

# The essence of the military strategy of the Nikol Pashinyan government

## Суть військової стратегії уряду Нікола Пашиняна

**Zafar N. Najafov**

Senior lecturer of the Department of National Security and Military Humanitarian Sciences of the Institute of Military Management, e-mail: zafarnajafov@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-1392-9359

National Defence University, Republic of Azerbaijan

**Зафар Н. Наджафов**

Старший викладач кафедри національної безпеки та військово-гуманітарних наук Інституту військового управління, e-mail: zafarnajafov@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-1392-9359

Національний університет оборони, Азербайджан

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**Purpose:** The study aims to examine the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the militarization policy implemented by the Pashinyan government in Armenia in the last 5 years.

**Method:** historical, political, structural-functional and comparative analysis methods.

**Findings:** The results are that the revanchism that took place in Armenia, which suffered a heavy defeat in the Second Karabakh War, created the basis for the rearming of the country, the diversification of its foreign policy course and military security. Armenia is trying to compensate for that defeat by turning the region into a wider conflict zone (West-Russia).

**Paper type:** theoretical.

**Мета:** Дослідження має на меті вивчити теоретичні та концептуальні аспекти політики мілітаризації, реалізованої урядом Пашиняна у Вірменії за останні 5 років.

**Метод дослідження:** історико-політичний, структурно-функціональний та порівняльний методи аналізу.

**Результати дослідження:** В результаті реваншизм, який стався у Вірменії, яка зазнала важкої поразки у Другій Карабаській війні, створив основу для переозброєння країни, диверсифікації її зовнішньополітичного курсу та військової безпеки. Вірменія намагається компенсувати цю поразку, перетворивши регіон на більш широкую зону конфлікту.

**Тип статті:** теоретичний.

**Key words:** “new war-new territories” formula, April battles, expansion, asymmetric war, “indirect action strategy” and “soft power” concept, 44-day war, non-contact war.

**Ключові слова:** “нова війна — нові території”, квітневі битви, експансія, асиметрична війна, “стратегія непрямих дій” і концепція “м’якої сили”, 44-денна війна, безконтактна війна.

### Introduction

In the four-day war that took place in April 2016, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan destroyed many Armenian personnel and freed 2 thousand hectares of territory from occupation. This defeat lowered the moral and psychological situation in the Armenian society and the army, several leading service chiefs of the military leadership were removed from their positions, and Defense Minister S. Ohanyan had to say goodbye to his post. The most important result of the April battles resulted in the transfer of power from the Karabakh clan, which has ruled Armenia since 1998, to pro-oppositionist N. Pashinyan. The turning of the April battles into a nightmare for the Armenian society did not end there. Armenia, which is in a morally and psychologically depressed state, received another serious blow in two years. Thus, because of the counter-offensive operation, Gunnut village of Sharur region (Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, an exclave of Azerbaijan), Aghbulag hill, Gizilgaya mountain, Garagaya mountain were liberated and Arpa village of Darelayaz district came under the control of the Azerbaijani army. As a result of the battles, a total of 11,000 hectares of land was liberated.

Unable to digest the defeat they suffered in the April battles and the Gunnut operations, Armenian nationalists tried to expand the geography of Armenia’s aggression policy against Azerbaijan and take control of the country’s strategic energy infrastructure by coming up with the “new war – new territories” formula, but they had to accept a bitter defeat in the Second Karabakh War.

## Results

### Armenia's new war plan

Having seized political power in Armenia, N. Pashinyan began to make a number of political maneuvers in order to strengthen his political position, eliminate the depression in the Armenian society and subjugate the shaken and morally-psychological state of the army. He solves socio-economic problems in the country (reducing the amount of taxes for small businesses, reducing the number of ministries and departments in the government, introducing tax incentives for foreign companies that want to invest in the country, eliminating economic monopoly, transforming Armenia from an agricultural country into a high-tech state, etc.) began to voice opinions about the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, thereby gaining political ratings at home and abroad. Encouraged by the absolute victory he won in the parliamentary elections (88 out of 132 seats were won by his "My Steps" block), N. Pashinyan succeeded in eliminating his political opponents one by one, placing his supporters in the leadership of the military and separatist regime, and then he was strict in the process of settling the conflict and tried to show an uncompromising position and change the format of the negotiations and blessed the transition to the "new war – new territories" formula authored by D. Tonoyan.

