-developed Zen anti-drone system to help Armenia counter Azerbaijan's aerial threat.⁸⁸ Military cooperation also encompasses military education, training, and experience sharing.⁸⁹ India and Armenia are also set to post defence attachés in the other country.⁹⁰ From a political perspective, India's foreign policy strategy, which rejects the bloc mentality,^{91,92} aligns well with Armenia's efforts to ensure its security without being drawn into confrontations with conflicting powers.

According to Indian military experts, the arms sales process to Armenia is happening at an unprecedented pace for India.⁹³ As India's most significant export case, Armenia can serve as an excellent example for other potential buyers; therefore, it is also in India's best interest to position itself as a trusted partner in this

relationship. Speaking at the 2024 APRI Forum, held in Yerevan between 26-28 June, Manu Pubby, senior editor at the *Economic Times*, noted that India is keen to sell weapons to countries that share its values and respect the territorial integrity of other nations to ensure that these weapons are not used irresponsibly; India trusts Armenia to use these weapons appropriately and, unlike other countries, does not impose any preconditions. He emphasised that India does not want its weapons to fall into the hands of dangerous autocratic powers seeking territorial expansion.⁹⁴

Importantly, Armenia is not seeking revenge nor planning to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh; it has neither the capacity nor the intention to do so. Armenia has recognised Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, but Azerbaijan has yet to recognise Armenia's territorial integrity.⁹⁵ Armenia is committed to peace, even after the destruction of Nagorno-Karabakh, and has made additional unilateral concessions to Azerbaijan despite wide public discontent.⁹⁶ At the same time, given the power imbalance, Armenia must enhance its defence and security to compensate for its geographic vulnerability, withstand the pressure of Azerbaijan's new demands, and deter any aggression in the future.

However, India-Armenia defence collaboration alone cannot be viewed as a deterrent against the Azerbaijan-Türkiye alliance. India does not aspire to take up the role of Armenia's security guarantor, nor does Indian policy in the region support one side over the other. India will pursue a balanced policy of non-alignment, maintaining good relations with Azerbaijan in trade, tourism, and other sectors. "We want to be the provider of security for the region and not to start an arms war at all," Pubby noted at the APRI Forum. However, India must deepen its engagement in Armenia's security and provide the country with more sophisticated weapons to position itself as a security provider.

The Geoeconomic Rationale for the India-Armenia Partnership

The war in Ukraine has disrupted global supply chains, creating complications for land transit routes connecting Asia and Europe via Russia. Even before the war in Ukraine, the Suez Canal, the primary sea transit route connecting Southeast Asia with Europe, was congested due to growing cargo volumes, as demonstrated by the Ever Given

container ship incident in March 2021.⁹⁷ Since October 2023, the crisis in West Asia and tensions in the Red Sea have complicated India-Europe sea transit.⁹⁸

As a rising economic powerhouse, India must establish alternative routes to reach Europe. Indeed, in 2000, India, Iran, and Russia signed an agreement to launch the INSTC to connect India with Europe via Iran and Russia. Three main routes were identified to connect India with Russia: through Iran and Azerbaijan, through Iran and the Caspian Sea, and through Iran, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.⁹⁹ According to the initial plan, the cargo would enter the northern part of Europe from Russia, creating an India-Europe route that circumvents the Suez Canal. However, the war in Ukraine and the rupture in Russia's ties with the West have put the realisation of INSTC in danger. As the crisis continues to disrupt Russia-West economic and political ties, large-scale cargo transit across the Russia-Europe border is risky for international logistics and insurance companies.

In recent years, India has also invested in the Iranian port of Chabahar, regarding it as a focal point to reach Central Asia via Iran and Afghanistan, circumventing Pakistan. Viewing it as a pillar of the INSTC, India attempted to modernise the port and even received a US sanctions waiver for its investments.¹⁰⁰ In May 2024, India signed a 10-year contract with Iran to develop and operate the Chabahar port.¹⁰¹

Parallel to the discussions around the INSTC, Iran proposed the ‘Persian Gulf-Black Sea International Multimodal Transport Corridor Project,’ potentially involving Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, and Greece. This project aims to connect Iran with Europe via the South Caucasus and the Black Sea.¹⁰² The proposed corridor fits into India’s plans to develop additional routes to reach Europe by circumventing the Suez Canal and Russia-Europe land transit. The corridor may connect Iran with the Georgian Black Sea coast via either Armenia or Azerbaijan. Armenia and Azerbaijan have railway and highway connections with Georgia, and Azerbaijan has a railroad to the Azerbaijan-Iran border. To connect Azerbaijani and Iranian railways, a railroad of around 162 kilometres

inside Iran (the Rasht-Astara line) will need to be built. Armenia does not have a direct railway connection with Iran. In November 2021, Azerbaijan closed the main Armenia-Iran highway in the Syunik region, forcing Yerevan to construct an alternative road to reach the Iran border.¹⁰³ There is a functioning railway from Yerevan to the Armenia-Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic border, and Nakhichevan has a railway connection with Iran.

