

**POLICY CONVERGENCE ISSUES WITHIN
HIERARCHICAL INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS:
ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP**

*Vahagn Aglyan**

Phenomenon of hegemony in international relations continues to evolve both conceptually and empirically, reflecting the dynamic features and aspects of the 21st century's transformations. As a type of rule and a certain form of relations, hegemony at the global, as well as regional levels presupposes existence of several structural "preconditions" to acquire a relatively sustainable character. Historically, hegemony rested on premise of existence of subordinate relationships between the preponderant power and subordinate state(s) whereby the hegemonic power structures the regional/ international context to conform its longer term interests and preferences. Yet, according to the hegemonic stability school, Great Power provides public goods by establishing regimes that open up opportunities for the other members of international relations to be users of the benefits that come forward as outputs of the order established by the preponderant power in the system. In this variation of hegemony, the material capabilities and power asymmetry come forward as major precondition for the hegemonic rule to take shape.

However, the term hegemony is a semantically and politically overloaded definition to explain variations in practices and patterns of interstate relations across the modern systems of international relations. In retrospect, hegemony and domination terminologies have been primarily associated with a disrespectful and one-sided rule over subjugated entities, whether those being (ethnic) nations or tribal formations in less developed parts of the world. Prime examples of the more recent hegemonic rule cases might include strong-handed and ideologically nurtured forms

*PhD, Associate Professor, Yerevan State University, Head of the Chair of Public Administration, Head of the Centre for Political Studies at the Noravank Foundation.

of domination, with a heavy totalitarian or extreme nationalist tinge in the employed policies of the dominant states.

However, along with the material and power-based set of factors, an alternative variation of hegemony rests on ideational assumptions, and mainly associated with the constructivist stand of thinking that emphasizes norms, ideas and ideational social attributes: “a state strives to be a hegemon because it views itself and others recognize it as such” [1].

According to the one of the interpretations, hegemony in international relations is explained through the lens of hegemonic stability theory that presumes an existence of certain legitimate settlement between the subordinates and the dominant power on accepting the hierarchical principles of order maintenance and benefits of sharing common “goods” produced by the hegemon such as stability, financial sustainability, trade regimes and, most importantly, relative peace and security of the regional/ international order. At the same time, hegemony is viewed not solely as a status or everlastingly fixed state of affairs, but also as a predominant influence that the leading state exerts upon and within the system. The later aspect presupposes that the leading state possesses required capacities to formulate and enforce the “the common rules of the game” [2]. Within this scheme of interstate relations, the dominant state has to take into consideration the interests and preferences of the subordinate and the smaller states in order to keep the hierarchical system sustainable and not to endanger its own status of hegemon, specifically in case of unfavorable trends in material distribution patterns, emergence of rival powers or in case of subordinate actors trying to upset the hierarchical order.

For the IR hierarchy researchers, the major conceptual dimension of this approach postulates a prominent role for the non-material factors in structuring the hegemonic pattern of international relations, however with an important reservation for substantial coercive potential that the dominant state ought to keep as “a reserve option” in case of non-obedience. Hierarchy in international relations, thus, is relational phenomenon that rest on social contact between the dominant and subordinate entities whereby the both sides of “contract” accept the mutual obligations and rights as emerging from this specific type of interaction practices. In operational terms, as D. Lake notes, the hierarchical patterns of international relations presup-

pose the existence of some range of actions that subordinate actor is willing to accept and observe in its relations with predominant state [3].

Given the complexity of the current international relations and an apparent tinge towards the technocratic apprehension of many policy-making domains, one of the key dimensions indicating the degree of (regional) hierarchical relationships can be the policy convergence dynamics between the predominant and subordinate state(s). Here, the main factor in qualitative “assessment” of the levels and degrees of the preponderant state’s hierarchical engagement may concern the intrusiveness of dominant actor into the variety of policy domains of the subordinates, in terms of not only “correcting the behavior of another (weaker) state” [4], but also through guiding the processes and channeling the expected effects.

Policy convergence in security and defense realms is longer-term phenomenon as it concerns institutionalized patterns of relationships. Yet, the convergence pay-off perspective is certainly a value in itself. As J. Ikenberry notes, in a long-term perspective it is much more effective to shape the interests and orientations of other states than directly coerce them to follow the certain acts; that decreases the necessity of spending huge costs to constrain and disciple these states along the course determined by the leading state [5].