When analyzing in depth the new defense strategy that Armenia started implementing in 2019, the following can be noted as its main postulates:

#### **1. Change of defense philosophy: replacement of defense (trench) with attack (front).**

Thus, at the beginning of 2019, the Minister of Defense of Armenia D. Tonoyan expressed the opinion that Armenia intends to change the philosophy of army building by replacing the defense strategy with an offensive strategy. According to him, the change in people's thoughts regarding the ideology of defense organization is considered the most important indicator for him as the defense minister. Human history has long proven that any army whose main formula is considered to be trench defense will sooner or later experience the pain of defeat. At some point in the eternal struggle between the sword and the shield, the sword wins, and this fact has been proven many times. The Armenian army will not sit in the trenches, it will become more and more combative, strong and extremely dangerous for the enemy. We are an army with diverse, modern and lethal weapons. We are an army whose fighters receive excellent training, are protected by the state and are able to fulfill the most important mission ("The sword will defeat the shield at some point", 30.12.2019).

In the spring of 2019, in the meeting with the Armenian diaspora in the United States, the Minister of Defense of Armenia D. Tonoyan stated that he changed the formula "peace in exchange for territory" and replaced it with the formula "new war for the occupation of new territories". "We will get out of this "trenches situation", permanent defense situation. We will also increase the number of units that can carry out military operations into the enemy's territory" (Armenian Defense Minister Warns, March 31, 2019).

At an event coinciding with the 3rd anniversary of the April battles, N. Pashinyan supported this formula put forward by the Minister of Defense: "If David Tonoyan had made another statement, I would have dismissed him from the position of Minister of Defense. What did the Minister of Defense say? He said that, if there is a war, we will work to win this war. If the Minister of Defense thought otherwise, then he would have to say goodbye to his position. This in no way overshadows the peace process for the resolution of the conflict, on the contrary, it emphasizes the importance of the negotiation process" (If David Tonoyan had made, April 02, 2019).

These views indicate that he is not in favor of negotiations, but clearly in favor of war. The significant growth of the military budget of Armenia during his rule indicates such thinking. In 2020, Armenia's defense spending increased by 28% compared to 2018. Thus, in 2019, the occupying

country spent about 629.5 million dollars on defense (129 million dollars more than in 2018), and the defense budget for 2020 was about 631 million dollars (Armenia's military budget, 30.09.2019).

In the modern army building of Armenia, armament was considered perhaps the first of the strategic vectors of the country's defense policy. Considering that Armenia had small financial resources at a time when Azerbaijan was buying modern weapons, any innovation in the armament park was considered important in terms of ensuring military security for the occupying country. According to official Iravan, every modern weapon that Armenia has acquired has served to restore the balance of power that has shifted in favor of other players over the past few years.

N. Pashinyan's coming to power did not prevent the occupying country from arming itself with new weapons. Armenia imported almost all weapons from Russia. It should be recalled that in 2018-2019, Armenia acquired a significant amount of weapons and ammunition – Su-30SM multi-purpose fighters, TOR-M2KM and Osa-AK anti-aircraft missile systems and other weapons and military equipment, and the purchase of a new batch of Su-30SM fighters continued the negotiations. Four of these aircraft were included in the armament of the Armenian Air Force in 2019. The Su-30SM is designed to destroy both air and ground targets (The autumn of this year, 03.09.2020).

The head of the Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, Dmitry Shugayev, said that in 2019, spare parts for Su-30SM, small arms, Mi-17 helicopters were delivered to Armenia, and the previously delivered aircraft were overhauled, and "Kornets" (tanks and armored military vehicles) were destroyed. It is intended to be done) he said that training is being conducted for specialists on operation. By carrying out this policy, Armenia encouraged regional militarization and intense armament, followed a political line contrary to the demilitarization of the South Caucasus. According to SIPRI data, in 2019, Armenia spent 4.9% of its GDP for military purposes. In the same year, in terms of the ratio of military expenses to GDP, Armenia took the sixth place among all the countries of the world (Will the August 26 visit, 24.08.2020).

