

Observation no: 202 – Azeri-Armenian Conflict

Country-year: Armenia 1992

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

The current regime in Armenia came to power through elections held in October 1991, during which Levon Ter-Petrosian of the Armenian nationalist party (APM) was elected President. Prior to October, the communist regime, run by the Armenian Supreme Soviet, was also headed by the Ter-Petrosian.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

Azerbaijan experienced a coup in November 1920, when the Soviet Union's 11th Red Army invaded Armenia, forcibly dissolving the First Armenian Republic and creating the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

The country's leader prior to all out war with Armenia in 1992 was the President of Armenia and the head of the Armenian nationalist party, Levon Ter-Petrosian. Before being elected president by voters, he was the chairman of the Armenian Supreme Soviet even though he did not belong to the Armenian Communist party.³ Prior to that, he was an academic researcher.⁴

There is no evidence that he ever served in the Soviet or Armenian military.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

¹ Curtis, Glenn. 1994. *Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: Country Studies*. Washington DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, p 22-23.

² Hovannisian, Richard G. 1971. *The Republic of Armenia: The first year, 1918-1919*. Volume 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, p 394-396.

³ Curtis 1994, p 22.

⁴ Dahlburg, John-Thor. "A Proud Day for Armenia as It Chooses First President." *Los Angeles Times*. October 17, 1991. <http://articles.latimes.com/1991-10-17/news/mn-904_1_soviet-union>

There is no smoking gun evidence to suggest that any particular ethnic, sectarian or racial criteria were used to *exclude* segments of the population from the officer corps.

However, even prior to the independence in 1991, there existed severe ethnic tensions in Armenia, particularly against Azerbaijanis that went as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. Ethnic divisions between the two were never resolved. In the waning years of the USSR in the 1980s, mutual ethnic distrust had devolved into pogroms of ethnic cleansing where Azerbaijanis “were forced to flee Armenia, often under violent circumstances.”⁵ The Azeris conducted similar campaigns in Azerbaijan, a fact that was incredibly salient in Armenian politics, and drove the nationalist movement in Armenia to the point that defending any Azerbaijani actions was politically costly.⁶

Also, in early 1992, the ministry of defense of newly independent Armenia issued an appeal to Armenian officers who had commissions in the Soviet army to return to Armenia “to help form the new force to defend their homeland against Azerbaijan and build a permanent national army.”⁷

Finally, early reports from the new Armenian armies suggest that Armenian conscripts complained about officer elitism, “chiefly because the first language of many officers is Russian.”⁸ Junior officers from the army also spent their time training in military schools in Russia, and senior officers spent two to three years in academies in Russia and Belarus.⁹

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

Curtis (1994) writes, “during the Soviet period, Armenian troops were thoroughly integrated into the Soviet army...after independence, Armenia profited from some aspects of this close association, and a strong Russian military presence is expected to remain for some time.”¹⁰ The ideological loyalty to communism required to get into the senior officer corps during that time seems to have shaped the leadership so soon after independence. Curtis (1994) reports that the chief architect of the armed forces of the newly independent Armenia was General Norat Ter-Grigoriants (who was the overall commander of the Armenian army), who was the former Soviet deputy chief of staff.¹¹ Finally, senior officer training also involved spending two to three years at academies in Russia and Belarus.¹²

⁵ *Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*. 1994. New York: Human Rights Watch, p 1.

⁶ Rieff, David. 1997. “Nagorno-Karabakh: Case Study in Ethnic Strife.” *Foreign Affairs* 76(2): 118-132, p 126-129.

⁷ Curtis 1994, p 73.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Curtis 1994, p 74.

¹⁰ Curtis 1994, p 70.

¹¹ Curtis 1994, p 72.

¹² Curtis 1994, p 74.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

Party membership was a requirement under the Armenian communist regime while it was a member of the USSR. After October 1991, the Armenians seceded from the Soviet Union and declared themselves a Republic.

