



# Security sector reform in Armenia



**Gagik Avagyan** and **Duncan Hiscock**

**May 2005**

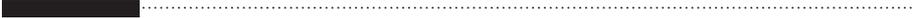
**Saferworld is an independent non-governmental organisation that works with governments and civil society internationally to research, promote and implement new strategies to increase human security and prevent armed violence.**

**COVER PHOTO:** GETTY IMAGES.

Saferworld  
The Grayston Centre  
28 Charles Square  
London N1 6HT  
UK

Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647  
Email: [general@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:general@saferworld.org.uk)  
Web: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)

ISBN 1 904833 07 1



# Security sector reform in Armenia

**Gagik Avagyan** and **Duncan Hiscock**

---

## About the authors

**Gagik Avagyan** is currently the Co-Chairman of the Armenian NGO and think-tank ‘Co-operation and Democracy’ working on media monitoring, democratisation and conflict resolution activities. Previously he worked as a senior advisor to the President of Armenia, and was a leading specialist at the Council for Religious Affairs attached to the Council of Ministers in Armenia. Gagik has worked with the Institute of War and Peace Reporting and other media institutions. He has written two books, 18 papers and over 100 newspaper and magazine articles.

**Duncan Hiscock** is Project Coordinator for Eastern Europe at Saferworld. He has an MSc Distinction in Russian and Post-Soviet Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and has studied and worked in the former Soviet Union for almost ten years. Previous publications include *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided* with Matveeva A (eds), ‘The Role of Civil Society in Security Sector Governance in the South Caucasus’ in *Security Sector Governance in Southern Caucasus – Challenges and Visions*, Ebnöther A and Gustenau G (eds), and *Macedonia: Guns, Policing and Ethnic Division*, with Matveeva A, Paes W-C, and Risser H.

---

## Acknowledgements

This report was produced as part of Saferworld’s small arms project in the Caucasus. Saferworld is grateful to the UK Government for funding this project. The authors would like to thank Artak Ayunts, Cornelis Blok, Cemal Cendan, Matthieu Goodstein, Thomas Jackson, Maia Nikolaishvili, Nouneh Dilanyan, Tevan Poghosian, Henry Smith, and Mark White for their advice and individual contributions to this paper.

---

## Acronyms

<b>ANM</b>	Armenian National Movement	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>ARFD</b>	Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsyutiun	<b>NKAO</b>	Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
<b>CEPS</b>	Centre for European Policy Studies	<b>NSC</b>	National Security Council
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organisation	<b>NSS</b>	National Security Service
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>IPAP</b>	Individual Partnership Action Plan	<b>PfP</b>	Partnership for Peace
<b>MOD</b>	Ministry of Defence	<b>SALW</b>	Small arms and light weapons
<b>MOI</b>	Ministry of the Interior	<b>SSR</b>	Security sector reform
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation		



# Contents

Map of Armenia	4
Executive summary	5
<b>1 Introduction</b>	10
<b>2 Theory and practice of security sector reform</b>	12
<b>3 Armenian security in context</b>	17
<b>4 Security sector actors in Armenia from independence to the present day</b>	23
<b>5 Reform and 'transformation'</b>	37
<b>6 The potential for security sector reform in Armenia</b>	42
Bibliography	46

# Map of Armenia



---

# Executive summary

**IN THE LAST FEW YEARS**, the South Caucasus has gradually gained in geo-political importance, with Russia, the US, Turkey, Iran, the EU and NATO all competing for influence. Armenia is Russia's closest ally in the region, and Iran has also established good relations. In contrast, Western governments have commonly shown more interest in Georgia and Azerbaijan, particularly in military and security co-operation. Yet Armenia remains open to closer co-operation with the EU and NATO. Furthermore, events in Armenia, particularly in the security sector, have a significant impact on its neighbours. There is therefore a need to better understand the Armenian security sector, both on its own terms and in comparison to Western concepts and standards of security sector reform.

Armenia became independent in 1991 against a backdrop of conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. The Armed Forces were formed largely from scratch, a combination of volunteer forces with little military experience and servicemen who had left the Soviet Army to return to Armenia. Other institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of State Security, were to some extent inherited from the Soviet Union, but required significant adjustment to function independently from Moscow. In general, two main factors shaped the security sector in the immediate post-independence period: its Soviet heritage, and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh.

This meant that from the start, security institutions – particularly the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence – held a privileged position within the state, which they have not really relinquished since a ceasefire was signed in 1994. There is little democratic control of the power ministries, which remain highly militarised, and neither parliament nor civil society have much influence or oversight over their actions. Corrupt elements within these ministries retain control over important sections of the economy, and have at times been used for political purposes, most notably to put down opposition protests in 1996. The judicial system is also perceived to be highly corrupt, with a large proportion of citizens believing that bribery and political interference are rife. All of this means that much of the security sector enjoys little trust among the public, with the possible exception of the army, which is popular for its perceived victory in Nagorno Karabakh.

The Armenian government does not currently appear to have a coherent plan for reform of the security sector. It has not yet even produced a national security concept that would clearly state the threats that Armenia faces and how it intends to deal with them. There have been some positive moves with respect to judicial reform, though sometimes this was a result of pressure from the Council of Europe and has been introduced half-heartedly. There is also some movement on police reform, as indicated by the development of a Police Assistance Programme with the OSCE.

However, the limited reforms that have occurred in Armenia cannot be understood as ‘security sector reform’ (SSR) as it is usually defined. Very little has been done to address the key issue of improving democratic governance, the cornerstone of most SSR activities. There has been insignificant progress in the areas of strengthening the rule of law, improving democratic control, civilianisation, professionalisation, and demilitarisation. Yet it is unfair to judge the Armenian security sector against the tenets of SSR, as the Armenian authorities have never committed to this idea or perceived security in these terms, emphasising that they are not prepared to risk any changes that may weaken Armenia’s military readiness. It makes more sense to see the development of the Armenian security sector in terms of an initial formation phase, and then a second phase in which these institutions were formally and informally strengthened legally, financially and structurally without radically changing their fundamental principles or practice.

Are essentially Western models of the security sector relevant to Armenia? Should Armenia consider undergoing radical and unsettling reforms to bring it closer to this Western ideal? Currently, Armenia exists in a condition of ‘stable instability’. Despite a ceasefire in Nagorno Karabakh lasting over ten years, the external situation is largely unfavourable for Armenia, and further conflict cannot be ruled out. There may also be significant threats to stability internally, however. Though the opposition is currently weak, there is a strong feeling of discontent among a significant section of the population, particularly with regards to the security sector. A third factor is increased co-operation with the EU and NATO, which will lead to demands for various elements of SSR in both the military and political spheres. It is thus questionable how long the current situation is sustainable.

Implementing reforms that strengthen the rule of law, reduce corruption, and improve the public’s participation in and trust for the security sector would go a long way to reducing the tensions in Armenia and creating a state that is more sustainable over the long term. Such reforms would find strong backing from the public, and from the international community, which should give the government the strength needed to face down powerful elements who are resistant to change. Given the political situation, reforms may be more possible in justice and policing, as the history of the sector to the current day seems to show. Encouraging these reforms now could save a lot of trouble for the government, the state, and the Armenian people over the long term.

---

## Recommendations

### To the international community and donors

- **Consider the possibilities to encourage security sector reform as part of conflict resolution.** Extend conflict resolution activities from a narrow focus on negotiations to include wider security concerns. Include an assessment of the security sector into ongoing conflict analysis. Assess whether it is possible to use certain forms of security sector reform as confidence-building measures (e.g. greater transparency in defence matters, improved rule of law). Prepare to support a full range of SSR activities after the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh is resolved.
- **Link security and development when drafting development programmes.** Continued insecurity in Armenia undermines economic development and discourages investment. A renewal of fighting over Nagorno Karabakh would have disastrous consequences for development. It is therefore essential that greater links are made between development strategies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and conflict resolution and SSR activities.
- **Ensure that development and security assistance to Armenia and Azerbaijan is conflict-sensitive.** Offer balanced support to ensure that security co-operation with the region does not impact negatively on conflict resolution.
- **Coordinate continued international support for security sector reform.** Continue to support judicial reform in Armenia, and provide full backing for the OSCE Police

Assistance Programme. Maintain and strengthen contacts between donors to ensure that security assistance is co-ordinated. Ensure that Russia is consulted and included in reform initiatives that aim to strengthen security in Armenia.

- **Facilitate debate on security matters.** Encourage debate with the Armenian authorities, both privately and in open forums, on issues such as national and regional security, the changing international security agenda, the role of civilians in security affairs, regional and international security norms, and international experience of security sector reform.
  - **Offer advice and assistance on security sector reform.** Make it clear to the Armenian government that the international community is willing to provide advice and assistance on a wide range of issues relating to security sector reform, including: developing a national security concept; designing and implementing a policy for security sector reform; managing security budgets; strengthening the rule of law; improving parliamentary oversight; etc.
  - **Balance local and Western priorities in security co-operation.** Though the main concerns of Western governments (terrorism; weapons of mass destruction; illicit trafficking of human beings, drugs and weapons; border control; financial crimes; peace support operations) are global in nature, security co-operation and assistance should equally focus on broader security sector reform that can address Armenia's specific needs and concerns.
  - **Include security sector reform activities into EU and NATO partnership with Armenia.** Increase dialogue on a widened range of security affairs. Consider which SSR activities can be included into European Neighbourhood Policy co-operation and a NATO-Armenia Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Emphasise the non-military aspects of SSR in the NATO-Armenia partnership.
  - **Maintain dialogue between the West and Russia.** Ensure that Russia understands that security assistance and co-operation is given to strengthen Armenia, not to undermine its influence. Identify common ground for trilateral co-operation between Armenia, Russia and the US/EU/NATO.
  - **Develop civil society's capacity to contribute to security.** Widen the range of activities that are supported under democracy-building projects to include measures to improve democratic control of the security sector. Increase funding and provision of technical assistance to civil society organisations working on security matters, including monitoring, research, and civilian review boards.
- To the Armenian Government**
- **Publish a national security concept that clearly analyses the security threats to Armenia and defines how the Government will combat these threats.** Consider accepting assistance from Russia, the US, and EU governments in developing this document. Set a clear deadline for publication. The content of this document should include an analysis of internal, external and trans-national threats, and should consider the relationship between state security and human security.
  - **Formulate a policy on the future of the security sector.** An overall vision should be developed for the future of the security sector over the next 5–10 years. This should take into account the national security concept, relevant national legislation, anti-corruption strategies, human rights legislation, international law, commitments to regional and international organisations, etc. Where reform is deemed necessary, clear objectives should be stated and made publicly available.
  - **Clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of security actors.** Legislation should be improved to clearly define and limit the responsibilities of all state security actors. This legislation should take into account best international practice on security sector governance, and should severely restrict the ability of armed security institutions to

interfere in democratic politics. The Government should consider accepting international assistance to develop this legislation. The rationale behind changes to legislation should be clearly and publicly explained. Sustained efforts, backed by strong political will, should then be made to implement and enforce them.

- **Tackle corruption and human rights abuses in the security sector.** Make a strong public commitment to rooting out corruption and human rights abuses in the Armed Forces, Police, National Security Service and judiciary. Ensure that the Government's Anti-Corruption strategy is extended to all security sector institutions, not only the judiciary. Allow greater monitoring (see point below) from civil society and parliament to ensure corruption and human rights abuses are revealed and investigated.
- **Increase transparency in the security sector.** Re-assess the system for classification of information, and make much more information available to the public. Publish all major legislation and policy documents online. Boost parliament's powers of enquiry, and encourage investigations of corruption, human rights abuses and other bad practice within the security sector.
- **Improve budgetary oversight.** Present a full defence budget to parliament. Give parliament greater powers to scrutinise the budgets of all state security institutions. Except where secrecy is essential, full budgets should be made publicly available.
- **Make a strong commitment to police reform.** Ensure that there is full government backing for the OSCE Police Assistance Programme. Promote community-based policing as a means to reduce crime and rebuild trust with the public. Consider the full demilitarisation of the police force, transferring militarised units to the Ministry of Defence if necessary. Create mechanisms for civilian oversight of the Police at parliamentary or ministerial level.
- **Exchange international information and experience of security sector reform.** Increase dialogue and information exchange on SSR with other international actors, including: the US; the EU (and its member states); Russia; and other post-communist countries (the Baltic States and several of the Black Sea states may be particularly useful in this respect).

## To civil society

- **Increase the number and strength of organisations working on security issues.** Encourage more civil society organisations to take an interest in security matters. Build links between existing organisations in a wide variety of fields: academic institutions working on security, international relations, law, etc; non-governmental organisations working on issues such as human rights, democracy building, human rights; traditional faith-based and community groups; and others. Consider establishing new organisations that will work more precisely on security matters.
- **Strengthen civil society's capacity to monitor the security sector.** Continue and improve efforts to monitor corruption and human rights in the security sector. Analyse the Government's implementation of its existing commitments in national and international law and its adherence to its stated policies. Campaign for greater access to non-secret information and improved transparency in policy development and budgetary spending.
- **Conduct research and facilitate debate on security issues.** Develop independent research on security issues and provide an independent source of views and analysis. Facilitate debate between international, national and non-governmental actors on security issues. Present recommendations to the authorities on how to implement SSR effectively (for example, civil society may have a role to play in developing a national security concept).

- 
- **Work together with the Police on community-based policing.** Civil society should strongly support the community-based policing trial in Yerevan and participate fully in it.
  - **Exchange information and experience with civil society in other countries.** Share experiences and learn from civil society in other countries about security issues and what role civil society can and should play.
  - **Act as an independent source of skills and knowledge.** Civil society organisations should be respected as an independent source of skills and information. They should be prepared to work with the authorities and avoid being confrontational whenever possible, since improved security should be in the interests of both the people and the state.

# 1

## Introduction

**INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS** has grown steadily since the mid-1990s. This is partly because of its role as a transport corridor for energy resources from the Caspian basin, and as a link in the chain of a new 'Silk Road' joining West to East. It is also because of the region's key strategic position on the crossroads between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, a point where the regional powers of Russia, Turkey and Iran all have interests, and where the US and EU are also becoming more involved. NATO and the OSCE are paying more attention to the South Caucasus as well, spurred on by re-assessments of the security threats facing the Euro-Atlantic area in the light of the events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror.' International donors and development agencies, which are increasingly aware of the detrimental effects that insecurity can have on social and economic development, have also begun to look for new approaches to combat the multiple causes of instability in the region.