In the "Concept of the transformation of Armenia until 2050" developed under the leadership of N. Pashinyan, it was stated that by that date, the Armenian army should be among the 20 most combat-capable advanced armies in the world. "It is for this reason that each of our soldiers should be able to resist 7 or 10 soldiers of a potential enemy. Of course, not with bare hands", he said. At the same time, in that document, the desire of the Armenian special service agency to be among the top 10 intelligence agencies in the world within the next 30 years was expressed (Pashinyan presented, September 21, 2020).

## **2. The creation of new conflict centers in order to expand the geography of occupation.**

This logic stems from the desire of the enemy to transfer military operations to the new territories of Azerbaijan. The Tovuz provocation, which took place on July 12–16, 2020, is a vivid example of this. By creating a new source of conflict, the enemy was trying to divert attention from occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and 7 adjacent districts of Azerbaijan, put the negotiations in the background, and maintain the existing status quo in the conflict region. This plan was reminiscent of Russia's policy following the annexation of Crimea. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia created the separatist entities of the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in the south of Ukraine in order to neutralize international pressure and shifted the center of gravity of the military-political processes there.

**3. Ideological foundations of the new strategy.** The main goal here revolves around the issue of Armenian identity. Armenia included the creation of a unified security system with the separatist "Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR)" in its new National Security Strategy (New National Security Strategy of Armenia. 10 Jul 2020). The ideological content of this condition is closely related to "Miatsum" (unification in Armenian). It is known that in relation to "NKR" Armenia's invasion plan did not focus on the independence of the separatist regime, but its integration with Armenia. The goal of N. Pashinyan was to legalize "Miatsum" by integrating the separatist "NKR" into the security

system of Armenia, remove the so-called organization from the status of an enclave, and bring it under the authority of the official Yerevan in all parameters. Before the 44-day war, the work on the preparation of the document on the strategic alliance between Armenia and the so-called entity continued. Although the acceptance of such a document was not de jure, it meant de facto recognition of “NKR” by Armenia.

Armenian President A.Sargsyan connected Armenian separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh with the concepts of “Armenian identity” and “pan-Armenianism”. Referring to the 29th anniversary of the “independence” achieved by the Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh on September 2, 1991, because of the illegal referendum, he noted that “that victory” was the joint efforts of the all-Armenian forces – the separatist regime, Armenia and the diaspora. achieved as a result and that struggle continues today (The autumn of this year, 03.09.2020). The last opinion of the President of Armenia meant that Armenia and the diaspora supported the separatist regime’s secession attempts.

**4. Geo-economic priorities of the new strategy.** This meant taking control of Azerbaijan’s international oil and gas pipelines, including other important strategic infrastructures – Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTQ) and the Baku-Gazakh highway. Tovuz has a favorable economic and geographical position in the north-west of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, the Southern Gas Corridor (TANAP-TAP) and the Great Silk Road, which are of vital importance for Azerbaijan, pass through the region. The European part of the Southern Gas Corridor is the TAP pipeline. This 878 km long pipeline connects to TANAP at the Turkey-Greece border. The pipeline passes through Greece, Albania and the bottom of the Adriatic Sea in Europe and ends in southern Italy. The initial transmission capacity of TAP is 10 billion cubic meters. In the future, this volume is expected to be increased to 20 billion cubic meters through additional compressors. TAP has been put into operation since January 1, 2021.

Armenia’s choice of Tovuz as the scene of military operations during the events of July 12-16, 2020 is considered to be related to the stated purpose. Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov also admitted this. He noted that “the conflict occurred due to a complex set of reasons a complex set of reasons. The geographical factor also played the role of a kind of trigger: the decision of the Armenian side to reactivate the old checkpoint located 15 km from the export pipelines of Azerbaijan caused the concern of one side, and the other side caused an unreasonable reaction, and as a result, a wheel of conflict with the most unexpected consequences was set in motion” (Lavrov named the reason, August 21, 2020).