While an Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia route may seem more realistic from a logistical point of view, geopolitical considerations show otherwise. Currently, Iran uses Azerbaijan’s territory to reach Russia; however, given the defence and security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel, which started in early 2010s,¹⁰⁴ providing additional leverage to Azerbaijan by using its territory to reach Europe via Georgia and the Black Sea does not serve Iranian interests. While Azerbaijan is not India’s enemy, India also has reservations about incorporating Azerbaijan into the India-Europe route via Iran and the South Caucasus for various reasons. Iran and India will prefer an alternative transit route to Azerbaijan to reach Europe via Georgia and the Black Sea.

Recognising the limitations of its infrastructure for large-scale cargo transit from Iran to Georgia, Armenia began constructing the 556-kilometre ‘North-South’ highway in 2013, which will connect the Armenia-Georgia and Armenia-Iran borders.¹⁰⁵ The section connecting Yerevan with the Georgia border is nearing completion, and the focus is now on constructing the southern section of the road connecting to the Iran border. In February 2024, two Iranian companies started the construction of the Kajaran-Iranian border section in Armenia’s Syunik region,¹⁰⁶ while a tender is underway for the Sisian-Kajaran section of the ‘North-South’ highway. Launching the Armenia-Iran border highway will significantly increase Armenia’s transit capacities, connecting the Iranian ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas with the Georgian Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi. The completion of the entire ‘North-South’ highway will significantly facilitate the India-Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Black Sea-Europe transit route.

There is a possibility of connecting Armenian and Iranian railroads by extending a railway from Iran to the bordering Armenian town of Meghri. Given the developed capacities of Armenian cargo transportation companies, it is possible to transport containers from Meghri to Ayrum (a

railway station at the Armenia-Georgia border) and then move these to the Georgian ports of Batumi or Poti by rail. At the 2024 APRI Forum, Gagik Aghajanyan, the founder of Apaven, one of Armenia’s largest cargo companies, stated that this will allow Armenia to play a crucial transit role in connecting Iran with the Black Sea. At the same forum, D.P. Srivastava, India’s former ambassador to Iran, emphasised the possibility of making Armenia a transit country connecting India with Europe via Iran, Georgia, and the Black Sea.¹⁰⁷

Notably, Armenia, the only South Caucasus country in EAEU, is the only grouping member that shares a land border with Iran. Iran signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EAEU in December 2023¹⁰⁸ and has also applied to become an observer member country of the grouping.¹⁰⁹ India is also negotiating an FTA with the EAEU,¹¹⁰ which will provide greater market access to Indian goods and services and allow India to have a more stable presence in Central Asia. The link to Armenia via Iran is also significant for India in this context: the Iran-EAEU FTA will positively impact Iran-Armenia cargo transit, and Armenia can serve as a cargo distribution centre for Russia and other EAEU countries, facilitating regional trade.¹¹¹

Future Prospects for the Bilateral Relationship

Bilateral relations between India and Armenia have great potential for development, and cooperation in different sectors will need to be enhanced to elevate ties to a strategic partnership. In the defence sector, the partnership should seek to go beyond the buyer-seller dynamic. At the 2024 APRI Forum, experts noted that the way forward was through collaboration in digital technologies, space, drone manufacturing, cybersecurity, anti-drone technology, army training, and experience-sharing. While India has an advantage in scale and workforce, Armenia has recent real-time combat experience, the lessons of which can also be helpful for India.¹¹²

At the political level, there should be more coordination on supporting common causes on international platforms and countering propaganda against Armenia and India. Cooperation in multilateral formats, such as Armenia-India-Iran¹¹³ or Armenia-India-Greece-

France, and collaboration between the Armenian and Indian diasporas are other layers that can enhance the existing framework.

Economic ties also have the potential for development. Some sectors for cooperation and investment are infrastructure development, renewable energy, manufacturing, telecommunications, information technology (IT) and high-tech industry, tourism, education, and bilateral trade in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, textiles, and other fields. Collaboration in many of these spheres is already underway. For instance, in cooperation with Indian companies, Armenia has advanced IT companies and ties with global IT centres through its diaspora.¹¹⁴ Both countries are also prioritising joint initiatives in these fields.¹¹⁵

Importantly, establishing a direct flight between any major city in India and Armenia is crucial to boosting bilateral ties as it will facilitate regular interactions between businesses, foster tourism, and enhance people-to-people relations.


Conclusion

Recent global developments have intensified the demand and competition for alternative transportation routes, including those via the South Caucasus. This has enhanced the importance of the region for external powers. For India, which seeks to expand its influence in its extended neighbourhood and play a role in future connectivity architecture, establishing a reliable partnership with Armenia is important for a number of reasons. India and Armenia are natural allies; they share civilisational, ideological, and political affinities that underpin the bilateral relationship.

Securing an alternative transport route through Iran and Armenia to Europe and possibly Russia, independent of Turkish or Azerbaijani dominance

in the region, is of importance to India. For the INSTC Armenian section to be operational, it is important that there is peace in the South Caucasus and that Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty is safeguarded. Azerbaijan's projects such as the Zangezur corridor threaten to jeopardise the Armenia-Iran border, which will block communication between India and Armenia, as well as India's prospects for connectivity projects through Armenia. It will also have implications on India by empowering Pakistan and by other means. As the growing Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Pakistan alliance poses a challenge for Armenia and India, counterbalancing the Turkish influence in the region is in the interest of both countries.