Policy Convergence: Security and Defense domains

The traditional understanding of policy convergence defines the latter as a gradual borrowing and transfer of policy-related practices between the states. The connotation of convergence is mainly positive, while the basic case exemplifying the positive spillover effects of converging policies in the modern times has been the European Union. Though policy convergence might be series of short-term decisions, yet the (political) logic of policy convergence refers to the gradual confluences and elimination of diverging policies. At the macro-level, the three prominent mechanisms come forward as “transmission belts”: (1) harmonization of policies through the international agreements or supranational regulations, (2) the coercive imposition of policies, and (3) the interdependent, but un-coordinated diffusion of practices by means of cross-national imitation, emulation or learning [6, pp. 3-4]. Meanwhile, an important and distinct difference between the policy imposition and dif-

fusion should be noted; in case of policy imposition the policy-making elite in the targeted country has only limited (if at all) opportunities to influence or change the already adopted policies, whereby for the imposing state the major objective is to export and enforce its principles, values and *modus operandi*. The targeted states usually prefer to cede to the demands of imposing actor in hope to secure their access to the economic, social, or security benefits that the stronger actor could provide in exchange. Conditionality is the central factor in policy imposition process [6, pp. 4-5]. Policy imposition is usually works in the context of existing political and economic asymmetries that the imposing actor utilizes in its own or collective interests. High degree of institutional similarity is an important facilitating precondition for the development of convergence in polices [7]. Existence of similarities in socio-economic institutions, structures and development trajectories is yet another factor that contributes and facilitates the transfer of policies across the boundaries. Path dependency in its turn

Diffusion, in difference to previous mode of convergence, is more about voluntary, decentralized, but also interdependent interaction processes that lead to imitation, emulation or learning with respect to one and the same policy item [6, pp. 5-6]. An important aspect of diffusion is its emphasis on process and policy characteristics.

As for the parametric characteristics and the frames of defense and security policy convergence then the both ones, in analytical and empirical terms, belong to the specific cluster of cross-national policy convergence practices. Policy convergence in these areas directly relates to the national interests of the states concerned. Security and defense policies comprise the primary set of national interests with tangible and empirically focused applicability characteristics. In this context, instrumental characteristics and policy means are principally important to reach the strategic objectives within the triangle of strategy/policy – means – convergence process/effects. For instance, in opinion of a Russian researcher the convergence means of Russia's national interests realization in the CIS space can be defined as collaborative and joint efforts of the states to secure their common national interests. The fields where these interests coincide opening the playground for convergence development are: collective peacekeeping activities; creation and development of military-political alliances; training of foreign states' military staff; provision of military and

technical assistance to the states of Russia's "near abroad"; enhancement, equipment and protection of the CIS external boundaries; and deployment of military bases [8].

Reviewing and analyzing the case of the European defense policy convergence between France, Germany and the UK, A. Pannier and O. Schmitt define the main building blocks of convergence processes in defense field as the gradual adoption of similar policies in terms of doctrines (enunciated principles or/and discourses), means (or instruments) and practices related to the use of military force. Further, the authors examine the correlative and casual links between the level(s) of institutionalized cooperation (enhanced and formalized via bilateral agreements and treaties) and policy convergence dynamics of the three key European actors in defense and security sphere as three separate pairs [9].

Membership and active/passive participation of states in international alliances and pacts are the typical feature of the modern system of international relations. Sometimes rationales behind the memberships may overlap or contradict each other, yet the states' attitudes towards the variety of issues in international forums are indicative factor in assessing their converging or diverging policies with regard to political or other problems on agenda. For instance, in spite of certain similarities in institutional design France's, Germany's and the UK's attitudes towards certain security-related issues or decisions to use the force in multilateral formats differ not only on case-specific base, but also as reflection of normative, ideational of discursive preferences in their respective foreign and defense policies.

