

CAUGHT BETWEEN ABANDONMENT AND ENTRAPMENT: ANALYZING CSTO'S INACTION IN THE ARMENIAN CASE THROUGH SNYDER'S ALLIANCE DILEMMA

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Introduction

Founded in 2002, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a regional security organization consisting of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. As outlined in Article 3 of its Charter (2002), the primary objective of the CSTO is the protection of the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of its member states.

In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, following the clashes on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenia formally appealed to the CSTO two times, in May 2021 and September 2022. However, the CSTO was unable to activate Article 4, as the locations of the clashes remained disputed due to the absence of a formal border delimitation between the two countries. Nonetheless, this position of the organization contrasted sharply with Armenia's expectations of unconditional support from Moscow/CSTO, which were shaped by its deep military and economic dependence on Russia.

Analysis and findings. According to Snyder, alliances inherently contain two contradictory risks: abandonment and entrapment. Abandonment refers to the risk that an ally may fail to fulfill its obligations or even realign with the adversary, while entrapment describes the danger of being dragged into an unwanted conflict due to an ally's behavior. These risks intensify in situations where one state is significantly more powerful than the other. The more dependent a country is on an ally, the more afraid it is of being abandoned, and the more likely it is to accept risks to keep the alliance strong. Conversely, if a state feels less dependent, it will avoid being trapped in conflicts and be less concerned about whether its ally feels abandoned (Snyder, 1984).

Armenia's Military and Economic Dependence. Armenia's post-Soviet security infrastructure is institutionalized in its formal alliance with Russia, both in the spheres of military and economy. The foundational 1992 treaty established the legal fra-

mework for Russian forces to operate in Armenia, focusing on securing the former USSR's external borders. This was followed by the September 30 1992 agreement, which formalized the deployment of Russian FSB border guards along Armenia's frontiers with Turkey (330 km) and Iran (45 km), with detachments stationed in Gyumri, Armavir, Artashat, and Meghri, as well as a unit at Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport, totaling around 4,500 troops. In addition, the March 16, 1995 treaty among parties transformed Russia's remaining Soviet-era forces into the 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, initially hosting 3,000–5,000 troops and later expanding to include the 3624th Air Base at Erebuni Airport. Moreover, on August 20, 2010, Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Dmitry Medvedev signed an agreement extending the treaty for 49 years. Thus, the base's jurisdiction was extended until 2044, which demonstrated Russia's long-term commitment (Nazaretyan, 2021).

Economically, Armenia's dependence on Russia is equally pronounced. Between 2019 and 2021, more than 80% of Armenia's gas and oil imports came from Russia, with over 80% of the country's energy infrastructure either directly owned or heavily influenced by Russian entities. For instance, Gazprom Armenia, a subsidiary of the Russian state-owned Gazprom, controls the national gas distribution network. The Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, which supplies about a third of Armenia's electricity, relies entirely on Russian fuel and technical assistance (Nazaretyan, 2023). This dependency harmed Armenia's bilateral relations with other countries. For example, in 2005, a proposal to use Armenia as a transit country for transporting Iranian natural gas to Europe via Georgia and Ukraine faced strong opposition from Russia, which sought to prevent any regional energy cooperation that could undermine its dominance. Under Kremlin pressure, the pipeline's diameter was reduced from 56 inches to 28 inches, and when construction was completed, Armenia eventually sold its share in the project to Gazprom (Kaleji, 2024). In the railway sector, a similar pattern of Russian involvement is evident.

In February 2008, Armenia signed a franchise agreement with Russian Railways. The agreement period is 30 years and can be extended by mutual agreement. As part of this deal, South Caucasus Railways, a subsidiary of Russian Railways, was established, which fully operates and manages Armenia's railway system. (Soboliev, 2019).

This very asymmetry of Armenia on Russia reduced its leverage in the alliance. As a result, Russia sought to avoid being drawn into a regional conflict based on unclear territorial disputes, especially when such involvement could complicate its relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan pursued a foreign policy of diversified partnerships, maintaining strategic autonomy from any single power bloc. A critical element of this strategy was Azerbaijan's deepening alliance with Türkiye, which culminated in the 2010 Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support. The agreement included a mutual defense clause, committing both states to provide military assistance in case of a third-party attack (UN Library, 2020). This alignment gained further importance following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Facing Western sanctions and isolation, Russia sought to reconsider its presence in key regional economies. In this regard, Türkiye emerged as a critical gateway to the outside world. Russia-Türkiye trade turnover nearly doubled in 2022, reaching over \$60 billion, making Türkiye Russia's second-largest trading partner after China. The TurkStream gas pipeline became the only direct gas route to Southeastern Europe after the sabotage of Nord Stream and Western sanctions. Moscow and Ankara also began working on a new Türkiye-centered gas hub project, which was proposed by Vladimir Putin at the Astana Summit in October 2022, to maintain Russia's influence over European energy markets (Coşkun et al., 2024).