There is no evidence to suggest that the officers, who continued to train even in Russia, or by Russian advisors in Armenia, had any requirements for party membership post-independence.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

As explained above, Armenians were thoroughly integrated into the Soviet military system during the Soviet era. Cadets, Junior officers and senior officers all frequently went to Russia to receive military training in Russian academies. There is evidence to suggest that the officers continued to receive political education as a result of this.

However, a major part of the Armenian armed forces involved in the actual Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were the Karabakh militia groups made up of “mostly of Armenians from Azerbaijan, plus volunteers from Armenia and mercenaries who formerly were Soviet officers.”¹³ They were tied to Armenia because significant arms, volunteers and material support came from Armenia, often at the expense of the regular army.¹⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that *their* training involved extensive political education or ideological indoctrination. On the other hand, they were heavily nationalist and harbored anti-Azerbaijani sentiment.¹⁵

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

Following the flare-up of ethnic violence in 1988 in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, there was a wave of refugees flooding into Armenia from Azerbaijan. The news of atrocities created unrest in the capital, Yerevan, and in November 1988, the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Curtis 1994, p 18-22.

Soviet military declared a military curfew in Yerevan.¹⁶ At the same time, Gorbachev had various nationalist leaders (who were blamed for the unrest) arrested.¹⁷

Similarly, in 1991, as the Armenian Supreme Soviet was considering declaring independence, Gorbachev sent Soviet paratroopers into Armenia to dissuade the Armenians.¹⁸

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

In Nov 1988, the soviet military imposed a curfew in Yerevan and took over the city to stop unrest. Further, in December 1988, a major earthquake hit northern Armenia. Soviet troops were deployed to govern and administer aid in the region, apparently which they did quite poorly.¹⁹

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

There existed a variety of militia groups that took part in the fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. In the first half of 1990, a variety of unofficial militias emerged within Armenia itself. The most active of these was the 5000 member strong Armenian National Army (ANA).²⁰ There also existed Armenian Interior ministry troops, that were later used to disband many of these Armenian militias.²¹ In addition, the Armenian National Movement, the political party of Ter-Petrossian, had their own militia.²² Finally, various ethnically Armenian militias from within the Nagorno-Karabakh region itself were active during the 1989-1991 period, that had some level of support from Armenia.²³

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

¹⁶ Masih, Joseph R, and Robert O. Krikorian. 1999. *Armenia at the Crossroads*. Amsterdam: Harwood, p 13.

¹⁷ Masih and Krikorian 1999, p 15.

¹⁸ Curtis 1994, p 23.

¹⁹ Masih and Krikorian 1999, p 14.

²⁰ Croissant, Michael P. 1998. *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications*. Westport, CT: Praeger, p 38.

²¹ Croissant 1998, p 39.

²² Masih and Krikorian 1999, p 23.

²³ Curtis 1994, p 74.

Curtis (1994) reports, “shortly after independence, a special internal security force was formed under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”²⁴ The original mission of the internal security force was to “prevent guerrilla attacks on military installations in the first months of [Armenian] independence.”²⁵ However, they evolved into a general police force. Elements of the former KGB have remained also active under Armenian direction. All police agencies are under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

So while there is a security apparatus, there seems to be no evidence to indicate that they have been dedicated to watching the regular military.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

There is no evidence to indicate that a purge of either the Armenian or the Soviet armed forces within Armenia occurred in the past five years.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

Curtis (1994) reports that the new Armenian republic set up a Defense Committee. General Ter-Petrossian, overall commander of the Armenian armed forces worked alongside the newly appointed Minister of Defense, Vazgan Sarkisian as architects of the new military. Finally, the military establishment reportedly played a role in the formation of Armenia’s military doctrine (one of “defensive self-sufficiency”) during the planning stages of the setup of the new republic.²⁶

²⁴ Curtis 1994, p 76.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Curtis 1994, p 23, 72; See Curtis 1994, p 72 for more details on Armenia’s military doctrine.