In this context, membership patterns are certainly indicative of status and policy directions that states pursue in their international politics; these preferences are institutional manifestations of longer-term purposes that the states strives to achieve in their foreign policies. As an important variable in assessing the level and the degree in sustaining the security hierarchy between the dominant and subordinate states, D. Lake put forward a criterion of security/military alliance membership that both the subordinate and the dominant states share or not share (i.e. checking if the subordinate state participate in other security pacts or institutions where the dominant/hierarchical state does not participate; the number of overlapping alliances) [10]. In the post-Soviet Eurasia, which is a unipolar region in terms of power distribution [11] any perspectives, opportunities or even discussions of membership in non-regional (without Russian participation) alliance(s) is of paramount and princi-

ple importance given Russia's negative stance towards any talks of NATO engagement in the region.

***Hierarchy and policy convergence:
the case of Russian-Armenian Relations***

In literature, a generally accepted point in achieving hierarchy is the solid basis of hegemon's authority, whereby sources of such authority derive from variety of dimensions. In case of the post-Soviet Eurasia, Russian-centered hierarchal pattern of relations rest, in principle, on structural power asymmetry between Russian Federation (RF) and that of all other FSU countries combined; perception of Russia, in terms of degree of acceptance of its authority; and regional (hegemonic) stability provision, including credible arbitration and mediation capabilities [12].

Another aspect of regional leadership in international relations posits that one of the dimensions of the leader's sustained power is the coalition building that comes along with the efforts of institutionalizing the regional context [13]. What was specific for Russian policies in its own milieu is that Moscow first of all strived to nest the potential functionality of coalition into the bilateralism as primary vehicle of upholding hierarchal dependency links while placing these arrangements into the organizational frames *en route*. The major reason behind this approach is apparently analogical to N. Macfarlane's observation concerning the US regional policies: bilateral relations between the strong outsider and the weaker regional party enhance the outsider's capacity to control the agenda [14].

Since the beginning of the 2000s, Russia made clear its preparedness to translate its structural preponderance over the post-Soviet space into an organized and institutionalized dominance, pivoted around the political expediency of sustaining "the new architecture of international relations" in the CIS space.

Policy convergence dynamics in foreign and security realms between Russia, on the one hand, and its post-Soviet neighbors is specific case whereby the dynamics of convergence is strongly tilted towards the policy imposition pole of relations. Given the existence of huge resource asymmetry between Russia and the aggregate resources of all other former Soviet republics, phenomenon of foreign and security policy convergence(s) can potentially be approached as manifestation of hierarchical relationships. In difference to the European realities where no state can afford to

take role of the predominant trend-setter actor in foreign and security fields, Russia's position within the CIS space is still overwhelmingly dominant (even Germany, the economic and industrial European leader has just 20% of EU combined GPD share, while the population is 16% of EU¹).

In this context, one analytically important objective can be to track the Russia's broader stance and the adopted policies in terms of facilitating or inducing first of all its allies to follow the convergence logics along the path developed in Moscow. Pivoting on the two interrelated dimensions of defense and security policy convergence – level of institutionalization of military-political/defense (bilateral/multilateral) relationships and the level of policy convergence (military-political/defense) – it is possible to make some broad periodization of Russia's efforts and policies to institutionalize its leading position within the post-Soviet space. Level of institutionalization means the degree of formalization and enhancement of bilateral as well as multilateral (but clearly centered on Russia) relations as mainly manifested in interstate agreements; intensity and depth of interaction practices regulated and proceduralized within the structured frameworks. Policy convergence in defense and military-political domain in case of the whole post-Soviet space is tilted towards the policy imposition pole for the quite obvious reasons: huge resource asymmetry between Russia and all other neighboring states, willingness to pursue a longer term and purposeful policy of macro-regional engagement strategy on the part of the Russian leadership, and absence of any serious structural preconditions to balance either internally or externally against Russia.

However, the processes and the dynamics of policy convergence are not viewed as a coercive exercise of the Russian power over its smaller neighbors, though the structural preponderance of Russia over the region and processes unfolding in this part of the Eurasia is an key prerequisite of hierarchical international subsystem centered around Russia.