All of these factors have led to a greater interest in the architecture that aims to provide security, both externally and internally, to the Caucasus region. Most attention has focused on Georgia. Georgia has received the lion's share of security-related aid from the West for several years, including military training for counter-terrorism battalions, defence reform advisors, as well as support for measures to improve civilian oversight, establish a National Security Council, and develop a national security concept. In the wake of the Rose Revolution on November 2003, international co-operation with Georgia has both deepened and broadened, with increasing emphasis on reform of the Ministries of the Interior and Justice. Second comes Azerbaijan. Both political and military reforms have been slow, but Western interest has not waned. Azerbaijan is of key importance both because of its energy resources and because it lies on the transport corridor to Central Asia. Western analysts and officials, particularly from the US, have therefore stressed that Georgia and Azerbaijan need to be integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures together, and have persisted with advocating defence reforms that would bring Azerbaijan into line with European standards.

Armenia, however, has largely been ignored by the West, with little attention paid to reform either of the military or of other security sector agencies. In part this is because Armenia is strategically less important: with the West's energy and military transport corridors both running through Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia has been left to one side. It is also due to Armenia's warm relationship with Russia, which extends to close military co-operation. It is commonly assumed that Armenia's pro-Russian orientation precludes any possibility for the West to support security sector reforms in the country. Yet at the same time, Armenia has participated actively with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP), and has expressed an interest in deepening

its engagement by joining the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). This would require Armenia to begin a much more intense security dialogue with the West.

Though it is perhaps wise not to expect great changes in the immediate future, this nevertheless seems to be an appropriate time to begin to analyse the dynamics of the Armenian security sector. Very little has so far been written about this subject, and this report aims to go some way to filling this gap. It seeks to describe the state of the security sector as the authors find it at the start of 2005, and explain some of the changes that have occurred since Armenia became independent in September 1991. It asks how much need or desire there is for reform both from the state and from Armenian society in general, and considers the relevance of essentially Western models of SSR to the situation in Armenia. Some potential benefits of SSR are suggested, along with potential entry points for such reforms.

It is anticipated that this report will be of interest for a variety of reasons. It should act as a useful overview for those in the international community who may wish to learn more about security issues in Armenia. From an academic viewpoint, it may provide an interesting counter-point to studies on SSR where the initial rationale for reform has been much clearer. Most of all, it is hoped that this report may contribute to increased dialogue within Armenia itself about the kind of security sector it needs or wants.

The report is not in any way meant to be a comprehensive guide, but rather a preliminary discussion document on an under-analysed issue. It was written by an Armenian author in Yerevan and a British author in London, and was based on research and approximately twenty interviews conducted between Summer 2003 and Summer 2004. The authors hope that this combination of local knowledge and an international perspective will prove interesting and useful to readers both in Armenia and abroad. The authors welcome all comments and criticism on the report, and accept full responsibility for any mistakes they have inadvertently published.

---

## Structure of the report

Following a brief examination of the concept of SSR in theory and practice, the report attempts to place the Armenian security sector in context through a summary of the recent history of Armenia and a description of the complicated regional security environment. It moves on to consider in more detail each of the main security actors, their interaction, and public attitudes towards them. It then discusses the changes that have occurred to the sector since independence, and asks whether theories of SSR provide a suitable framework for understanding these developments. It concludes by reflecting on the potential for security sector reform in Armenia, and the possible benefits that such reforms might bring.

# 2

---

## Theory and practice of security sector reform

**IN ONE SENSE**, there has been security sector reform for as long as there have been states with security functions that have had to adapt to changes in technology and politics. More precisely, however, the term ‘security sector reform’ (SSR) refers to a body of theory and practice that has evolved in Western academic and policy circles in recent years, particularly since the end of the Cold War. This chapter briefly explains the reasons behind this growing interest, before introducing definitions of the security sector and SSR. It then considers how current interpretations of SSR may be relevant to Armenia.

---

### Security since the Cold War

Since the Cold War there has been a significant re-interpretation of the notion of security. Formerly, security was perceived almost exclusively as a military matter (national security), and was concerned primarily with how states could defend themselves against external aggression from other states. In this environment, Western interest in the security of the rest of the world was largely limited to defence alliances and accompanying military aid. This aid often had more to do with the politics of the Cold War than the real security needs of the local population; at times, it was even debatable how much this actually benefited the security of the state concerned. At the same time, the development agenda centred on economic expansion, with little appreciation of social or political factors.

In the past fifteen years, however, there has been an increasing focus on the interplay between security and development, with a new donor agenda to match. Attention has gradually shifted away from state-oriented notions of security towards broader ideas of ‘human security’. Rather than looking only at proximate causes of global insecurity, and short-term measures to address them, advocates of human security have stressed the need to combat the underlying, long-term causes of instability, including poverty, weak or failing states, and unrepresentative or corrupt governments. Meanwhile, it has become obvious that persistent violence and conflict act as a significant impediment to sustainable development. In order to break this cycle where underdevelopment fuels conflicts, and conflicts undermine development, much greater co-ordination is required between security actors and development agencies. Recognising this fact, donors have broadened their scope to support a wide variety of initiatives to reduce conflict and improve human security. These include, *inter alia*, measures in the

following fields: conflict management, prevention and resolution; improving food and resource security; the international campaign to ban land mines; drug- and human-trafficking prevention; combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW); and stopping the use of child soldiers.

Another aspect of this new agenda has been the emphasis on the need for more representative and efficient security sectors.<sup>1</sup> Primary responsibility for the maintenance of security inevitably rests at the national level. Yet in many states, government security institutions are seen by the general population as ineffective, or worse still as a threat in themselves. There may be several reasons for this. It may simply be because these institutions are out-dated or under-funded, and lack the necessary skills and resources to provide security properly. Alternatively, the security sector may have sufficient resources, but be run so inefficiently that it sucks up resources from the state budget that would be better spent elsewhere. Often, however, the problems run deeper. The security sector is frequently infected by ideologies that are hostile towards sections of the public, or the public as a whole. Rather than providing for the security of the people or the state, they may be interested only in protecting the interests of the ruling regime, or even criminal or non-state actors. In many countries, the military frequently interferes in politics, or even takes full political control, with detrimental effects on democracy. All of this has led Western donors to promote SSR, despite the obvious political sensitivities of working on an area so directly related to national sovereignty.

In certain areas of the world, there has also been another motor for SSR. Close allies of Western governments have been keen to reform in order to boost integration and to meet the standards of regional security alliances. This is particularly true in Central and Eastern Europe, where governments have instituted sweeping changes in order to meet the political and military requirements of NATO and EU membership, which have strict criteria in terms of civilian control of the armed forces, democratic accountability, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

## The security sector and security sector reform

### Defining the security sector

It is necessary at this point to clarify what is meant by the security sector. As the concept of security has expanded, so has awareness of the range of different institutions that have a role to play in the provision of security. Far from being synonymous with the military, definitions of the security sector include not only all organisations that are authorised to use force, but also the civilian structures that manage them and the justice and law-enforcement institutions that provide the legal basis for maintaining security. Yet even this does not normally take into account the full range of security actors in most countries, as there are also non-state groups that play a role in security affairs, whether militarised (paramilitary organisations, etc) or civil society (the media, NGOs, academics, etc). These non-state bodies and the state security sector may together be considered as the ‘security community’ of a given country. For an approximate typology of the security sector and the security community, see **Box 1** overleaf.

<sup>1</sup> SSR is not an entirely development-oriented concept, however. Chris Smith and Timothy Edmunds note that SSR has its roots as much in theories of civil-military relations as development. See Edmunds, T, *Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation*, and Smith C, ‘Security-sector reform: development breakthrough or institutional engineering?’ (details in bibliography)

### BOX 1: The security sector and the security community

Nicole Ball distinguishes between five different types of security actors. The first three of these are statutory security actors – the ‘security sector.’ The last two are non-statutory security actors. The five of them together represent the wider ‘security community.’

- **Organisations authorised to use force:** armed forces, police; paramilitary forces; gendarmeries; intelligence services (including both military and civilian agencies); secret services; coast guards; border guards; customs authorities; reserve or local security units (civil defence forces, national guards, presidential guards, militias etc)
- **Civil management and oversight bodies:** the president/prime minister; national security advisory bodies; legislature and legislative select committees; ministries of defence, internal affairs, foreign affairs; customary and traditional authorities; financial management bodies (finance ministries, budget offices, financial audit & planning units); and statutory civil society organisations (civilian review boards and public complaints commissions)
- **Justice and law enforcement institutions:** judiciary; justice ministries; prisons; criminal investigation and prosecution services; human rights commissions and ombudsmen; correctional services; customary and traditional justice systems.
- **Non-statutory security force institutions:** liberation armies, guerrilla armies, traditional militias, political party militias, private security companies.
- **Non-statutory civil society bodies:** professional organisations, including trade unions; research/policy analysis organisations; advocacy organisations; the media; religious organisations; non-governmental organisations; concerned public.

Source: Nicole Ball, *Democratic Governance in the Security Sector*, presentation prepared for UNDP Workshop on ‘Learning from Experience for Afghanistan’, 5 February 2002, <[http://www.undp.org/eo/afghanistan/doc/Nicole\\_Ball.pdf](http://www.undp.org/eo/afghanistan/doc/Nicole_Ball.pdf)>

### Defining security sector reform

There is no internationally agreed definition of SSR,<sup>2</sup> but the general principles of SSR are widely accepted. These may be grouped into four broad categories:

- Strengthening democratic control over security institutions, by the state and civil society (including improving policy development and implementation and expenditure management)
- Professionalisation of the security forces
- Demilitarisation and peace-building
- Strengthening the rule of law<sup>3</sup>

Running through all of these is an emphasis on governance. Essentially, governance is concerned with the whole architecture, both structures and processes, by which a certain institution gets things done. The level of security sector governance is thus a measure of the capacity and efficiency of the security sector. This has a normative element, inasmuch as there is growing consensus on what constitutes best practice or ‘good’ governance. As Hänggi notes, there appears to be little difference between ‘good’ and ‘democratic’ governance, as both emphasise the importance of transparency, responsibility, accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the people. Improving security sector governance requires improving legal, civilian, parliamentary, judicial and ‘public’ control. SSR is the process by which this is achieved.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Hendrickson D, *A Review of Security Sector Reform*; Department for International Development, *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform*; Edmunds T, *Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation*.

<sup>3</sup> Hänggi H, ‘Making Sense of Security Sector Governance’; Bouta T, van de Goor L & Ball N, *Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security Sector: An Institutional Assessment Framework*.

To be effective, SSR needs to be very broad in scope as reforms in one area may determine the success of reforms in other areas. For example, without increased budget oversight it may not be possible to allocate the resources need for force restructuring and professionalisation. Similarly, legislative improvements or police reforms may be undermined if judicial structures remain as corrupt and ineffective as ever. Reforms within the security sector can also positively or negatively affect reforms in other areas of government. For example, attempts to reform the economy are sometimes impeded by unaccountable security actors who control important sources of revenue. Improving the military strength of the army without enforcing sufficient democratic control may increase the risk that the army will be able to intervene in domestic politics, thus undermining democratic reforms.

### Security sector reform: A donor driven process?

A distinction should be made between different types of security sector reform. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, all states have security sectors, and these frequently undergo reforms. President Putin has made defence reform and modernisation an important goal of his second term in office. Since 11 September 2001, the US has launched sweeping reforms aimed at combating terrorism and improving homeland security. Yet these are not usually considered within the framework of SSR, partly because their emphasis is not necessarily on improving governance, and partly because they do not envisage significant external support for the reform process.

Though this is not always openly acknowledged, SSR usually depends on financial and technical support from other countries. This is expressly stated in a recent paper from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which explains that SSR 'seeks to increase *partner countries' ability* [italics as quoted] to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law.'<sup>4</sup> This is not, however, to say that SSR is necessarily a donor-driven process: progress is unlikely without real commitment from the security sector of the state itself.

It is also useful to sub-divide SSR into two distinct categories. As noted above, SSR has been strongly promoted as a way to improve sustainable development. In certain areas, though, the impetus for SSR has come less from development imperatives than from political incentives, particularly the membership criteria of NATO and the EU. Though the final goal is the same (improved security sector governance), the starting point is very different: in many developing countries in Africa and Asia, SSR has been advocated in terms of 'post-conflict' state-building, whereas in Central and Eastern Europe and part of Latin America, the focus has been on 'post-communist' or 'post-authoritarian' state transformation (the exception being the Western Balkan countries, which essentially combine the two, inasmuch as they are post-conflict states that are aiming to transform previously authoritarian structures in order to achieve NATO and EU membership).

## Armenia and security sector reform

How does the above discussion relate to Armenia? As will be shown in the following chapters, there have been fundamental changes to the Armenian security sector since the country became independent in September 1991, and there are likely to be more in the coming years. Yet it would appear that Armenia does not fit easily into the current SSR agenda. It cannot be said to be 'post-conflict' due to the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh, and there is little domestic demand for reform. However, donor agencies working in Armenia have not so far felt that insecurity is a

<sup>4</sup> OECD Policy Brief, *Security Sector Reform and Governance: Policy and Good Practice*, May 2004.

significant impediment to development (see Chapter Five).

Nor can it be said that Armenia is clearly 'post-authoritarian.' This does not imply that Armenia is an authoritarian state. Yet underlying the reforms of other 'post-authoritarian' states has been an understanding that these states are in 'transition' towards a Western model of the state; SSR has been one part of the transition towards this model. Thirteen years on from independence, it is still far from clear exactly where Armenia is headed, and similar confusion regarding Armenia's main ally, Russia, further complicates the picture. Any transformation of Armenia's security sector is unlikely to fit neatly into the current methods of SSR unless Armenia looks more clearly towards the West. This may change as NATO, the EU, and many Western governments become more involved in the South Caucasus, but so far there has been little co-operation between Armenia and the West on SSR.

In this work, therefore, the Armenian security sector, and changes therein, are assessed using the dimensions and tools common to SSR programmes, without assuming that such a process is currently occurring in the country. The authors hope that this framework will help to shed light on the current state of the sector. Given constraints of time and resources, it is not possible to give a full insight into each and every part of the security sector. This paper aims instead to give a general overview of the security architecture of the country, and focus on some of the actors that the authors believe to be most important. This should provide useful pointers as to where further reforms may be necessary.