In parallel, Azerbaijan became a vital transit state for Russia's pivot toward alternative trade corridors. In particular, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), initially agreed upon in 2000 by Russia, Iran, and India, gained renewed strategic importance. Azerbaijan and Iran had first formalized cooperation on the INSTC in 2016. However, the imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran in 2018 complicated financing efforts and resulted in Azerbaijan reconsidering its earlier commitment to provide a €500 million loan to Iran. Recognizing the urgency of developing the route after 2022, Russia issued a €1.3 billion loan to Iran in 2023 (Smagin,

2023). Last year, during a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, President Ilham Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan allocated approximately \$120 million toward the modernization of its railway infrastructure to meet the increased demand for cargo transit (Aliyev, 2024). Since Russia is highly dependent on financing this route due to sanctions on Iran, Azerbaijan emerged as an essential partner.

Conclusion

Armenia assumed that by creating a high level of dependency on Russia, it would secure Moscow's backing even in cases of alleged security threats. However, ironically, this very asymmetry reduced Russia's incentive to act. Yerevan's structural dependence left it with no credible exit option, as any attempt to shift its foreign policy orientation would be politically and economically risky. For instance, following Armenia's attempts at security reorientation, Russian pressure on Armenia started. In November 2023, dozens of Armenian trucks were denied entry into Russia at the Upper Lars checkpoint under the pretext of phytosanitary inspections (News.am, 2023). Similarly, Russia failed to deliver \$400 million worth of weapons that were agreed upon in the 2021 arms deal, reportedly due to the Armenian debt (Nersisyan & Melkonian, 2024). There were also claims that in 2023, Russia temporarily shut down the gas pipeline running from Georgia to Armenia (de Wall, 2024). Therefore, the Armenian experience illustrates how one-sided reliance on alliance relationships can create false expectations and, by limiting sovereignty, can result in the absence of viable alternatives.

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Caught Between Abandonment and Entrapment: Analyzing CSTO's Inaction in the Armenian Case through Snyder's Alliance Dilemma

SUMMARY

This article examines the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) inaction in response to Armenia's requests through Glenn Snyder's theory of the security dilemma in alliance politics. Focusing on the concepts of abandonment and entrapment, the analysis reveals that Armenia's deep dependence on Russia resulted in Russia's limited concern over the potential cost of alienating Armenia. Since the CS-TO's legal obligations only cover the internationally recognized borders of member states, Russia avoided entrapment over Armenia's alleged security claims.

Keywords: CSTO, alliance dilemma, abandonment, entrapment, asymmetric alliances, regional security, South Caucasus.

Ermənistan Nümunəsində KTMT-nin Fəaliyyətsizliyinin Snyderin İttifaq Dilemması Nəzəriyyəsi Perspektivindən Təhlili

XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalə Kollektiv Təhlükəsizlik Müqaviləsi Təşkilatının (KTMT) Ermənistanın gözlədiyi səviyyədə onun müraziətlərinə dəstək göstərməməsini Glenn Snyder-in alyans siyasətində təhlükəsizlik dilemması nəzəriyyəsi kontekstində təhlil edir. Tərk edilmə və münaqişəyə cəlb olunma anlayışlarına diqqət yetirən analiz göstərir ki, Ermənistanın Rusiya ilə dərin asimmetrik asılılığı Moskvanın Ermənistanın onun siyasi dairəsindən kənara çıxmasının ciddi nəticələr doğuracağına dair narahatlığını minimuma endirmişdir. KTMT-nin hüquqi öhdəlikləri yalnız üzv dövlətlərin beynəlxalq səviyyədə tanınmış sərhədlərini əhatə etdiyindən, Rusiya bu çərçivədən kənar bir münaqişəyə cəlb olunmamaq üçün ehtiyatlı mövqe tutmuşdur.

Açar sözlər: KTMT, ittifaq dilemması, assimmetrik ittifaqlar, regional təhlükəsizlik, Cənubi Qafqaz.