As of today, the likelihood of renewed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains high, primarily due to the current imbalance of power in favour of Azerbaijan and the maximalist ambitions of the latter. To be able to counter Azerbaijan's renewed aggression, it is important for Armenia to strengthen its self-defence capabilities. India has been playing an important role in this regard, as it has become Armenia's largest weapons provider, effectively replacing Russia within just a couple of years. The case of Armenia, which is now the largest buyer of Indian indigenous weapons, is also important for India in terms of boosting India's military industry and exports in international markets.

By supplying arms to Armenia, India is contributing to the restoration of a balance of power in the region. To have a more substantial impact on regional security, however, India should deepen its engagement with Armenia, and both countries should work toward elevating their relationship to a strategic partnership. This potential exists on many levels. In addition to political and military cooperation, fostering economic collaboration and strengthening people-to-people contacts are also crucial. Think tanks in both countries can play a significant role in advancing these efforts. 

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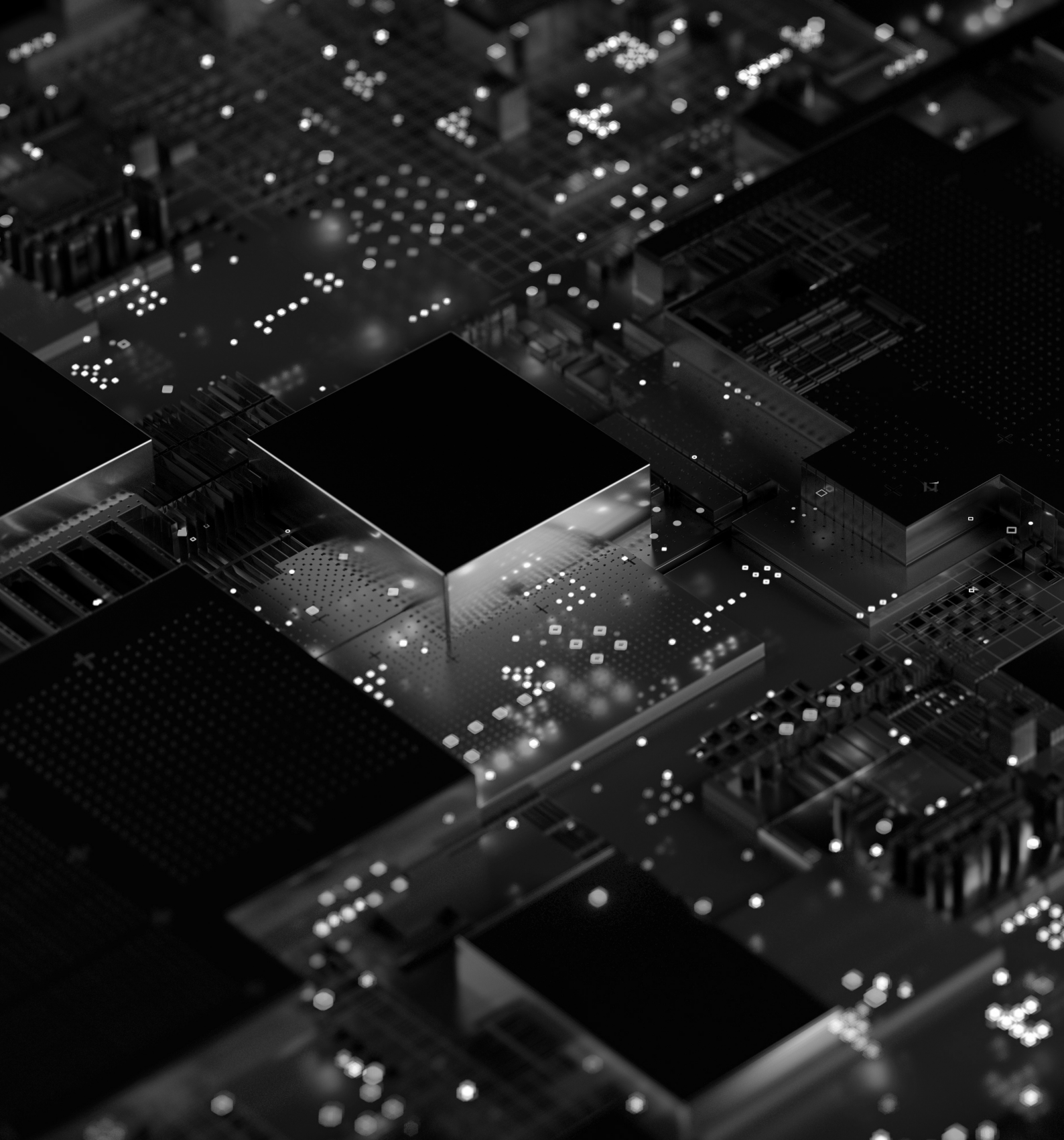
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