# 3

## Armenian security in context

**AS A RELATIVELY SMALL COUNTRY IN A VOLATILE REGION**, Armenia's security is strongly dependent on its geographic and geopolitical location. Two of the biggest issues in Armenian politics since the first moments of independence – the economy and the status of Nagorno Karabakh – are strongly related to the wider situation in the South Caucasus. This chapter thus attempts to briefly place the evolution of the Armenian security sector in the context of both internal and external military and political developments.

### A recent history of Armenia

#### The push for independence

Excluding the short-lived Republic of 1918–20, there had not been an Armenian state for over 600 years. Armenians have long had a strong national identity, however, formed by a number of factors. There is a strong religious and literary tradition, and people look back hundreds of years to when Armenia was a regional power. By far the most important event in Armenian history, however, was the genocide of 1915, when a significant proportion of the Armenian population died as a result of their forced migration from the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. This event, which most of the world (including Turkey) has not recognised as genocide, left a deep scar in the Armenian consciousness. When *perestroika* unwittingly provoked demands for national sovereignty across the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, Armenia soon began to push for independence, spurred on by events in Nagorno Karabakh (see below). When elections were held for the Supreme Soviet (parliament) on 20 May 1990, the Armenian National Movement won a majority. This led to confrontations between Soviet troops and volunteer troops, though details of what happened are sketchy. Many of the local Communist deputies moved closer towards the ANM, and on 4 August the ANM's Levon Ter-Petrossian was elected Chairman. Armenia declared independence in September 1991 following a referendum in which 97% voted to leave the USSR. Ter-Petrossian was elected president, but euphoria quickly evaporated as the tension with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into full-scale war.

#### The challenge of state- building

Building sustainable institutions of government with well-trained staff is a challenge for any state that has just gained independence. In Armenia, however, this process was complicated by the war in Nagorno Karabakh and severe economic decline. In this

context, the main objective of the Armenian state in the early post-independence years was simply survival. To a significant extent, therefore, the evolution of the Armenian state as a whole was closely linked to developments in the security sector.

The formation of a suitable security system for the Republic of Armenia was thus conditioned from the start by the threat of war. From the first days of independence, the ‘power ministries’,<sup>5</sup> and in particular the Armed Forces, were given priority in the state-building process. Hence the main economic, political and personnel resources of both the people and the state were directed towards the army. Co-ordination between the army and the other power ministries was managed largely by the National Security Council (see Chapter 4), which played an important role in maintaining some balance between these institutions and keeping the army under political control.

As a result of the conflict the power ministries claimed a higher position in political life than is normal in most European societies, and politicians, keen to exploit the popularity of the Armed Forces, made frequent use of military imagery and language. As these power ministries became more powerful, it became increasingly difficult to impose control on them. This allowed corruption to spread in some state institutions – most notably the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) – to the extent that they were functioning as much to enrich their leaders as to perform their official role.

In 1996, Levon Ter-Petrossian was re-elected in an election that was overshadowed by accusations of large-scale fraud.<sup>6</sup> Opposition supporters staged massive demonstrations in Yerevan, which were broken up only after clashes with the security forces. From then on, Ter-Petrossian was constantly dogged by controversy, and the power vacuum caused by the weakness of his presidency was increasingly filled by the power ministries. Things came to a head in February 1998, when Ter-Petrossian was forced out amid continuing complaints about corruption and the economy and accusations by opposition politicians that his negotiations with the OSCE Minsk Group would result in ‘selling out’ Nagorno Karabakh (see below). In the ‘velvet revolution’ that followed, Robert Kocharian, previously President of the unrecognised Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, and then Prime Minister of Armenia, was elected as president over two rounds of voting on 16 and 30 March 1998.

### Kocharian’s presidency

Robert Kocharian can point to some success in improving economic conditions. According to official statistics, Armenian GDP increased by 12.9 percent in 2002 and 9.9 percent in 2003.<sup>7</sup> These figures may appear to be high, but GDP is still below its 1988 level, and much of the population, particularly outside Yerevan, remains in extreme poverty. Furthermore, though he initially declared he would fight corruption on achieving power, his presidency has continued to be dogged by allegations of bribery and dishonesty.

Kocharian is now in his second term as President, though the OSCE criticised the elections of March 2003 for falling ‘short of international standards for democratic elections’ and being ‘marked by serious irregularities’.<sup>8</sup> This included many cases of ballot stuffing, intimidation before and during voting, and the arrest of over 200 opposition supporters and candidates, of which over 80 were sentenced to up to 15 days in jail, ‘often in closed hearings and without the benefit of legal counsel’.<sup>9</sup> There were also stories of servicemen voting in an ‘open regime’ overseen by their officers. Two cases were brought before the Constitutional Court contesting the results of both

<sup>5</sup> the Ministries of Defence, the Interior, and State Security

<sup>6</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Armenian Presidential Elections September 24, 1996. Final Report*.

<sup>7</sup> Armenia Daily Digest, *Armenia’s GDP 13 percent up in 2002*, 10 February 2003; The CIA World Factbook 2004, <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/am.html>>

<sup>8</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Presidential Election Second Round 5 March 2003 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

rounds of voting. Though neither complaint was upheld, the Court did note that there had been serious breaches of election procedures. Parliamentary elections held in May 2003 were deemed to be an improvement on the March presidential elections, but still fell short of international standards.

Opposition parties held protests against the election results in 2003, and repeated them in April 2004. Comparisons were naturally made to the public protests in Tbilisi in November 2003 that brought down the Shevardnadze government, yet in contrast to Georgia, the government was able to shut down these demonstrations within a couple of weeks. This was partly due to aggressive policing tactics, with various allegations that journalists and protesters had been beaten by Police troops. However, it was also because the opposition has so far failed to unite around a single candidate and present a truly popular alternative.<sup>10</sup>

## Security in the South Caucasus

The rise of nationalism in the late 1980s and the collapse of Soviet rule in 1991 helped to spark three separatist conflicts in the South Caucasus – over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh – all of which resulted in victory for the separatists and had become ‘frozen’ by the end of 1994. The conflicts in Georgia directly affected Armenia not only because of the general risk of instability spreading but also because they disrupted transport links with Russia, increasing Armenia’s economic isolation.

### Nagorno Karabakh – The search for peace

Nagorno Karabakh is a largely mountainous region<sup>11</sup> of little strategic importance that was integrated into the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic as an autonomous *oblast* (region) during Soviet times despite being overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Armenians. In February 1988 Nagorno Karabakh officially called for union with Armenia. When both Baku and Moscow rejected this request there were massive protests both in Karabakh and in Yerevan. Though Armenia was not officially at war with Azerbaijan, Karabakh’s struggle for independence from Azerbaijan was seen as being inextricably linked both to Armenia’s struggle for independence from Moscow and to the Armenian nation’s wider battle for survival. Hence the motor for political change within Armenia itself was events in Nagorno Karabakh – a trend that has continued to the present day.

By 1991, fighting had escalated into a large-scale war. Turkey closed its border with Armenia in support of Azerbaijan, cutting off Armenia’s main transit route into European markets. Armenia thus supplied both volunteer troops and weaponry to Karabakh. In turn, Armenia had a certain amount of support from Russia, from which it got supplies of arms and ammunition, though it should be noted that with Moscow’s policy towards the region was in flux, and at times Azerbaijan also received supplies.

On paper, Azerbaijan had overwhelming military superiority, yet just as with the conflicts in Georgia, it was the separatists who emerged victorious. By the time a ceasefire was signed in May 1994, the Karabakh forces controlled not only virtually all of the NKAO, but also seven other surrounding districts that they held on to as a buffer zone and to ensure access to Armenia. 30,000 had died and well over a million people were displaced.

Soon after the ceasefire was signed, the OSCE created the Minsk Group to manage the peace negotiations. The Group is co-chaired by France, Russia and the USA, and

<sup>10</sup> For an interesting commentary on the April 2004 protests, see Iskandarian A, ‘Armenian battle of the week’, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Caucasus Reporting Service No. 229*.

<sup>11</sup> The name Nagorno Karabakh is an odd amalgam of Russian, Turkish and Persian, reflecting the region’s multiple imperial rulers. *Nagorno* means ‘mountainous’ in Russian, *kara* is Turkish for ‘black’, whilst *bakh* derives from a Persian word for ‘garden’. Armenians sometimes refer to the region by the old Armenian name of *Artsakh*.

contains representatives of a number of other OSCE states, including of course Armenia and Azerbaijan – though the unrecognised Republic of Nagorno Karabakh does not take part directly in high-level negotiations. On several occasions, most recently following the Paris and Key West talks of 2001, some form of agreement has appeared to be close, only to collapse before the details had been officially announced. This is thought to be largely due to radical public attitudes towards the conflict in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are not prepared for compromise. Though there is some understanding that the frozen conflict in Karabakh has a negative effect on the Armenian economy and the development of the state, it would be seen as deeply unpatriotic to even countenance relinquishing control of the territory. Azerbaijanis, for their part, cannot accept a solution which does not retain Nagorno Karabakh within Azerbaijan. The Minsk Group has been promising new proposals for some time, but with public attitudes as non-conciliatory as ever, it remains doubtful whether such initiatives can gain widespread support.<sup>12</sup>

The odd position of Nagorno Karabakh illuminates perfectly the dilemma that both national governments and international organisations face when operating in the South Caucasus. Torn between territorial integrity and self-determination, between the need to respect the legitimate rights of internationally recognised states and the need to know what is happening across the *whole* region, they have been drawn into diplomatic compromises which severely impede any attempts to look at security in a wider regional context. For example, though the political system in Nagorno Karabakh is closely tied to Yerevan, and though it is clear that Armenia's main security concerns lie along the line of ceasefire on Karabakh's eastern border, the staff of the OSCE Office in Yerevan are not allowed to travel to Karabakh; they are not even able to discuss such matters with representatives of the Minsk Group, as it is explicitly excluded from the Office's mandate.

### Bilateral and multilateral relationships in the South Caucasus

Bilateral and multilateral relationships in the South Caucasus are notoriously complicated, with various actors pursuing differing and sometimes incompatible goals. Not only must Armenia consider its relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, and with the three powers that border the region (Iran, Russia and Turkey), it must increasingly deal with powers from further afield as well: the US and the EU. It is also strongly influenced by a further international grouping – the Armenian Diaspora. Add to this the fact that Armenia is landlocked, and that it has been excluded from the route of the oil pipeline transporting Caspian oil to the West, and it starts to become clear what a difficult geographic and geo-political position it finds itself in.

Armenia's border with Azerbaijan is closed due to the war, as is the border with Turkey. Relations with Turkey are further complicated by historical factors such as the 1915 genocide. Relations with Georgia are better, though far from ideal: transport links are poor, and at times there have been fears in Tbilisi that Armenia may encourage separatism in the Armenian-populated area of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Only with Iran have there been consistently good diplomatic and trade links. This situation has led some Armenians to joke that Armenia has only one border, and three fronts.

Armenia's main partner in the region is the Russian Federation. Armenia is a member of the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a Russia-dominated body that establishes mutual security guarantees and military co-operation. One recent innovation was the establishment of three rapid reaction forces, including a Caucasus Force of Armenian and Russian troops. So far, however, little progress appears to have been made in operationalising these forces. Meanwhile, the majority of Armenia's defence co-operation with Russia continues to be bilateral in nature. Russia maintains

<sup>12</sup> Aware of the low level of public readiness for any form of peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the UK Department for International Development has recently granted money to a consortium of four international NGOs in order to work on building awareness and support for peace among parliamentarians, the media, and civil society.

a military base in the northern town of Gyumri (201st Mechanised Rifle Division), home to approximately 2,900 servicemen. These troops have 90 tanks, 200 units of armoured combat vehicles, 100 units of artillery, 50 helicopters, 25 combat and 20 transport aeroplanes. Russian and Armenian troops jointly patrol the country's borders with Turkey and Iran, though its other borders are guarded solely by Armenian Troops.

Despite Armenia's close military links with Russia, it has also tried to improve its relations with NATO, and has participated in a wide variety of activities, both civilian and military, within the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. In May 2003 Armenia hosted joint manoeuvres with forces from eight NATO and eight PfP member states in a two-week exercise, *Co-operative Best Effort*. An Armenian peacekeeping platoon serves under Greek command as part of the NATO operation in Kosovo. Armenia has also indicated its interest in following Georgia and Azerbaijan in applying for an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which involves much more intensive collaboration with NATO than the PfP.

Armenia has also been a strong supporter of greater EU involvement in the South Caucasus, and lobbied hard to be included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (the 'Wider Europe' initiative). The EU has the advantage of being the only external actor that is more or less viewed positively by everyone, though it still lacks real influence and a clear strategy, as illustrated by the decision to leave the South Caucasus out of 'Wider Europe', only reversed after the revolution in Georgia. Given time, however, the EU is likely to develop more active relations with the region, particularly since the official acceptance of Turkey as a candidate country means that one day the EU will have a direct border with all three South Caucasus countries.

The Republic of Armenia also has to take into account the views of its diaspora. The Armenians are a classic diaspora nation, with many more ethnic Armenians living outside Armenia than inside it. The diaspora Armenians act as a significant source of both political and economic support, but this is not without complications. Some diaspora Armenians have a romanticised view of the country, or fail to understand the intricacies of domestic and regional politics. Thus their support is sometimes tied to policies or initiatives that are not shared by all within the country, which may at times even distort domestic politics.

Lastly, the importance of international business should not be forgotten. This has focussed largely, though not exclusively, around energy supplies, and Armenia has emerged as the clear loser in this respect. Largely because of the unresolved conflict over Karabakh, the export pipelines for oil and gas from the Caspian travel from Baku via Tbilisi down into Turkey (to Erzerum for gas, and Ceyhan for oil), bypassing Armenia. This has led to a tendency for Western governments to engage more deeply with Azerbaijan and Georgia than Armenia, which has increased Armenia's sense of isolation and dependence on Russia.