By turning the territory of international oil and gas and strategic transport and communication lines from the territory of Azerbaijan to Europe into a field of military operations, to disrupt the operation of these projects, to keep both them and the Baku-Kazakh highway under attack, to close the Georgian strategic corridor, to isolate Agstafa and Gazakh regions and in this way, by putting pressure on Azerbaijan, he tried to weaken its position in the negotiation process.

**5. The relationship of the new strategy with the concept of asymmetric war, “strategy of indirect actions” and “soft power”.** The new strategy indicated the synchronization of actions. This version was based on the synthesis (hybrid) of conventional and non-conventional elements of operational skill. Placing terrorists in the conflict region under the name of PKK and Armenian families brought from Lebanon (this activity is called “civilization of terrorists”) was a considered step. Thus, during the military operations in 1991-1994, Armenia was formed of Armenian-born terrorists and mercenaries trained in the Middle East. He tried to take advantage of the help of a criminal group like “Arabo”. The fact that Armenia filled the occupied territories with Armenian and PKK terrorist families after the signing of the cease-fire regime indicated its desire to wage an asymmetric war against our country in the event of an inevitable war in the future. There was no doubt that the official Iravan could use those terrorist and mercenary forces as or as part of its attack units.

In addition, it was not unlikely that the occupying state could use special technologies – “strategy of indirect actions” and “soft power” in order to implement the “new war – new territories” formula. “Strategy of indirect actions” was brought to science by B. Liddell Hart. The purpose of that strategy is to deliver massive blows to the rear-front facilities and communications of his army in order to achieve a quick victory over the enemy during the war. This deprives the enemy’s army of the ability to fight effectively and provide long-term resistance. The main goal of the war is not the complete destruction of the enemy’s armed forces and its economic potential. the enemy state) is forced to accept the conditions that will fully meet the political, economic and military interests of the aggressor state. At present, the “strategy of indirect actions” is the most effective geopolitical tool used in the international world to weaken the real and potential enemy. The “enemy” is directed to take advantage of the political and administrative, socio-economic, defense, cultural, ideological and other main areas of the state (Karyakin V. V., 2014). According to this strategy of geopolitical conflict, the pressure of the aggressor on the victim country can be carried out both in the absence of direct conflict and in the conditions of open conflict, including armed conflict. The enemy aims to gain an advantage in the negotiation process, to dictate its own conditions or to accept conditions that suit its interests by seizing the vital oil and gas lines and other communication infrastructures of Azerbaijan in the direction of Tovuz.

“Soft power” is not only an additional resource for the implementation of international political processes, but it is understood as a means of disruptive influence, a weapon in the information war. “Soft power” weakens the stability of the state as a whole, seriously damages the social order of the state.

“Soft power” is remembered for its serious influence on the course of historical processes and the change of the world order. The industrial revolution, the information age and the end of the “cold war” are considered achievements achieved as a result of the application of “soft power”.

Unlike armed operations, information warfare is a more sustainable and effective means of combat. Undoubtedly, the continuation of the policy of aggression by Armenia and the impunity for the crimes against humanity it has committed are the result of its information war. Armenia has benefited from the elements of “soft power” against Azerbaijan – diaspora, public diplomacy, lobby structures, social networks and is still benefiting today. For more than a century, Armenian nationalists in different parts of the world, with the help of “soft power” elements, managed to prepare a favorable ideological and political ground for the realization of the aggressive and aggressive “Great Armenia” plan, and to spread false information about our country.

In the National Security Strategy adopted in the summer of 2020, Armenia gave a normative-legal determination of “soft power” (The Origins of the 44-Day War, January 4, 2021). This trend indicates that the occupying country will continue to use the elements of “soft power” in relation to Azerbaijan, both in peacetime and during wartime.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, during the period until September 27, 2020, Armenia’s new defense strategy was offensive and aggressive, based on the pluralism of conflict centers and aimed at distraction, promoted confrontation and violence rather than consensus, tended to imitation rather than constructive negotiations, “indirectly” gave serious importance to the strategy of actions and the means of “soft power” and served disintegration and militarization in the region as a whole.