Russia's strategies and longer-term security interests in the Southern parts of the CIS region have undergone series of transformations over the past quarter of century since the demise of the Soviet Union in early 1990s. Military and military-political factors have always comprise the basic dimension of the Russian regional profile in the region as the Moscow's security concerns shaped the overall policy

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, 2014, CIA [e-version].

directions and content of its regional engagement strategies. Given the volatile and to some extent unpredictable social and political developments in the whole Caucasian region, military and security considerations have loomed large in Moscow's regional calculus, and the clusters of defense collaboration and security policies coordination emerge within the newly created CIS security structures or through the bilateral agreements with the individual states of the FSU.

Over the early and mid-1990s, the patterns of bilateral relations between the former Soviet republics in security and defense domains were characterized by the hectic and sometimes harsh attitudes on contentious issues of military hardware distribution approaches and the principles of developing the initially planned joint military system that had to replace the defunct Soviet military body. In spite of the efforts to preserve the centralized command and control structure within the so called CIS joint command, the newly established Russian MoD, since its creation in 1992, shifted the emphasis to the urgent need of developing the set of bilateral agreements with the CIS republics to formalize the new formats of military cooperation and secure the legal status of Russia's military presence (bases) in the CIS¹. The major objective was to halt the possible loss of defense infrastructure footholds in the post-Soviet space and consolidate Russia's influence leverages over the military-political processes, including the ethnic conflicts, unfolding in various hotspots of the former Soviet Union.

The operational objectives of Russia's security policies were centered on providing the accelerated institutionalization of the newly defined and legalized formats of bilateral accords with the member-states of CIS Collective Security Treaty through signing series of binding treaties on Russian military bases in a number of CIS states. However, given that the strong nationalist sentiments and pro-Western tinge with sometimes pronounced anti-Russian emphasis were typical attributes underlying the foreign and security policies of the majority of the newly independent republics over the 1990s, policy convergence rationale was deemed an unsustainable objective both politically and operationally.

Yet, over the 1990s Russia's relations with several post-Soviet states were substantially institutionalized. Particularly, still in 1992 Russia and Armenia, among the firsts, signed series of framework agreements and treaties institutionalizing the

¹ Линч Д., Реализм российской внешней политики, *Pro et Contra*, №6, Осень 2001 [эл.версия].

allied relationships that reached its highest political and strategic point in August 1997 after the Russian-Armenian Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance was signed in Moscow¹. Russia and Armenia entered the 21st century with well-institutionalized framework of military and defense relationships.

Under V. Putin's presidency, since early 2000s onward, the Russian new leadership dropped off previous grand schemes of overwhelming integration of the whole post-Soviet area under the CIS guise, instead actively prioritizing bilateral relations as a more efficient way of securing Russian national interests [15]. Simultaneously, the rise of Russia's international profile and engagement in a variety of regional formats and its openly stated priority to uphold its status of world power actualized, on the one hand, a necessity to sustain Russian-led/dominated regional organization, while on the other hand, new preferences later made it urgent to coordinate the foreign policy stances of its allies on the international and regional scenes.

Over the period of the two V. Putin's presidential terms (2000-2008), Russia substantially bolstered its positions in the post-Soviet space not just through exploiting the asymmetries or skillfully using the leverages over its weaker neighbors, but also via active economic (mainly in energy industry) engagement. The basic principles of the new *modus operandi* rest on several policy assumptions. First, while stating Russia's foreign policy shift towards the pragmatic course and economization [16] of its foreign policy-making both regionally and in international arena, nevertheless Moscow set some limits and kind of access denial provisions for the "third parties" involvement into the spheres its traditional interests. Several revisions of RF Military Doctrine, Foreign Policy Concepts as well as National Security Concepts contained the clauses on unacceptability for Russia of any foreign military presence in the CIS space. Secondly, serious efforts were put in creation of regional groupings of states integrated around the Russian-centered core. In 2002/2003 on the basis of the older CIS Collective Security Treaty a new organization was established (CSTO, with its 6 member states: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). At the same time, Russia intensified discussions on the Custom Union as well as other regional integration formats. Bilateral institutionalized formats were clustered into the newly refashioned multilateral formats.

¹ ДОГОВОР о дружбе, сотрудничестве и взаимной помощи между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения, Собрание законодательства РФ. 21 декабря 1998 г. N 51. Ст. 6274., *Бюллетень международных договоров*, 1999. N 2, стр. 71 – 77.