### Regional collective security – a pipe dream?

The OSCE, EU and NATO, as well as certain national governments, have all recently expressed an intention to focus more on the South Caucasus, and regional security is sure to be high on the agenda. Yet despite numerous attempts to promote regional co-operation either through diplomacy, economic initiatives, or 'grass-roots' donor programmes, the results have so far been disappointing. Why have previous attempts failed, and why have regional politicians themselves been unable to create suitable security arrangements?

The high point of international enthusiasm for promoting regional cooperation came with the publication of a proposed 'Stability Pact' for the South Caucasus by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in June 2000.<sup>13</sup> The Pact aimed to promote

13 Emerson M & Tocci N, *A Stability Pact for the South Caucasus*.

stability through a comprehensive series of multi-lateral and multi-sectoral initiatives, and envisaged six chapters, based on: conflict resolution and prevention; the establishment of a South Caucasus Community; an OSCE regional security system; co-operation between Russia, the EU and the US; broader Black Sea-Caucasus-Caspian co-operation; and oil and gas investment. Despite local and international interest, this proposal never got off the ground. One of the key problems was the issue of conflict resolution. States which had lost territory due to separatist conflicts (Georgia and particularly Azerbaijan) believed that other measures should be dependent on progress in resolving the conflicts, as to do otherwise would be to further entrench the status quo. Since there has been little progress on Nagorno Karabakh and the Azerbaijani government still refuses to work directly with Armenia on most matters, regional co-operation remains as out of reach as ever. In Armenia, politicians know that because of Azerbaijan's hard-line attitude, it is possible to pay lip service to the idea in order to please their Western interlocutors, without actually having to take any practical steps in this direction.

Fairly or not, the Stability Pact proposal was seen as being an externally imposed solution which failed to take into account local realities. One important lesson, however, is that regional security can only be achieved with the commitment of people from across the political spectrum in all (or nearly all) states and societies in the Caucasus. This is accepted by some people within the region, who talk optimistically about all-Caucasian values and the need for a Caucasian Federation.<sup>14</sup> Yet sadly there is still a widespread lack of recognition that such co-operation is necessary, strategically beneficial, or even desirable. This is partly because the local political elites have insufficient understanding of security matters, or continue to see things from an essentially zero-sum perspective. Furthermore, some elements that benefit from criminal business networks within these states are opposed to enhancing regional security.

Lastly, it must be acknowledged that it is not merely local politicians who are guilty of saying one thing and doing another. While the West has promoted regional co-operation, the actions of many Western governments have suggested that they too see the area as an arena to continue the battle for influence, whether with each other, with Russia or with Iran. Some countries are considered to be much closer to one South Caucasian state than others (for example, Greece and Armenia, or Turkey and Azerbaijan). Until Western governments co-ordinate their policies and actions better, it will be hard to convince the states of the South Caucasus to work together; it is more likely to increase the temptation to play powerful states off against each other.

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ashot Manucharian, former Chief Advisor to the President of Armenia on National Security Council, September 2003.

# 4

---

## Security sector actors in Armenia from independence to the present day

**AS NOTED IN CHAPTER 2**, the security sector is made up of a wide variety of actors, including not only those agencies that are authorised to use force but also the civilian oversight bodies that control them and the judicial and law-enforcement structures. The wider security community also includes non-state bodies that may resort to force, as well as civilian organisations that interact with the security sector in various ways. This chapter aims to provide an overview of many of the institutions that constitute this security community and outline their development since independence. Inevitably, however, this review cannot be comprehensive and should not be taken as such.

---

### **The Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence**

Armenian independence coincided with war in Nagorno Karabakh, meaning the development of the Armed Forces was prioritised. Ten years after the ceasefire, they continue to play a significant role in political life and are recognised as the most important of the security sector institutions. This section traces their roots and follows their progress through to the current day, assessing whether it is possible to identify any signs of genuine reform.

### **The beginnings**

During Soviet times, the 7th Army of the Transcaucasian Military District was stationed on Armenian territory, yet it would be wrong to equate this Army to closely with the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence (MOD) that now exist. It is true that Armenia acquired much of its weaponry from the 7th Army, particularly small arms and light weapons.<sup>15</sup> Yet none of the 7th Army's conscripts and few of its officers were

---

<sup>15</sup> For more info see Avagyan G, 'Armenia: Forcing the Peace' in Matveeva A and Hiscock D (eds), *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided: Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*.

ethnic Armenians. Nor did Armenia's institutions control this army, which reported directly to the MOD of the USSR.

In fact, the Armenian Armed Forces were formed from two main groups of people. In the late 1980s, people began to form volunteer units in response to the growing tension with Azerbaijan and also to defend themselves against potential attempts by Moscow to crush the independence movement. These volunteer units were formed illegally largely on the basis of location, though with time political affiliation also started to play a role. Most volunteers were civilians (particularly the intelligentsia), whose only training was military service. They were then gradually joined by veterans of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and career servicemen who left the Soviet Army out of patriotism to join the volunteers.

### **Establishing control**

Though these groups were mostly formed spontaneously and were apparently autonomous, to a significant extent their actions were co-ordinated. This was done by the Permanent Defence Committee set up in the newly-elected Armenian parliament in 1990. The Committee realised the need to impose structure over these groups in order both to better co-ordinate military operations and to forestall the possibility that some might descend into criminality or become politically uncontrollable. This included large formations such as the Armenian Liberation Army (approximately 1,500 people), which was disarmed more or less overnight. All arms were seized, registered and made available to the Committee. The commanders were prosecuted, while those members that were prepared to co-operate with the authorities joined the regular armed forces. Most other groups agreed voluntarily to submit to the Committee's authority, and retained their weapons after registration.

Following independence, this parliamentary committee was transformed into the Ministry of Defence and its chairman, Vazgen Sarkissian, became Armenia's first Defence Minister. Sarkissian was not a military man by profession. He was closer in mentality to the volunteer groups, who unconditionally acknowledged his authority, but he also treated the military specialists with great respect. He thus managed to unify the army, gradually removing the division between the career officers (who saw the volunteers as amateurs) and the volunteers (who thought of the career servicemen as out-dated Soviet fighters).

Sarkissian knew that for Armenia to successfully support the war in Karabakh, it needed to mould an adequate defence complex from its limited capabilities. He played a major role in creating an army which could, figuratively speaking, 'get by', and resisted the temptation to develop heavily-armed divisions it could neither finance nor use effectively.

### **Demobilisation and recruitment**

After the 1994 ceasefire in Nagorno Karabakh, there was a partial demobilisation of troops within Armenia, though the reintegration of these combatants back into society was not done in a controlled fashion, perhaps partially because of the poor economic situation. Despite this, the situation remained very tense, and the army was kept at a high level of combat readiness.

In order to maintain a large army and train reservists, the army continued to rely on military service. However, when the authorities tried to instigate military service in 1993, they found that many young Armenians had learnt during the late Soviet period to avoid military service. Parents would go at great lengths to get their sons out of the army, including bribes of up to \$5,000 and emigration (mostly to Russia). The authorities resorted to rounding people up in public places and raiding the houses of potential conscripts. The situation began to improve after 1997. The relevant legislation was improved and loopholes were removed. Life for such soldiers had also

improved, and as the ceasefire continued to hold, parents became more confident their children would not be used as cannon fodder – even though in fact young people doing military service had never been sent to the front line. However, hazing and violence within the ranks is still endemic, though the government claims that non-combat deaths in the military are decreasing year on year, from almost 200 in 1998 to less than 50 in 2003 (other estimates are slightly higher).<sup>16</sup>

## Change and continuity

The ten years since the ceasefire in Nagorno Karabakh have not seen major changes to the Armed Forces or the Ministry of Defence. A perceived victory in Karabakh has meant there is little internal pressure for defence reform, as the structures are believed to be adequate. Furthermore, there is still a strong feeling that it may be necessary to mobilise at a moment's notice. Thus there would be resistance to any reforms that would weaken the army's effectiveness even for a short time.

The lack of reforms in Armenia may also be seen in relation to defence reform in its main strategic ally, Russia. Like its Russian counterpart, the Armenian Army is run largely along Soviet lines, with the same hierarchy, military doctrine and culture. Furthermore, it is equipped almost exclusively with Soviet and Russian weaponry. Most officers, particularly those of middle and senior rank, are trained at military academies in Russia. It may therefore be predicted that unless there is a significant change in Armenian-Russian relations, no large-scale military reforms will be accomplished until such changes take place in Russia itself.

Nonetheless, some changes are occurring. These are largely a response to the changing external environment and Armenia's attempts to find 'complementarity' in its foreign policy. In military terms, this has meant maintaining strong relations with Russia, while at the same time cautiously responding to the demands imposed by co-operating with the West, particularly with NATO, and by its membership of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Since joining NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994, the Armenian military has edged slowly towards NATO in certain respects. As with other PfP countries, it has co-operated in hundreds of joint initiatives, from academic and scientific seminars through to joint military exercises; Armenia hosted Co-operative Best Effort 2003, where approximately 400 troops from 19 countries worked together on improving land force effectiveness. Two related themes appear to run through NATO's relations with Armenia: interoperability and participation in peace support operations. An Armenian platoon began serving in Kosovo under a Greek military unit in KFOR's Multinational Brigade East in January 2004. Peacekeepers have also been sent to Afghanistan and Iraq. This will give the Armenian peacekeepers valuable experience in working together with NATO forces, as well as exposing them to Western military practices.

When Armenia joined the Council of Europe in January 2001, it committed itself to passing a law on alternative service within three years. This law was passed in December 2003, but its provisions of three years of military service not involving the use of arms or three and a half years of alternative service seem designed to make alternative service as unappealing as possible.

Armenia has also developed bilateral defence relations with a number of Western states, most notably with Greece, where some junior officers are now trained. Relations with the US have also developed since the onset of the 'war on terror'. Paradoxically, this is due to strengthening relations between the US and Azerbaijan. Previously, virtually all defence assistance to Armenia and Azerbaijan was prevented under Section 907 of the Freedom Support, but this has been waived annually since the end

<sup>16</sup> For more details, see Armenian Helsinki Committee, *Observer Report for 2003*; and Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003*.

of 2001. Thus, in order to maintain a sense of even-handedness, the US has increased its security-related assistance, with \$4.4 million provided in the 2002 financial year to improve interoperability with US and NATO forces. Armenia has also been developing co-operation with the UK, signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Assistance and training some academics and junior officers in Britain.

### Civil-military relations and professionalisation

Though the changes outlined above indicate that some attempts are being made to bring the Armenian Armed Forces closer to the West, they do not constitute real reform. Consideration of two of the main processes involved in ‘classic’ SSR – the strengthening of civilian control and professionalisation – should demonstrate this.

It appears that the concept of civilian control over the armed forces is poorly understood in Armenia. No real distinction is made between the Ministry of Defence as a civilian body and the General Staff and the Armed Forces as the operational, military arm. The Ministry of Defence is basically militarised, with serving officers performing most of its functions. However, it is impossible to get much information about the make-up of the MOD in order to assess the level of civilianisation, as the authorities maintain a Soviet mentality that most things relating however broadly to security should be kept secret. The MOD is not run in a transparent fashion and information to civilian sources is very limited; for example, unlike many ministries of defence around the world, it does not even run a website.

In practice, the only civilians that have any control over the Armed Forces are the President, the Defence Minister, and a small circle around them. Yet as political scientist Aghasy Yenokian has noted, this has not guaranteed the separation of political and military decision-making. In fact, the reverse is quite likely true, with politicians effectively ‘piggy-backing’ on the power and prestige of the Armed Forces rather than genuinely exercising democratic control over them.<sup>17</sup>

However desirable professionalisation of the armed forces might be, there is likely to be no movement in this direction in the near future. As noted above, Armenia depends on conscription and a large reservist army. While the conflict remains unresolved and Armenia continues to perceive a threat both from the West (i.e. Turkey) and the East (Azerbaijan), it is unlikely to take the painful steps necessary to reduce and professionalise this force. To do so would require not only a major re-orientation of its military doctrines and ethos, but also a large amount of money. Without sufficient budgetary resources to fund a large-scale modernisation of the army, it is felt that all that would be achieved would be a weakening of the military strength that has so far served Armenia well.

## The Ministry of the Interior/Police

### The Soviet period

Unlike the local branch of the MOD, during Soviet times the local Ministry of the Interior (MOI) had a reasonable level of autonomy from Moscow. Although the top ranks were appointed only with Moscow’s approval, as a whole the MOI was largely controlled by the authorities in the Armenian republic, and was somewhat distanced from the central ministry.

At this time, the MOI was seen as being reasonably effective: the crime rate in Armenia was low, and murders, armed robberies and other such major crimes were quite unusual. Nonetheless, even then the Ministry had a reputation for corruption. Internal promotion depended on paying the correct bribe to one’s superior. Correspondingly, citizens that fell into the MOI’s field of vision became targets for extortion. The MOI, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, and the courts formed a self-reinforcing chain of

<sup>17</sup> Yenokian A, *Armenia: Civilians in National Security Policy*.

corrupt institutions that collected money from the public, restrained only by the fear that Moscow would sack people if the number of public complaints got too high.

## Changes of status

The role and status of the MOI has changed several times since independence. Like any weak democracy, the importance of any particular agency depends on the personal qualities of its leaders and their level of access to presidential circles. Between 1992 and 1996, the Interior Minister was Vano Siradegian, a close associate of President Levon Ter-Petrossian. Under Siradegian the ministry started to play a disproportionately large role in the political life of the country. This became particularly clear during the parliamentary elections in 1995, when Siradegian managed to get the *Shamiram* party, which was believed to be in his pocket, into parliament. *Shamiram* collapsed instantly after he left the political scene.

As Siradegian's reign went on, the Ministry became increasingly unpopular. It became apparent that rather than simply attempting to prevent crime and keep order, the MOI was also pursuing other interests. In particular, it seemed that the MOI was aiming to control some of the most profitable sections of the economy. In one example, in 1996 a close relative of Siradegian benefited from a monopoly to supply public transport with first aid kits, following a directive from Siradegian's office. This economic interference was echoed on the political front. As later became clear, in 1993 the MOI formed special units to assassinate political dissidents, which also began to attack people who caused them economic problems.

Siradegian was replaced in November 1996 by Serge Sargsyan. In 1999, Siradegian was arrested and accused of various offences including ordering murders, racketeering, and kidnapping. His trial began in January 2000, but soon after he escaped, and is still on the run.