However, the Second Karabakh War, which began on September 27, 2020 and lasted for 44 days, seriously undermined the “new war – new territories” formula adopted by Armenia in the spring of 2019 and the provisions of the National Security Strategy regarding Nagorno-Karabakh in the summer of 2020. it happened. During this war, the military equipment of the occupying country worth approximately 4 billion dollars was destroyed or looted. Armenia not only lost some of the

Azerbaijani regions known as the security zone it occupied in the battle, but also lost some of them as a surrender document, according to the Tripartite Statement of November 10.

In addition, Armenia was forced to provide a corridor to Nakhchivan for access to Azerbaijan from its territory, damaged its relations with its strategic partner Russia, and finally had to come to terms with the strengthening of Turkey's position in the South Caucasus, which it values as a historical enemy.

The 44-day war revealed that the Armenian army is far from modern military skills, and that it fights with a military mentality typical of the 90s of last year. The Prime Minister of Armenia N. Pashinyan admitted in his article "Roots of the 44-Day War" that "after 22 years of victory – in the April battles of 2016, it became known that the Armenian Army fought with the weapons of the 80s, and this led to the period of delaying the resolution of the conflict "ended" (The Origins of the 44-Day War, January 4, 2021). In other words, the modern weapons demonstrated by Azerbaijan in the April battles and the advantage it gained meant the end of Armenia's tactics of delaying the resolution of the conflict. This increased the probability that Armenia's 22-year imitation of negotiations in front of its strong opponent would come to an end and that the war would be imminent.

The point of interest is that N. Pashinyan provoked Azerbaijan to a 44-day war, knowing that the Armenian army was fighting with weapons and ammunition belonging to the 80s. Armenian President A. Sargsyan understood this reality very well. He, like N. Pashinyan, admitted in one of his speeches that while the Azerbaijani Army acquired modern combat experience, the Armenian Army was proud of the success of the First Karabakh War. Azerbaijan was able to surpass Armenia due to demography, information warfare, new weapon systems and drones (Every Armenian, November 29, 2020).

In these confessions of both Armenian leaders, their attempt to evade responsibility attracts more attention than the objective analysis of the reasons for Armenia's defeat in the 44-day war.

However, one fact is undeniable that in the Second Karabakh War, an army with low moral and psychological status and no understanding of modern military skills stood in front of a highly motivated Azerbaijani soldier who perfectly mastered modern war techniques. Armenian military analyst V. Ambarchumyan, while analyzing the reasons for Armenia's defeat in the 44-day war, rightly notes: "During these years when Azerbaijan developed the concept of non-contact war, the Armenian generals had to work with the military methods of the 90s. This was a tragic mistake. Armenia should change its military concept, which does not respond to fifth or sixth generation wars" (The scenario for war in Karabakh, 29.01.2021).

It is not excluded that the political chaos, moral depression and hopelessness that arose in Armenia after the 44-day war will lead to a transformation not only in the political life of the country, but also in the Armenian national consciousness, as well as a necessary change in the foreign policy and military security strategy. Armenia should come to terms with the demands of the new status quo created in the region, give up its territorial claims against its neighbors, and take advantage of this chance for regional cooperation.

However, it is still too early to say that Armenia has learned from the Second Karabakh war and one-day local anti-terrorist measures (September 19-20, 2023). Thus, Armenia does not come to terms with the bitter defeat it suffered in the Second Karabakh War, it thinks about taking revenge, rapidly arming itself, increasing its military budget, giving special importance to the policy of diversifying its defense potential, developing a new military doctrine and implementing military reforms, strengthening its weak air defense system. tries to strengthen it, develops cooperation in the military field with states that do not accept the new geopolitical change in the region and signs contracts with them to purchase modern military equipment, questions the establishment of lasting peace in the region by delaying the signing of the final peace agreement, demarcation and delimitation, and the opening of the Zangezur corridor.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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