From the heights of economic and financial prowess based on high oil prices and relatively sustainable growth dynamics, in 2005, V. Putin in his Federal Address proclaimed: “Today on the post-Soviet space emerged and have taken on the development path independent states, and together with them we wish to correspond the humanitarian values, [...]to the standards that could provide us the common economic, humanitarian, and legal space. While defending the Russian foreign policy interests we are interested in development of the economies of our nearby countries and emboldening of their international weight. *We are interested in synchronizing the pace and parameters of reformation processes in Russia and the states of the Commonwealth, and we are ready to in practice retake the experiences of our neighbors as well as to share our ideas and our working outcomes with them*”¹.

One of the strategic motives for Russia to forge broader and more intensive policy coordination and convergence initiatives with its neighbors was premised on the assumption to counter the EU's programs within Eastern Neighborhood. Given the scope and consistency of legal, normative, and economic conjunction with the European internal market implied by the EU's EP program for the 6 post-Soviet states, Moscow's policies to foster its own institutionalized integration project was deemed as highly required. Moreover, what is important, for Russia the EU and NATO have become increasingly associated as unified Western front in opposing the Russian interests, which marked a political shift that contrasted to earlier Russian posture for a softer attitude towards the European structures [17]. As D. Averre notes: “Moscow's increasingly sophisticated efforts to integrate and promote common understandings through regional organizations—the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation—signals a greater reliance on their collective normative potential to enforce the rules. These efforts have produced patchy results, stemming from the absence of a genuine common ideology and differing strategic aims among the regions' states, so that in practice bilateral relations have often predominated” [18].

In the field of foreign policy coordination, an apparent trend is visible in stronger coordination and convergence dynamics among the grouping of CIS states as compared to the earlier period of the 1990s. Foreign policies coordination has been proclaimed among the basic goals within the Collective Security Treaty Or-

¹ Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию РФ, 2005г.

ganization (SCTO), a primary multilateral security institution in the post-Soviet space. At the least, in case of voting behavior patterns at the UN the available data proves the evidence that post-Soviet states voting practices on a variety of international problems converging closer to mean with the central role being reserved to the Russia's voting position as "medium" for making the voting decisions. Although several post-Soviet states are in open opposition to Moscow's international initiatives for political and strategic considerations, but for the closer allies Russia would supposedly continue to play a leading role, serving as source of learning for the others or coercing the rest to follow its suit [19].

If earlier the Russian regional policies and its strategic objectives were primarily aimed at limiting the potential (available) foreign policy options and external extra-regional alignment variants for the neighboring post-Soviet states, while simultaneously containing the engagement of the "the third party" actors into the zone of its traditional influence, the newly formulated Eurasianist foray after 2012 strives to reach more institutionalized alignments of the foreign and security policies of the member-states of Eurasian Union and CSTO. These changes became particularly visible after the 2008 Russia-Georgian military conflict and the economic crisis of 2008/2009 that revealed financial dependency of the smaller CIS states on the Russian crediting resources.

Two major trends can be discerned in Russia-Armenia relations after 2010; more intensive securitization of Armenia's foreign policy and broader clustering of its security policies along the institutionalized framework of strategic partnership with Russia. Particularly, the foreign policy orientations and alignment patterns have been attached significantly sharper edge of making ideational and normative choice in terms of future development perspectives and, as such, making choice which is (pre) determined by longer term security considerations. The most recent case of making such choice was September 3, 2013, Armenia's decision to join the Russian-led Eurasian Union and dropping, at least for that moment, the signing of Associative agreement with EU, including its most important free trade clause. Because of existence of the unsettled conflict in the region concerning the future status of Karabakh Republic and militarily strained relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the problem of choosing the security complex currently concerned not only the defense and military-political areas, but also a wider spectrum of state and national interests. The Arme-

nian leadership openly alluded that the rationale behind the Eurasian Russian-centric choice has been highly security predisposed decision [20].