The new minister, Serge Sargsyan, was already Minister for State Security, and adding the post of Interior Minister and merging the two ministries was done almost entirely for political reasons, as Ter-Petrossian tried to shore up his regime in late 1996. Sargsyan pledged to root out corruption and to break links between organised crime and government, but though the ministry did not suffer from the same reputation during his reign as it had under Siradegian, there were no serious attempts to reform the ministry, which continued to pursue its economic interests as before.

In June 1999, the ministries were separated again, and Sargsyan handed control of the MOI to the former Mayor of Yerevan, Suren Abrahamian, while retaining control of the Ministry of State Security. Abrahamian did not last long in the job though, as he was forced to resign after the shootings in parliament in October 1999. He was replaced by Hayk Harutyunyan, a career police officer within the Ministry, who has held the post since then.

## Reforms in the Police

In June 2002, a new Law on Police was passed outlining the roles and responsibilities of the police force, paving the way for its alleged professionalisation.<sup>18</sup> As a result, in December 2002, the Ministry was downgraded to an adjunct body to the government and renamed the 'Police of Republic of Armenia'. Ostensibly, this was done to bring Armenia into line with European standards. Many commentators were suspicious, however, noting that in effect, the President had succeeded in bringing this important part of the security apparatus firmly under his own personal control, as the police are no longer answerable to anyone but him. The Council of Europe has criticised parts of the Law on Police, which Armenia is now expected to revise again. The penitentiary

<sup>18</sup> The law can be found on the Council of Europe's website at: <[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal\\_Affairs/Legal\\_co-operation/Police\\_and\\_internal\\_security/Documents/CO-POL%20LAWS%20\(2004\)01%20Armenia%20LawPolice.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Legal_co-operation/Police_and_internal_security/Documents/CO-POL%20LAWS%20(2004)01%20Armenia%20LawPolice.asp)>

system was also transferred from the MOI to the Ministry of Justice on the recommendation of the Council of Europe (see below).

Police reform is also on the agenda of the OSCE. The OSCE's Strategic Police Matters Unit has spent over two years developing a police assistance program in association with the Armenian police. This project has three components. The first is the introduction of community policing methods in the Arabkir district of Yerevan. If this is successful, it is expected that this will serve as a model for the rest of the country. Secondly, a new call-response centre will be set up to help the police respond better to emergencies. Thirdly, the Police Training Centre is being upgraded, with improved training courses and teaching materials.

The agreement with the OSCE to run a pilot community policing scheme is positive, indicating some willingness for reform within the police structures. The challenges they will face are vast, however, not least because police-community relations are generally quite poor, as was highlighted in an opinion survey done for the OSCE in the Arabkir region at the end of 2003. This displayed large discrepancies between the police and the community in their perceptions of crime and security, and showed that only about half of citizens regard the police's ability to provide protection and prevent crime positively.<sup>19</sup>

These figures suggest a wider problem with the police: it still suffers from the legacy of its Soviet past, in which the MOI saw its primary responsibility as the maintenance of state and regime security rather than protecting its citizens. This is compounded by the fact that there has never been much civilian control over the police. As with the MOD, there has never been any clear division of responsibilities between a civilian government body managing and overseeing the police, and the police officers themselves: to all intents and purposes, the MOI/Police run and manage themselves, and are answerable only to the President. Furthermore, it remains a highly militarised organisation, as suggested by the ranking system, which is more or less identical to that within the army. The Police is still home to a large number of well-armed interior troops, which are run in a very similar fashion to the standard military units.

The police also face huge challenges in terms of resources. Outside Yerevan, police officers have very poor facilities, only basic training and little equipment, hindering their attempts to fight crime. Added to this, official wages are low, providing a strong incentive for corruption. Corruption happens both among rank-and-file officers, who take bribes both in order to supplement their income and to pay off their superiors, and at a more senior level, and the Police is thought to still control a number of industries, including some of the oil market and trade in food and medicines. The traffic police are particularly unpopular, and are generally perceived to be more interested in taking bribes than in keeping the roads safe.

While not impossible, creating a genuinely professional, less corrupt and more effective police service will take much time and political leadership. It is questionable whether the current government really views such far-reaching reforms as a priority, particularly if it might undermine the ruling regime's ability to control the security sector. At the very least, however, the OSCE initiative provides an opportunity to test the water, both in terms of the government's commitment to reform and to the potential for improving policing in Armenia.

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia, *Arabkir Police Department Performance: Public Opinion Poll*, Yerevan: OSCE, 2004.

---

## **The National Security Service (including the Border Guards)**

The National Security Service (NSS), like the Police, has undergone a number of changes to its status and power since independence. In Soviet times, the Armenian branch of the KGB had virtually complete autonomy from the local authorities, with all senior positions appointed solely by Moscow without even nominal approval from the local administration – though generally, ethnic Armenians were nominated. One of the local KGB's main functions was to monitor the actions of the other state institutions, in particular the other power ministries. For this reason, it was important that they did not have friendly contacts within these ministries and the local administration, and admission procedures were very strict to prevent corruption. As a result, however, levels of education and professional preparation were higher within the KGB and they received better salaries.

Wherever in the world there was an Armenian diaspora, ethnic Armenians worked in Soviet embassies, claiming to be diplomats but in fact acting as intelligence officers (they were usually from the First Department (Espionage) of the Armenian KGB). This experience proved very useful in the early years of Armenian independence, particularly in war conditions. For this reason, the KGB survived a potential cull demanded by the more zealous nationalists, who associated it with the 'hand of Moscow', and emerged with a full complement of staff. It was, however, renamed the Department of National Security. This was then merged with the MOI in 1996 to form the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Security (see above), but became a separate Ministry again in 1999. At the end of 2002, its status was changed again, when along with the Police, it was made an adjunct body to the government answering directly to the President. As with the Police, it was argued by many that this move was motivated primarily by political concerns, with the President keen to ensure that he had full control over the agency. There have also been allegations that at times the NSS has been used by the incumbent regime to monitor its political opponents.

The National Security Service is still structured largely as it was in Soviet times, though the fifth department, which dealt with ideological matters, has been disbanded. The major innovation is an anti-terrorism unit, set up after the shootings in parliament in October 1999. Since America launched its 'war on terror' in late 2001, this department has become increasingly important. Whereas in the 1990s, Western governments watched impassively as the NSS grew weaker, with many staff leaving due to low wages and frustration at their changing circumstances, some have now discovered the need for co-operation with intelligence agencies in the Caucasus. NSS staff are trained in academies around the world, notably in Russia, but also in France, the US, and a number of other Western countries.

Other departments in the NSS include: espionage, counter-espionage; military intelligence; and the economic department, which deals primarily with crimes such as drugs and human trafficking while more routine economic crimes are still handled by the police and the Ministry of Finance. The National Security Service also includes approximately 2,000 Armenian Border Guards, who patrol Armenia's borders (including joint patrols of the Turkish and Iranian borders with the Russian Federal Border Guard Service. The reason the Border Guards are placed within the NSS appears to be based largely on the old Soviet model, though it may be argued that this helps the NSS to combat trafficking more effectively. On the other hand, such a format is very unusual for European countries, and reflects the fact that as with other security agencies, the Border Guards are over-militarised and are not subject to any form of civilian control.

## The National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) was formed immediately after the declaration of Armenian independence and originally comprised the President, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, the Chief Adviser on National Security, and the Ministers of Defence, State Security, the Interior, and Foreign Affairs. The functions of the Council included both short-term planning, and drafting a long-term national security doctrine. In the early independence days, the National Security Council played a vital role in ensuring that the army functioned within and for the benefit of the overall political system.

Over time, however, this balance began to falter. As political instability worsened in Armenia in the mid-1990s, and the power ministries both became more corrupt and gathered more power, the NSC's official role was increasingly subverted by political concerns, becoming an informal arena for the heads of these agencies to co-ordinate their actions in other areas as well. For example, it is believed that the NSC served as a planning forum for the falsified presidential election in 1996.

The exact status of the National Security Council at the present time is unclear. It is chaired by the President and the Minister of the Defence is the Secretary. Other members include the Chief of Police, the head of the National Security Service, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Speaker of Parliament and the Prime Minister. Yet it does not meet at regular times, apparently being convened whenever it is felt necessary. Nor does it have a Secretariat. There is no clear law regulating the NSC nor outlining its competences and responsibilities, though it is apparently mentioned briefly in the Law on Security. In short, there is very little information regarding the role of the Council or its influence on policy- and decision-making.

## The National Assembly

When Armenia gained independence in September 1991, the Armenian Supreme Soviet mutated into the first parliament of the new Republic of Armenia. The National Assembly was then restructured into its current form when the Constitution was passed in 1995, and the current government, its third, was elected in May 2003. The ruling coalition has 73 of 131 seats, made up of three parties: the Republican Party (40 seats), Orinats Yerkir ('Country of Law' – 22 seats), and the ARFD (11 seats). The opposition has 29 seats among three parties: Artarutyun ('Justice' – 14 seats), National Unity (9 seats), and the United Labour Party (6 seats). There are also a number of independent representatives.

The role of the National Assembly in Armenian politics remains open to debate. At times over the last ten years, the National Assembly has appeared to have significant influence and provide a counterpoint to the President's power. However, parliament is still haunted by the terrorist attack of 27 October 1999, when five gunmen burst in and shot dead the prime minister, the speaker of parliament, and six senior officials. With the loss of such important politicians, the National Assembly also lost a significant amount of influence, and has struggled to impose its will ever since. Debates over who ordered these killings and for what purpose have engendered furious debate and recrimination within the political sphere. Though one of the men charged, Nairi Hunanian, maintains that he acted on his own initiative, various conspiracy theories continue to circulate.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, there are six major areas in which parliaments can play a role in overseeing the security sector:

<sup>20</sup> Danielyan E, *Armenia: Parliament Massacre Still a Mystery Three Years Later*.

1. General powers: initiating and amending legislation, questioning members of the executive, carrying out parliamentary enquiries
2. Budget control
3. Approving/rejecting deployments abroad
4. Procurement
5. General defence and security policy
6. Defence/security personnel: approving or being consulted on senior appointments and fixing ceilings for manpower.

Considering the role of the National Assembly against each of these criteria, it is clear that the parliament in Armenia does not have significant powers of oversight:

1. Parliament has the primary responsibility for initiating and amending legislation. However, its record with regard to the security sector is not encouraging. Though it has passed a number of relevant laws, including On Defence, On Martial Law, On Security Bodies, On Military Service, On the Police, and On Interior Troops, it is doubtful parliament's role in scrutinising and amending this legislation was really that significant. Furthermore, these laws generally still contain many grey areas and lack clarity, limiting their power to be implemented effectively.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that the Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs, which lists its responsibilities as 'defence, security and internal affairs, the military-industrial complex, military educational institutions, military service and the police'<sup>22</sup> and has responsibility for the initial deliberation of draft laws in this field, is mostly functional and has little political weight.
2. The National Assembly has very limited control over the budget of the security sector, particularly the defence budget. The budget is developed by the Ministry of Defence in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister. It is then presented before the Standing Committee, but even this committee is not given detailed information about the budget. Following this, the National Assembly is presented with a final budget figure, which is not explained at all, which it can either approve or disapprove. This procedure is further weakened by the fact that the budget presented has little in common either with the Armed Forces genuine needs, nor their true expenditure. Instead, the budget that is presented reflects the highest figure that is thought acceptable, with the rest coming from other sources, including industries that are controlled by the Ministry.
3. On this issue, the Parliament's record is stronger. The proposed deployment of 50–60 non-combat personnel to join the international coalition in Iraq was met with concern by many Armenians, who feared that this could endanger the safety of the ethnic Armenian population in Iraq (approximately 20,000–25,000). The deployment was then debated heatedly across government, and the Prime Minister promised to leave it to the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court to decide whether it go ahead.<sup>23</sup>
4. The National Assembly has little control over procurement. For most government agencies, procurement is managed by the Committee on State Procurements, and can at certain times be reviewed by the National Assembly. This is not the case in defence matters. The MOD has its own procurement office that is not answerable to any other body.<sup>24</sup>
5. It may be argued that the National Assembly has played very little role in defining general defence and security policies. Armenia still lacks a National Security Concept, the Military Doctrine is kept secret, and there are few other policy documents relating

<sup>21</sup> These laws are considered in some detail in Yenokian, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Website of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, <<http://www.parliament.am/En/Members/third/indexComit.html#PA>>

<sup>23</sup> Despite calls from the opposition, voting was done in secret, and the deployment was sanctioned.

<sup>24</sup> Yenokian, *ibid.*

to security. However, inasmuch as some form of security policy is being formulated somewhere within government, it seems that this is the domain of the power ministries, the President's office, and the National Security Council.

6. Lastly, the Assembly has little control over personnel issues. The number of personnel in the security ministries is generally decided by the ministries themselves. Virtually all senior officials in the security sector can be appointed by the President, particularly as the Constitution allows him to 'appoint the staff of the highest command of the armed forces' (Article 55 section 12), a vaguely worded phrase which gives him significant flexibility in defining the limits of his powers of appointment.

In summary, then, the National Assembly has little effective powers of oversight over the security sector. In part, this reflects the general weakness of parliament: though Armenia is officially a parliamentary democracy, in practice the influence of the Assembly is relatively low. However, it is also the direct result of attempts to keep the security sector out of parliamentary and public scrutiny as possible in important areas such as budgetary, personnel and policy oversight.

## The justice sector<sup>25</sup>

As in other sectors, Armenia inherited a justice system that was almost entirely defined and run from Moscow. This was the case both for the constitution and legislation, and for the institutions charged with administering justice. However, over the past decade Armenia has made significant steps towards creating a justice sector more suitable for a small European country. Its accession to the Council of Europe in 2001 has played a particularly important role in catalysing changes, and though many aspects of its legal system are still insufficiently developed or implemented, it can well be argued that reform in this sector has been more active than elsewhere.

Justice reform began in earnest with the passing of a new Constitution in 1995, replacing the old Soviet one. This introduced a three-tiered national court system (the Court of Cassation, the Courts of Review and the Courts of First Instance) and a separate system (the Constitutional Court) for reviewing the constitutionality of laws and decrees. The Law on the Status of Judges and the Law on the Judiciary came into effect in January 1999.

The Constitutional Court began operating in 1996, and is made up of four presidential appointees and five by the National Assembly. Given that the National Assembly is dominated by pro-presidential parties, this has led to accusations that the Constitutional Court is not entirely free of influence. It has also been criticised for allowing cases only from the President, some members of the National Assembly, and election candidates. Nonetheless, it has at times tried to demonstrate some form of independence, most notably following the presidential elections of 2003. Complaints by two of the losing candidates, Stepan Demirchian and Artashes Geghamian, were unsuccessful, the Court ruling that although there had been some irregularities, it could not be shown that this had a significant effect on the outcome of the elections. However, the Court did propose that a referendum should be held one year after the elections as a vote of confidence in the president, though no referendum was ever held.

The independence of the judiciary is also compromised by the Council of Justice, which effectively supervises and governs the judicial system. The Council is chaired by the President, with the Minister of Justice and the Prosecutor General acting as Vice Presidents. It has fourteen members, including legal scholars, judges and prosecutors, and meets on an ad hoc basis. It has significant powers, including the ability to

<sup>25</sup> This section draws heavily on the work of various legal and human rights organisations both within and outside the country, who have been monitoring judicial reform for several years. The 'Judicial Reform Index for Armenia 2002' from the American Bar Association/Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative, and Freedom House's 'Nations in Transit 2004', have been particularly useful. More information on these and other sources can be found in the bibliography.

recommend the appointment or dismissal of judges. Since it is obvious from its structure that the Council of Justice is completely dependent on the President, society considers it as yet another branch of the presidential system rather than as an independent body.

Though the structure that was developed in the second half of the 1990s has largely remained intact, the justice sector has nevertheless witnessed several significant reforms since Armenia joined the Council of Europe in January 2001. Armenia's accession was made dependent on a number of obligations being fulfilled within a limited timeframe (mostly one to three years), including:

- To sign and ratify the European Convention on Human Rights
- To sign and ratify the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- To abolish the death penalty
- To establish an ombudsman's office
- To transfer the prison system from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of State Security to the Ministry of Justice, to ensure the reform and demilitarisation of this system
- To adopt a law on alternative service<sup>26</sup>

The Council of Europe also recommended that the Constitution should be updated in various places to address areas where it believed there was a lack of suitable checks and balances.

All of these changes have now been adopted, except for the amendments to the Constitution, though Armenia came under frequent criticism for the way in which these reforms were carried out. Various delaying tactics and loopholes prevented the abolition of the death penalty until September 2003, similar controversy surrounded the law on alternative service (see above), and the law on the ombudsman was held up for several months by arguments about how he/she should be appointed.

Constitutional reforms were debated in 2002, with rival versions being drawn up by the President's office and by the opposition, but have yet to be adopted. Opposition claims that the new constitution would strengthen the president's power were rejected by the presidential administration. The revised constitution failed to gain the necessary majority in a referendum in May 2003. A further referendum is due to be held in 2005, but there is still widespread ignorance about what the reforms entail. An opinion poll released in October 2004 suggested that less than 10 percent of voters in Yerevan were familiar with the proposed changes and were planning to vote.<sup>27</sup>

Even once reforms have been carried out, however, it is still open to debate how much effect they have really had. The transfer of prisons to the Ministry of Justice has been welcomed, and there is some indication that the system is now more open and transparent.<sup>28</sup> Yet this has not led to significant improvement in standards within the prisons, and brutality and even torture within prisons remain common. A report by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture in October 2002 concluded that 'persons deprived of their liberty by the police in Armenia run a significant risk of being ill-treated'.<sup>29</sup> This is attributable in part to a continued lack of resources, which means there has been little real change to conditions within prisons.

Similar controversy has surrounded the office of Ombudsman. Larissa Alaverdian was appointed in early 2004 following the ratification of the Law on an Ombudsman, but

<sup>26</sup> The full text of the Council of Europe's opinion on Armenia's membership can be found at: <<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta00/EOP1221.htm>>

<sup>27</sup> Danielyan E, *Armenians 'Vastly Ignorant of Constitutional Reform'*.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Valery Poghosyan, September 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Council of Europe, *Report to the Armenian Government on the visit to Armenia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment from 6 to 17 October 2002*. The Armenian government responded to this report: <<http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/arm/2004-27-inf-eng.pdf>>

soon faced a barrage of criticism over accusations that she was too close to the President and had failed to investigate alleged human rights abuses committed against opposition activists and protesters both during the elections in 2003 and during protests in early 2004. She denies this criticism, however, and points out that she has freedom to choose some 75 staff members and investigate whatever she sees as necessary.<sup>30</sup>

Public confidence in the judicial system remains low. There is little faith that corruption is reducing and most people doubt that the judiciary is free of political influence. In a recent public attitudes survey conducted by IFES-Armenia, 81 percent of respondents thought that corruption was a serious problem in the judiciary, 68 percent said they did not believe that the judicial system could protect them from unjust treatment from the state, and only 18 percent thought the judiciary is not influenced by politicians when making decisions.<sup>31</sup>

More than in other spheres, the justice sector has seen significant changes over the last decade. On the other hand, these changes have not yet succeeded in creating a system that is notably less corrupt or impartial. Even where laws are apparently well drafted and outwardly adhere to European standards, few believe that they will really be enforced in an impartial manner. This implies that the real challenge lies in implementing legislation consistently, requiring strong political will. Armenia's foot-dragging over its obligations to the Council of Europe, continued political meddling in the workings of the judiciary, and the weakness of anti-corruption efforts all suggest that the current leadership lacks the necessary commitment to carry out such reforms thoroughly.

## Informal security actors

As has been noted above, much of the Armenian security sector in effect began as informal, non-state actors. Both within Nagorno Karabakh itself and beyond its borders, volunteer defence units were formed illegally before the Soviet Union had collapsed. The Armenian leadership soon began to co-ordinate these units and succeeded in bringing virtually all of these groups under the state's control. Nevertheless, it is thought that two major organisations in Armenia would be able to mobilise armed structures at short notice if the situation demanded.

### Yerkrapah and the Dashnaks

The first of these is Yerkrapah (Defenders of the Nation), a union set up by veterans of the Karabakh war after the ceasefire in 1994. It was led by Vazgen Sarkissian, who at the time held the post of Minister of Defence. It expressly stated it would not get involved in politics, unless, as it put it, it was in the interests of national security. However, Yerkrapah played a key role in supporting the crackdown on protests against the rigged elections in 1996, patrolling the streets with an impressive array of military-style weaponry. This could not have happened without the government's consent, implying that Yerkrapah was allowed to maintain a significant quantity of weapons in exchange for its loyalty. Yerkrapah also played a decisive role in the ouster of Ter-Petrosian in February 1998, with Sarkissian also setting up a parliamentary faction of the same name and using the organisation's political strength to force the President to go. This faction formed the basis of the Republican Party, now the strongest party in the National Assembly.

The political strength of Yerkrapah was shown again after the murder of its leader, Vazgen Sarkissian, in the parliamentary shootings in October 1999. The Union was used by several senior members of the military who were critical of the President to air

<sup>30</sup> Aleksanian Z, *Armenia: Ombudsman Furore*.

<sup>31</sup> IFES-Armenia, *Citizens' Awareness and Participation in Armenia: Survey 2003*.

their political grievances. A compromise was eventually reached, and Yerkrpah started to withdraw from the forefront of political life, preferring to paint itself as a non-partisan organisation that could unite people from across the political spectrum.<sup>32</sup> Many people think it likely, however, that given its previous record and its continued closeness with the military, the union could again take up arms for political purposes if it felt it necessary.

The second group is the Dashnaks, represented in parliament as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsyutiun (ARFD). The Dashnaks suffered severe repression during the Soviet Union because of their aggressive stance on the need for armed struggle to protect Armenian rights, and their calls for the re-establishment of a Greater Armenia. They had a strong network throughout the Armenian diaspora, however (and still do), with a well-organised party structure and strict discipline.

The Dashnaks were legalised in 1990, and became highly involved in the Karabakh movement, setting up a number of detachments that were equipped and armed at the party's expense. However, they soon became mired in controversy, with the government alleging links between the Dashnaks and a secret organisation called Dro, which was believed to have a significant amount of weaponry and was involved in a number of notorious political assassinations in Armenia in the early 1990s. The Dashnaks were thus banned by Ter-Petrossian in 1994. This ban was lifted in 1998, and the ARFD has become a member of the ruling coalition in the National Assembly. However, given the Dashnaks' history and military experience, some analysts suspect that the party still has links to paramilitary groups that it could mobilise if it saw necessary, though this has never been proved.

## Public attitudes and civil society

Finally, this chapter will look at general public perceptions and attitudes regarding the security sector, and discuss the participation of civil society organisations in the governance of the security sector.

### Public attitudes towards the security sector

Public attitudes towards the security sector are not uniform, but some broad observations can be made. Firstly, as elsewhere in the South Caucasus, security is primarily seen in terms of overall national or state security, due to the threat of renewed conflict with Azerbaijan. In contrast to Georgia or Azerbaijan, however, Armenia has so far been successful in defending its national borders, and has also maintained control over Nagorno Karabakh and the surrounding territories. As a result, Armenians generally feel that their most basic security need – protection against foreign aggression – is being met, and thus attitudes towards the army are usually relatively positive. Though there were recruiting problems for several years in the mid-1990s, there is a strong image of armed men in uniform as defenders, liberators, fighters for freedom and justice. For a nation that remembers its history of suffering at the hands of others, there is a strong sense that 'might is right' and is the only way that it can protect itself.

Public opinions about other security actors are less positive, however. On one hand, it is acknowledged that levels of crime in Armenia are not excessive, and most people do have a sense of personal security. Yet as mentioned above, opinion surveys have repeatedly shown high levels of mistrust towards the police, and particularly to the judiciary. There is a widespread belief that the rule of law exists only on paper, that corruption is endemic, and that the whole sector is abused for political ends.

Furthermore, people still remember the way in which the power ministries broke up demonstrations in 1996, and more recently in 2003 and 2004, and many fear that even their own Armed Forces could be used against them in a crisis.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Khachatryan H, *Yerkrpah: 'Lightning Rod' or Political Force in Postwar Armenia?*

In short, it is clear that even where the government has been trying to reform the security sector, the public remains unconvinced that there has been any qualitative changes that would make them feel safer or that the rule of law is taking hold. There is a feeling that rather than being a public good, security is something that you either buy – whether from corrupt officials or private security companies – or provide for yourself.

### Civil society and security sector governance<sup>33</sup>

The importance of civil society organisations in security sector governance is now widely recognised.<sup>34</sup> They can play a vital role as a transmission belt between the state and society, communicating information and ideas in both directions. This is true not only of academic and policy think-tanks, who have the intellectual freedom to suggest more innovative methods of dealing with certain problems, but also with grass-roots organisations, in particular community and faith-based groups, who can communicate the concerns of their large memberships through dialogue with the authorities. Civil society organisations can monitor the actions of the security actors, making sure that these institutions (and individuals within them) operate to the highest standards and respect both national and international laws. They can also provide an alternative source of knowledge and experience in many fields.

Given the special nature of the security sector, however, there has often been resistance to allowing civil society organisations to get involved in this field, with a culture of secrecy reigning. Given the strength of the power ministries in Armenia, and the lack of control that even the parliament is able to exercise over them, it is perhaps not surprising that there appear to be very few organisations working specifically on security issues in Armenia.

There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, civil society is still a relatively new concept in Armenia after the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, and despite signs that non-governmental organisations are gradually becoming more professional and effective, their role in public life is still fairly low (their popularity is often further undermined by a perception that many NGOs are very progressive on issues where public opinion remains steadfastly conservative, such as the death penalty and homosexuality). Secondly, given this weakness, Armenian NGOs have tended to focus their strengths on other issues that are perceived as more important than the security sector, from democracy building through to poverty alleviation. Even NGOs that work in related fields, such as conflict resolution and human rights, have not tended to make the links between their work and other security sector issues. Thirdly, some people may actually fear to get involved in such work. For example, there have been several prominent cases of violence against journalists in recent years, suggesting that though there is some freedom of the press, it can be dangerous to touch on certain topics.

It may be expected that civil society will gradually become stronger and more able to voice its concerns in a wider range of issues, including those relating to the security sector. It may also be hoped that with time the state security institutions will also feel more comfortable about co-operating with local civil society organisations. However, as long as the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh remains unresolved and the country continues to feel it is on a war footing, the Armed Forces in particular are likely to remain resistant to what they perceive as civil society interference in their work (with the exception of distinctly pro-army organisations such as Yerkrpah – see above).

<sup>33</sup> This topic is discussed in more detail in Hiscock D, *The Role of Civil Society in Security Sector Governance in the South Caucasus* in 'Security Sector Governance in Southern Caucasus – Challenges and Visions'.

<sup>34</sup> Civil society is understood broadly here to encompass virtually all organisations that exist beyond the state and political parties, from non-governmental organisations, research institutes, through trade unions and faith-based organisations to small community groups and those with no social or political agenda (e.g. sports clubs).

# 5

## Reform and 'transformation'

**THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER** looked at a variety of security actors, tracing their development and assessing the evidence for reform in these institutions. This chapter aims to look at the changes that have taken place in the security sector on a broader level. It starts by considering how the changes outlined compare to a 'classic' definition of security sector reform as described in Chapter Two. It will be argued that it may be too early to talk of reform when the sector is still effectively in formation; at best, one can talk of security sector 'transformation'. The chapter then analyses some of the key factors that conditioned this 'transformation', and looks at the effects they have had on the process of change.

### Reform in Armenia and 'classic' security sector reform

Chapter Two already suggested that Armenia does not fit easily into the usual concept of SSR, because it is neither clearly post-authoritarian nor clearly post-conflict. It also outlined some of the defining factors of 'classic' SSR. These include, but are not limited to:

1. A holistic approach that seeks to ensure that reforms in one area are complemented and reinforced by improvements in related institutions.
2. Strengthening of democratic control over security institutions
3. Professionalisation of the security forces
4. Demilitarisation and peace-building
5. Strengthening the rule of law
6. International involvement, usually as support for either post-conflict reconstruction or to help states comply to international or regional standards

This represents an 'ideal type', and no example of SSR will meet all of these criteria in full. This should be borne in mind when considering the case of Armenia. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the changes in Armenia are far from what is generally understood by SSR.