Yet, Russia's active drive to establish a more consolidated positions in the region through bolstering its relations with Armenia rest on the imperative of not just further institutionalization of security and defense partnership, but also achievement of efficient convergent dynamics between the foreign, economic, defense and security policies framed as convergence in strategic objectives and institutional forums. Moreover, one of the likely outcomes of the trend can potentially be normative convergence. Analyzing the experience of the leading European states' military reforms convergence specifics, T. Dyson refers to this problem: "normative convergence is a product of policy-learning process consequent upon interaction through joint military operations and "elite socialization" within EU and NATO institutional forums, leading to the gradual convergence of domestic norms concerning the objectives and instruments of defense policy and the development of a "European strategic culture"¹.

In case of military-political and defense area, Russia's regional priorities have started to anchor more and more on the joint modes and frameworks of cooperation that presuppose higher communication intensity and sustaining closer institutional culture between the participants. In 2013, the commander-in-chief of the Russian main military base in Armenia (Gyumri) mentioned among the mutual priorities a necessity of further deepening field-level cooperation, "that will assist us to better understand each other, to interact at higher qualitative levels. [...] In spite of similarities of our military systems some differences are certainly still there"².

In 2010 Russia and Armenia agreed on prolongation of the Russian military presence in Armenia (until 2044), supplementing the treaty with a wider security guarantees to Armenia. A number of other military and security-related agreements and other types of documents were signed since then between the two countries,

¹ T. Dyson, Convergence and Divergence in post-Cold War British, French and German Military Reforms: Between International Structure and Executive Autonomy, *Security Studies*, Volume 17, 2008, Issue 4, pp. 725-774. [ref. to: Cornish and Edwards, "The Strategic Culture of EU: A Progress Report"; Howarth, Security and Defense in the European Union, 188; Jones, The Rise of the European Security Cooperation, 218; Christoph Meyer, "Convergence towards a European Strategic Culture", *European Journal of International Relations* 11, N 4 (winter, 2005): 536; Meyer, The Quest for a European Strategic Culture: Changing Norms on Security and Defense in the European Union].

² Ю. Белоусов, Южный форпост России, *Красная звезда*, 10.10.2013.

ranging from military-technical cooperation in field of interoperability and force deployment to the military-political issues like peacekeeping and CSTO rapid reaction forces. In June 2013, during the Russia's Security Council secretary N. Patrushev's visit to Armenia, Russian-Armenian agreement was signed in Yerevan on development of military-technical cooperation that contained a provision for each party to export military production with same characteristics, and with identical characteristics for their national military forces, paramilitaries, police and special forces.

In 2015 agreement on united regional air defense system was signed that included more specific steps in operationalization of an earlier agreements in this field¹. Once joined with the Russian air defense system, the Armenian Air Defense Troops will have access to all the information available to Russian Southern Military District units and the country's air and missile defense troops². Yet, the perspectives and the dynamics of convergence in defense and security areas, including the normative dimensions of military partnership, have been substantially pushed forward after November 2016 approval of joint Russian-Armenian group of forces in the Caucasian region. Though the decision on creation of a joint military contingent was approved back in April 2001³, the new agreement implied more efficiency and wider scale for establishing common defense space, including joint plans for training and combat use of troops. A treaty does not include a NATO-type key dimensions for defense policies convergence such as joint military budget, military policy, and so on, but it “comes down to an improvement in the cohesion of the two armies during fighting”⁴.

In retrospect, if we review the aspects and dynamics of Russian-Armenian relationships in defense and security fields over the past quarter of century since the Soviet break up, the dynamics of “genuine” policy convergence became more operational and visible since the early 2010s, and proceeded along the already well institutionalized and integrated modes of strategic partnership between Russia and Armenia. A novel emphasis, within the newly formulated frames of common defense space, would likely be put on normative convergence in a joint operational context and development of new strategic culture of the allies in the region,

¹ Russia, Armenia unite air defense, create regional system in the Caucasus, *Russia Today*, 23.12.2015.

² V. Litovkin, Russia, Armenia to set up joint air defense system in the Caucasus, *UPI*, 12 October 2016.

³ Armenia, Russia agree to create joint military contingent, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 17.04.2001.

⁴ V. Litovkin, Russia and Armenia to create joint defense force in Caucasus, *UPI*, 16 November, 2016.

though the policy convergence has been occurring in the settings of highly hierarchical patterns of interactions.

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