1. There does not appear to have ever been a clearly stated policy on reform at a sectoral level. In fact, one of the main pre-conditions for such an approach is lacking, as Armenia is yet to publish an official National Security Concept that would outline the major threats to Armenian security and how the state plans to deal with them. Without

such a document, it is hard to know how much the various parts of the security sector, as it is has been defined in this paper, are even conceived of as a united whole. Overall, however, there is little evidence to suggest that there has ever been a coherent blueprint for reform at any level, whether more broadly or within a specific ministry. Instead, it appears that the changes that have occurred have done so in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion.

2. There is limited if any democratic control over the security institutions either from the state or civil society. Though one can point to some examples of 'civilian' control exercised by senior government officials, it is debatable whether this really serves to reduce the influence of the power ministries, particularly the Ministry of Defence, over politics. Nor does this civilian control permeate very far through the system, with few civilians holding positions of responsibility in these ministries. Furthermore, not only the Ministry of Defence, but also the Police and the Ministry of State Security remain largely militarised institutions, with training and ranking systems to match. The capacity of civil society to monitor and influence the work of security actors is severely curtailed by a culture of secrecy and by the relative weakness and inexperience of many civil society organisations. Even parliament has only limited influence over the security institutions, with few powers of budgetary oversight, mechanisms to investigate wrongdoing, or control over appointments to senior positions.
3. Though professionalisation of the armed forces may potentially be desirable, in practice no moves have been made in this direction. This appears to be equally true in the Police, where so far little has been done to raise standards through modernisation and improved training. However, the OSCE-backed police reform project suggests that the government is keen to begin this process.
4. Armenian troops now participate in peace-building exercises internationally. Closer to home, however, there has been little change to the way that Armenia approaches the issue of Nagorno Karabakh, the conflict resolution process is largely stalled, and no demilitarisation of the conflict zone is in sight.
5. As outlined in the previous chapter, the justice sector has seen considerable change in the last decade, and it may well be argued that reform in this sphere has progressed further than it has elsewhere. Nonetheless, most Armenian citizens continue to have little faith in the rule of law, which is undermined both by political interference in the workings of the judiciary and high levels of corruption across the security sector. Government attempts to combat these problems has so far seemed half-hearted.
6. Lastly, the level of international involvement in SSR has so far been low, with limited co-operation between the Armenian authorities and Western governments and international organisations in this sphere. This criterion is somewhat different from the other five, since it does not prescribe any particular changes to the security sector; rather, it suggests the level of engagement from external actors. There is no objective reason why the international community must be involved in this process, though its experience and resources may be helpful. This absence of international engagement is significant, however, because it removes one of the major rationales that most countries have for beginning a reform process. It is also understandable that without input and guidance from the international community, such changes as do occur are less likely to follow the 'standard' pattern of SSR.

## The security sector in Armenia: forming and transforming

How then should the changes that have occurred in the Armenian security sector be interpreted? Perhaps it is simply too early to use the word ‘reform’. The concept of reform implies two conditions, neither of which hold true in Armenia. Firstly, ‘reform’ indicates an intention to fundamentally change certain core variables of a given structure (even if this reform is incomplete or totally unsuccessful). The authorities have never indicated that they believe such changes to be necessary.

Secondly, inherent in the idea of ‘reform’ is the idea that an established system already exists. Yet Armenia inherited no more than ‘half’ a security sector from the Soviet Union when it gained independence. The Armenian authorities likely see their task more in terms of developing and strengthening the state security institutions rather than in any type of reform. This does not mean that there have been no changes in direction over the last decade. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that where necessary, the government has tried to adapt to accommodate both internal political events (such as the terrorist shootings in parliament in October 1999) and to changing geo-politics and international demands (such as the conditions of Council of Europe membership, or NATO’s growing interest in the South Caucasus). Nonetheless, such modifications have been conducted on an ad hoc basis and manipulated to fit the prevailing climate, rather than leading to dramatic changes in direction.

It therefore makes more sense to consider developments in the security sector in the past fifteen years in two basic phases. The first was an attempt to create a security sector from a combination of old Soviet institutions and new forces, in war conditions. The second phase (1993–94 onwards), saw the development of these institutions at a formal level, the emphasis being on improving their legal, financial and structural base without radically changing their fundamental principles and practice.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, ‘frozen’ conflict and faltering democracy allowed the sector to extend its influence in politics and the economy.

## Phase 1: Establishing a security sector in times of conflict

The initial conditions in which Armenia began to establish its security sector have already been noted. Essentially, there were two key factors: independence and conflict. It was necessary to create new Armed Forces by merging the volunteer brigades formed in the late 1980s with the troops and materiel inherited from the Soviet Union. In other sub-sectors, such as the police or judiciary, institutions were inherited in a more complete format. Even where this was true, however, these institutions had been designed to be part of a much larger system, and it was necessary to adapt them accordingly so that they could function autonomously. The whole sector, therefore, was an accommodation of old Soviet structures – and the structures, mentality, and practices that came with them – with new actors and institutions that could fulfil the needs of independence.

This process was common to all of the states of the former Soviet Union. However, the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh served both to accelerate and disrupt this process. Understandably enough, the development of strong and effective armed forces was seen as Armenia’s number one priority. Yet this sowed the seeds for some long-term problems. The power ministries were given a privileged position within the state, and the only attempts that were made to control its actions related to directing military operations, not to managing its structure, limiting its budget, monitoring the legality of its actions, etc. Furthermore, within the security sector, the role of the armed forces was emphasised at the expense of other institutions. This did not affect the MOI or the MSS so much, as their efforts were also relevant to the conflict, and they were also largely militarised. Other parts of the sector, such as the judiciary, parliament, and civil

<sup>35</sup> A similar argument is made in Yenokian A, *Armenia: Civilians in National Security Policy*.

society, were given little power in security matters. An imbalance was thus created both at a state level, where the security sector had too much power, and at a sectoral level, where the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces were over-dominant.

This also had consequences for the hierarchy of values as to who and what the state should defend. Theoretically at least, in most Western democracies the starting point of their concept of security is the state's duty to provide security to individuals. All other priorities work outwards from this: the defence of groups of individuals, the defence of the people as a whole, and ultimately, the defence of the state. In Armenia, however, as in many newly independent states, this hierarchy of values was constructed in the opposite direction. Everyone understood that the overwhelming threat to security was external. As a result, state security was prioritised, and human security<sup>36</sup> and the protection of individuals followed some way behind.

## Phase 2: Building on the foundations

Though many of the institutions that collectively make up the security sector have undergone changes since the early 1990s and the establishment of a ceasefire in Nagorno Karabakh in 1994, there have been no major attempts to change the overall way in which they work. Legislation has been developed and improved; the status of agencies and departments within them has been altered; and security actors have sought to acquire more resources and concretise the way in which their institutions are run. Yet none of this amounts to more than a gradual strengthening of the existent system. Indeed, it would be strange if it were otherwise, given that – as argued above – there has never been a coherent strategy for reform.

In fact, there has never even been an officially stated policy to define what the security threats to Armenia are and how the state intends to deal with them. The drafting of a national security concept has apparently been in consideration for several years, but it is still unknown when this will be published. In 2004, the MOD announced that it was establishing a special think tank to advise it on defence and national security. Though this may be a positive step towards better policy development, the fact that it is stationed within the MOD suggests that it is unlikely to look at security in a broader fashion, as this paper has argued is necessary, even if it is true that Armenia still faces major external threats.

Changes are perhaps more evident when looking at the relationship between the security sector and the state more widely, though in a sense, this too was a process of building on the foundations that were set in the immediate post-independence phase.

It may have been expected that once the Karabakh conflict was no longer active, attempts would have been made to reign in the power of the power ministries. Unfortunately, however, this did not happen. Instead, these ministries have been allowed to behave with great autonomy and little oversight, and have used this freedom to build links with and even establish control over many profitable sections of the economy. Furthermore, the MOD in particular has continued to play a central role in politics – though the other power ministries have also intervened at times, particularly to disrupt opposition protests in 1996 and 2003.

The unresolved status of Nagorno Karabakh is one reason for this. This is not just because the continued danger of renewed fighting means that virtually all attention is focussed on external threats to security, and the MOD is therefore entrusted with the defence of the state without too much scrutiny. It is also because with Karabakh in legal limbo it is impossible to formulate a clear security policy for Armenia itself. Until

<sup>36</sup> The meaning of 'human security' is still a subject of some debate. The term stems largely from the re-evaluation of the concept of security that has taken place in the last fifteen years (see Chapter Two). A UN Commission on Human Security was established in January 2001 to explore this concept in more detail. A report of its work can be found at: <<http://www.humansecurity-chs.org>>

the conflict is resolved, Armenia's security to the East will continue to be provided through informal relationships that must remain off the record. This makes it difficult for both normal citizens and the international community to monitor the situation. It also limits Armenia's room for reform. Armenia cannot realistically make large alterations to its security sector without corresponding reforms in Karabakh, yet until Karabakh's status is legally resolved, there is likely to be strong resistance to reform within Karabakh itself if there is any perception that this might even temporarily weaken the effectiveness of the armed forces, and politicians in Yerevan learnt long ago that it is unwise to be seen to be in disagreement with Stepanakert.

The failure of the leadership to establish proper democratic control over the power ministries firmly was also closely related to the overall weakness of democracy in Armenia. With its authoritarian Soviet past, and the first years of independence conditioned by conflict, Armenia had not developed institutions to resolve disputes through proper democratic channels. When a vicious power struggle erupted between different political elites, control of the power ministries became essential because of the weapons and power networks they maintained. Inevitably, politics and security also became intertwined with business, as elites sought to defend and extend their interests with the help of the state security institutions. Not only did this breed high levels of corruption, it also meant that these institutions gradually became less concerned with providing security to the state or the people than to defending the interests of certain groups of people.

This trend has continued to the present day. Corruption is pervasive within many security institutions, and enough people are benefiting substantially from the current state of affairs to resist changes that might restrict their power. At the wider level, the President must balance the interests of various political 'clans', some of which have a strong power base within the security sector. As such, there is a clear distinction between state security and regime security, and the temptation is always to sacrifice the former for the latter.

This may also go some way to explaining the half-hearted way with which Armenia has carried out the reforms that have been demanded of it, such as its obligations to the Council of Europe. Though on paper they appear to be bringing Armenia closer to a European or Western model of the state, in practice it is debatable whether they have had much impact. In every society, there is a gap between the formal structures that govern relationships, and the actual way in which things are run; in Armenia, this gap is quite large (it should be noted, however, that informal structures such as cultural traditions and value systems do still play a significant role in defining what is possible (if unpopular) and what is totally unacceptable).

# 6

---

## The potential for security sector reform in Armenia

**CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUDED THAT** though there had been some notable changes in the security sector since independence, on the whole it was not possible to talk of a coherent agenda for security sector reform. This chapter discusses the possible benefits of a more concerted approach towards SSR in Armenia. What could such a programme offer to Armenia, and who would benefit? It then looks at the potential for reform, assessing the likely allies and opponents of such change.

---

### The benefits of security sector reform

SSR has many potential benefits for the state, its people, and the international community as a whole. For the state itself, SSR can produce more professional, more effective security institutions. Not only could the state provide a better quality of security, it could do so more efficiently. Over the long run, this makes it possible to reduce the share of the budget that is spent on defence and security, meaning this money can be spent on other projects.

SSR encourages states to conceive security in broad terms as a public good for all its citizens, and provides mechanisms to achieve this. It also aims to define the role of the security sector within the state, clearly delineating and limiting its functions. It can therefore reduce the risks that the sector plays too important a role in politics or that it can be perverted to the interests of powerful clans.

With its emphasis on strengthening the rule of law and increasing civilian control, SSR can also play an important role in re-building trust between the state and the people. This is particularly true of police and justice reform – citizens benefit directly from an improved sense of security and from not having to confront corrupt officials in the police and judiciary – though it can also be the case with military reform if this is shown to improve the effectiveness of the state to protect people from external aggression.

Improving the rule of law, reducing corruption and having more professional, accountable security forces also has a positive effect on the economy, because it reduces transaction costs and enables people to trade more freely. It can also help to

boost the country's international image, making it more attractive to foreign direct investment.

SSR is also attractive to the international community, for several reasons. Firstly, in many cases, SSR forms part of wider developmental assistance in other areas. The more secure the environment is, and the more effective the security sector is, the greater the chances any development programme has of success. Secondly, improved governance and democratic control tends to make it easier to understand how the state functions, therefore making them more predictable, and more attractive neighbours and partners. Thirdly, SSR is a very important part of any attempt to deal with conflict prevention and resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. This is obviously relevant to the international community as interest in the South Caucasus increases.

SSR contains many potential aspects, many of which may not be suitable specifically as conflict resolution tools. In the case of Armenia, however, it has been increasingly recognised that resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will involve preparing the state and the public on both sides to make compromises that they are currently not ready for. There are two ways in which SSR may help to create such an atmosphere. Firstly, it would help to create security sectors that are more accountable and more able to fulfil a peace-building role (this can be done without actually reducing their military effectiveness, which would be unacceptable to all actors). Secondly, by increasing public engagement in security issues, effectively making people feel that they are taking part in the decision-making process, it would gradually be possible to build public trust in the state. To put it the other way round, given the huge role that the security sector plays in life in Armenia, trust in the state cannot be created without improving the public's attitude towards the security sector.

---

## The road ahead: the potential for change

The benefits of SSR should thus be clear. Yet how likely is it that a SSR programme will be even partially designed or implemented in Armenia in the near future?

Much depends on whether the current situation is sustainable. If it is, it is likely that the government will see no particular reason to instigate large-scale reforms that might rock the boat. Nothing remains static forever, of course, and the question is thus whether in its present condition, the security sector could survive large shocks caused by changes to either the internal or external environment.

## The internal rationale for security sector reform

Internally, it appears that Armenia has sunk into a condition of 'stable instability'. Though there is obvious discontent within the country, whether voiced by the opposition or discussed informally at the kitchen table, the system has so far managed to withstand even serious protests, such as those in 1996 and more recently in 2004. Scared of a 'Georgian scenario', the regime is likely to be prepared for any further public demonstrations. Furthermore, civil society is weak and is unable to exert much pressure. Therefore though there is considerable anger towards the current regime, it has not yet reached a point where the government will be forced to act.

This of course does not mean that public demands for change will not grow; any reforms that genuinely improve the rule of law and reduce corruption would be very popular indeed. Such demands need not be done in a confrontational fashion: capable, popularly supported civil society organisations could work together with the government to develop some SSR initiatives, thus reducing tension before it reaches a dangerous level.

SSR may be in the interests of the state, as outlined above, but whether it is in the interests of the ruling regime is another matter. Successful SSR would define much

more clearly the roles and remits of security institutions, and increase control and monitoring over their activities. This would obviously provoke strong resistance from the powerful interests that are benefiting from the current situation, and it would need a very strong president to defeat such resistance. It is debatable whether the current president could do so, or would even want to: it might reasonably be argued that it is easier to maintain the status quo, especially if this includes the option of utilising security actors for political gains when it seems useful. Yet playing such a game runs the risk of miscalculating, allowing one of the powerful 'clans' to gather too much power, particularly within the power ministries – leading eventually to some form of coup. Were this to happen, this could have grave consequences for both the ruling regime and for the state. This is equally true were there to be another major act of violence within the country, such as the terrorist attack in October 1999 which killed several senior politicians.

### **The external rationale for security sector reform**

Though there are significant internal threats to the current situation, the Armenian authorities may well feel they can contain or neutralise them. They have less ability to influence geo-political changes at the regional and international level, however.

The situation at the regional level is disconcerting for Armenia. Attitudes in Azerbaijan have become increasingly bellicose recently, a combination of frustration with the status quo, increased oil revenues, and the freedom of movement since the US began waiving Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act in return for Azerbaijan's support for the 'war on terror'. This may actually make SSR less likely, with even more resources and freedom granted to the Armed Forces. Yet in theory, SSR can be realised without affecting their military effectiveness, and could actually help by improving their efficiency and ensuring that they are under full political control. How seriously this argument is likely to be taken is another matter, however. It is also possible to envisage a worst-case scenario where Nagorno Karabakh suffered some form of military defeat. This would have profound implications for Armenia, but again, it is another matter whether this would actually lead towards SSR in any recognisable form.

So far, international actors, with the exception of Russia, have not significantly affected Armenian security affairs. The main concern of the international community as a whole has been the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, where the OSCE is playing a mediating role. Yet the conflict resolution process has been largely restricted to peace negotiations that have brought little success. Despite the rhetoric, the West's engagement in the South Caucasus has so far been modest, and has shown particularly little interest in Armenia, which has no pipelines running through its territory and has not courted or been courted by NATO with the same enthusiasm as Georgia or Azerbaijan. Until very recently, the EU seemed to have no policy towards the region at all. Yet the geo-political map is changing, primarily because of the 'war on terror' and the expansion of the EU, and also because the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline will start pumping oil in 2005. This has profound implications for Armenia's security.

Armenia has so far followed a policy of 'wait and see' with NATO, participating in PfP exercises while keeping its distance for fear of angering Russia. However, NATO's (and particularly the US's) interest in the Caucasus is increasing because of its proximity to the Middle East, its potential as a transport corridor to Central Asia, and the danger that instability in the Caucasus caused by conflict and organised crime might spread to other areas. This will make the balancing act harder to maintain. Armenia does not want to be left behind Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are gradually moving closer to NATO, yet it cannot afford to anger Russia. Though it might be expected that increased NATO involvement would stimulate only military reform, this is no longer true, with NATO now stressing that it is a much a political as a security alliance. As co-operation deepens through participation in the Individual Partnership Action Plan, NATO will

most likely demand some elements of SSR, such as democratic control and civilianisation, as criteria for continued engagement.

Though NATO and the EU have so far resisted taking responsibility for conflict resolution in the Caucasus, they have a strong interest in seeing these conflicts solved and would back any international initiative that promises to do so. If, as argued above, SSR can play a role in facilitating this process, at some point Armenia may face international pressure to consider certain forms of SSR.

One final variable is how Russia will react to increased Western involvement in Armenia, particularly if it touches on security matters. It has already been argued that with Armenian security dependent in part on co-operation with Russia, it will be hard for Armenia to reform its military without its consent; perceived Western intervention in the security affairs of its allies in the South Caucasus is likely to be received with considerable suspicion, possibly even overt opposition. Reforms in other parts of the security sector, such as the police or the judiciary, may prove less controversial, however.

### **How likely is security sector reform?**

There is nothing inevitable about SSR. There are powerful figures within the Armenian establishment who would resist reforms that limit them in any way, and there is no real evidence to suggest that the authorities as a whole recognise the need for reform. So far, the Armenian authorities have managed to either ignore calls for reform from the West and the international community, or to implement them half-heartedly in a way that does not fundamentally alter the way in which things work (as they have done with their obligations to the Council of Europe).

There is a more compelling reason to begin SSR much sooner, however. Implementing reforms that strengthen the rule of law, reduce corruption, and improve the public's participation in and trust for the security sector would go a long way to reducing the tensions in Armenia and creating a state that is more sustainable over the long term. Such reforms would find strong backing from the public, and from the international community, which should give the government the strength needed to face down powerful elements who are resistant to change. Given the political situation, reforms may be more possible in justice and policing, as the history of the sector to the current day seems to show. Initiating these reforms now could save a lot of trouble for the regime, the state, and the Armenian people over the long term.

---

# Bibliography

- American Bar Association/Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative, *Judicial Reform Index for Armenia, April 2002*, Washington: ABA/CEELI, 2002.  
<[http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/jri/jri\\_armenia.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/jri/jri_armenia.pdf)>
- A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Foundation, *Monitoring Report on Working conditions in first instance courts in Shirak, Gegharkunik and Syunik Marzes (Regions)*, Yerevan: OSCE, 2001.  
Available in English: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2001/01/146\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2001/01/146_en.pdf)>  
Armenian: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2001/01/146\\_hy.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2001/01/146_hy.pdf)>
- Aleksanian Z, *Armenia: Ombudsman Furore*, Institute for War and Peace Reporting Caucasus Reporting Service No. 221, 4 March 2004.  
<[http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau\\_200403\\_221\\_4\\_eng.txt](http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau_200403_221_4_eng.txt)>
- Armenia Daily Digest, *Armenia's GDP 13 percent up in 2002*, 10 February 2003.  
<<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/armenia/hypermail/200302/0028.shtml>>
- Armenian Helsinki Committee, *Observer Report for 2003*,  
<[http://www.hra.am/ahc/english1/12new\\_e/frame\\_e.htm](http://www.hra.am/ahc/english1/12new_e/frame_e.htm)>
- Armenian Sociological Association, *Situation with Human Rights in Countries of South Caucasus: Results of Sociological Surveys 2002*, Yerevan: Lusabats Publishing House, 2003
- Ball N, *Democratic Governance in the Security Sector*, presentation prepared for UNDP Workshop on 'Learning from Experience for Afghanistan', 5 February 2002,  
<[http://www.undp.org/eo/afghanistan/doc/Nicole\\_Ball.pdf](http://www.undp.org/eo/afghanistan/doc/Nicole_Ball.pdf)>
- Born H, *Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector. What Does it Mean?*, Working Paper No. 9, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002.
- Bouta T, van de Goor L & Ball N, *Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security Sector: An Institutional Assessment Framework*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2003.
- Centre for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia, *Arabkir Police Department Performance: Public Opinion Poll*, Yerevan: OSCE, 2004.  
Available in English: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2004/01/2332\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2004/01/2332_en.pdf)>  
Armenian: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2004/01/2332\\_hy.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2004/01/2332_hy.pdf)>
- Chalmers M, *Security sector reform in developing countries: an EU perspective*, London: Saferworld/Conflict Prevention Network, 2000.
- Civil Society Development Union (Yerevan), *Monitoring report on the right to communicate with the outside world in trial detention*, Yerevan: OSCE, 2003.  
Available in English: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143_en.pdf)>  
Russian: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143\\_ru.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143_ru.pdf)>  
Armenian: <[http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143\\_hy.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/oy/2002/04/143_hy.pdf)>
- Commission of the European Union, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, Brussels: Commission of the European Union, 2004.  
<[http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy\\_Paper\\_EN.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/strategy/Strategy_Paper_EN.pdf)>
- Corley F, *Dogging Dashnaks, Dissidents and Dodgy Dealers: Armenians and the KGB*, Armenian Forum 2, no.3, pp. 1–32, Princeton, NJ: the Gomidas Institute, 2001
- Council of Europe, *Report to the Armenian Government on the visit to Armenia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment from 6 to 17 October 2002*, CPT/Inf (2004) 25.  
<<http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/arm/2004-25-inf-eng.pdf>>

- Council of Europe, *Follow-up response of the Armenian Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on its visit to Armenia from 6 to 17 October 2002*, CPT/Inf (2004) 27.  
<<http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/arm/2004-27-inf-eng.pdf>>
- Danielyan E, *Armenia: Parliament Massacre Still a Mystery Three Years Later*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 28 October 2002.  
<<http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/10/28102002161752.asp>>
- Danielyan E, *Armenians 'Vastly Ignorant of Constitutional Reform'*, Human Rights in Armenia Updatable Internet Resource, 11 October 2004.  
<<http://www.hra.am/eng/index1.php?goto=news&id=1835>>
- Department for International Development, *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform*, <[http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/supporting\\_security.pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/supporting_security.pdf)>
- Edmunds T, *Promoting Democratic Control of Armed Forces in Central and Eastern Europe: Lessons Learned and Future Research Agendas*, Working Paper No. 49, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002.
- Edmunds T, *Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces Working Paper No. 86, 2002.
- Emerson M & Tocci N, *A Stability Pact for the South Caucasus*, CEPS Working Documents No.145, Brussels: CEPS, 2000. Available online at: <[http://shop.ceps.be/BookDetail1.php?item\\_id=55](http://shop.ceps.be/BookDetail1.php?item_id=55)>
- Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2004: Democratisation in East Central Europe and Eurasia*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.  
<<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/nattransit.htm>>
- Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces/Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Principles, mechanism and practices*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces/Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2003.
- Greene O, *International Standards and Obligations: Norms and Criteria for DCAF in the EU, OSCE and OECD Areas*, Working Paper No. 88, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002.
- Groenewald H and Peake G, *Police Reform through Community-based policing: Philosophy and guidelines for implementation*, New York: International Peace Academy/Saferworld, 2004.
- Hänggi H & Winkler T (eds), *Challenges of Security Sector Governance*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003
- Hänggi H (ed.), *Practical Confidence-Building Measures: Does Good Governance of the Security Sector Matter?*, Working Paper No. 107, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003.
- Hendrickson D, *A Review of Security-Sector Reform*, Working Paper Number 1, The Conflict, Study and Development Group at the Centre for Defence Studies, London: King's College, 1999.
- Hiscock D, *The Role of Civil Society in Security Sector Governance in the South Caucasus* in 'Security Sector Governance in Southern Caucasus – Challenges and Visions', Vienna/Geneva: National Defence Academy, Vienna and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2004.
- Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003  
<<http://store.yahoo.com/hrwpubs/worrep19.html>>
- Huntington S, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- IFES-Armenia, *Citizens' Awareness and Participation in Armenia: Survey 2003*, <[http://www.ifes.am/pdf/survey%2003\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ifes.am/pdf/survey%2003_eng.pdf)>
- International Crisis Group, *Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead*, Yerevan/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004. <[http://www.icg.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/158\\_armenia\\_s\\_internal\\_instability\\_ahead.pdf](http://www.icg.org/library/documents/europe/caucasus/158_armenia_s_internal_instability_ahead.pdf)>
- International Peace Academy, *Challenges in Police Reform: Promoting effectiveness and accountability*, New York: International Peace Academy, 2003.
- Iskandarian A, 'Armenian battle of the week', Institute for War and Peace Reporting Caucasus Reporting Service No. 229.  
<[http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau\\_200404\\_229\\_3\\_eng.txt](http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau_200404_229_3_eng.txt)>
- Khachatrian H, *Yerkrapah: 'Lightning Rod' or Political Force in Postwar Armenia?*, EurasiaNet, 13 May 2002, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavo51302a.shtml>>
- Masih, JR and Krikorian RO, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.

- Mathias G, Kendrick D, Peake G, and Groenewald H, *Philosophy and principles of community-based policing*, Belgrade: UNDP/Stability Pact South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2003.
- Matveeva A and Hiscock D (eds), *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided: Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*, London: Saferworld, 2003.
- OECD Policy Brief, *Security Sector Reform and Governance: Policy and Good Practice*, 2004.  
<<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/20/47/31642508.pdf>>
- OSCE Office for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Armenian Presidential Elections September 24, 1996. Final Report*,  
<[http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election\\_reports/am/arm1-2.pdf](http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/am/arm1-2.pdf)>
- OSCE Office for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Presidential Election Second Round 5 March 2003 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*,  
<[http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election\\_reports/am/am\\_5mar2003\\_2r\\_eps.php3](http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/am/am_5mar2003_2r_eps.php3)>
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, *Opinion No. 221 (2000): Armenia's application for membership of the Council of Europe*, Strasbourg: PACE, 2000.  
<<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/taoo/EOP1221.htm>>
- Smith C, *Security-sector reform: development breakthrough or institutional engineering*, in 'Conflict, Security and Development 1:1', London: King's College, 2001.  
<<http://csdg.kcl.ac.uk/Publications/assets/PDF%20files/Smith.pdf>>
- van Eekelen WF, *Democratic Control of Armed Forces: The National and International Parliamentary Dimension*, Occasional Paper No. 2, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002.
- Winkler TH, *Managing Change: The Reform and Democratic Control of the Security Sector and International Order*, Occasional Paper No. 1, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002.
- Wulf H, *Security-Sector Reform in Developing Countries*, Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), 2000.
- Wulf H, *Security Sector Reform*, BICC Brief 15, Bonn: Bonn International Centre for Conversion, 2000.
- Yenokian A, *Armenia: Civilians in National Security Policy*, Conference paper presented at the 1st workshop on 'Civilians in National Security Policy' held in Geneva 2–4 November 2002, organised by the Working Group on the Role of Civilians in National Security Policy of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.  
<[http://www.dcaf.ch/news/Civilian%20Expert\\_Gev\\_041102/Yenokian.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/news/Civilian%20Expert_Gev_041102/Yenokian.pdf)>