Friends or Fellows?

Making sense of the Armenian-Russian Relationship in Light of the

Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

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Abstract

This thesis combines regional security complex theory and relational peace in a theoretical framework which is used to analyze the relationship between Armenia and Russia to the backdrop of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Using qualitative content analysis, important events and statements concerning the relationship before and after the war are analyzed, respectively. The analysis reveals an asymmetrical relationship that is contingent on regional security concerns. Security dynamics in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia has made the relationship appear less stable than before, which raises important questions about future alignment and regional security. While the fundamental relationship between the two countries is the same, two fellows in a state of minimal relational peace, the observed changes in regional security and relations will likely have consequences for future security dilemmas and relations. More generally, the theoretical framework offers an interesting avenue for analyzing relationships, and it can be of use to understand other relationships in the region, or beyond.

Keywords: Armenia, Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh, regional security complex theory, relational peace

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1 Introduction

In peace and conflict research, much attention is given to the relationship between active or former enemies. However, interstate conflict does not only affect the relationship between foes. Conflicts do not occur in a vacuum, and will affect relations with other states. Therefore I want to investigate how interstate conflict can affect relationships between a belligerent and a third state with close relations. The relationship I have chosen is the relationship between Armenia and Russia. It is an interesting case because these two states have close relations to each other, operate in the same region, with Armenia fighting against Azerbaijan in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020.

The former USSR can be roughly divided into liberal states facing towards "the West" on one hand and autocratic states left in Russia's sphere of influence on the other (Stoner 2021). Armenia is an interesting case because it is one of the states that are most dependent on Russia (Stoner 2021:54), but stands out as a democratizer (V-Dem 2023:40) while also moving closer to the EU in recent years (Stoner 2021:52). Therefore, it is interesting to understand whether developments following the latest war signifies a new trend for Armenian-Russian relations, for example if Armenia tries to make itself less dependent on Russia and seek new diplomatic relations. Further, it could have interesting implications beyond the Armenian-Russian relationship and to other post-Soviet states with a complex relation to Russia. Especially considering that Russia, the great power in the region, is becoming more isolated in world politics following its war of aggression against Ukraine (Stoner 2022:38). Lastly, my ambition is that the thesis will be able to say something more general about how wars affect relationships between small and great powers within regions.

The thesis will pursue the following outline: First, necessary background information about Armenian-Russian relations will be provided. Second, the theoretical framework consisting of regional security complex theory and relational peace will be presented. Third, the method, operationalization and material. Then comes the analysis followed by a discussion, and lastly, conclusions.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of the thesis is to explain how Armenian-Russian relations have been shaped by the Second-Nagorno Karabakh War. In order to analyze the relationship, regional security complex theory and relational peace will be used. The Caucasus, where both states are regional players, is a complex region made up of small and great powers that all have different and overlapping interests and who are all drawn into security dilemmas with each other (Buzan & Wæver 2003:420). Therefore, the relationship between Russia and Armenia can be best understood in a regional context, more specifically as part of the post-Soviet sphere. This is especially true since the thesis' approach to the relationship is to view it through the prism of the latest war which, by itself, has regional implications.

To realize the purpose of the thesis, the following research question will be answered: "How has security dynamics following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 shaped the Armenian-Russian relationship?".

2 Background

From the 19th century to present time, Russia has been central to conceptualization of Armenian identity and nationhood. In contrast to the Turks, the Other, Christian Russia was seen as the protector. Its role became even more central during World War One and the Armenian genocide, where Armenian nationalists saw a Russian victory as the only hope for the nation's survival. Russia withdrew from its front against the Ottomans after the Bolshevik revolution, but came back in 1921, striking a deal with the new state of Turkey, resulting in the establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union. This deal meant smaller borders than the historical Armenian lands that nationalists wanted to claim, however, and here can be found two different narratives around Russia's relationship with Armenia. The first, gratefulness towards the Soviet Union as many believed that without its "protection", there would be no Armenian homeland at all. The other is that Armenia is only Russia's friend as long as Armenia subordinates itself to Russia, becoming an obstacle rather than guarantor of security. During most of the Soviet Union's existence, the former narrative of Russia as guarantor of security and the only viable ally dominated (Mirzoyan 2010:22-25).

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has, up until recently, been regarded as a "frozen conflict". The conflict started over 30 years ago, with Armenia and Azerbaijan still part of the Soviet Union, and Nagorno-Karabakh an autonomous region in the Azerbaijani SSR. The war that broke out over the region ended in 1993 with Armenia occupying substantial portions of Azerbaijani territory (Askerov 2020:55). This meant that the territories of the previously autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh populated mainly by Armenians became de facto independent under the name of the Republic of Artsakh (UCDP 2023). Traditionally, Russia and Iran have been on the side of Armenia while Azerbaijan has been supported by Turkey and Israel. Armenia's precarious position and distrust towards Turkey and Azerbaijan has led to substantial dependence on Russia (Yavuz & Gunter 2023:4). During the first war, Russia tried to keep the two evenly matched as they had interest in keeping influence over both. Even leading up to the latest war, Russia has been a large arms supplier for Azerbaijan (Aliyev 2018). Still, for Armenia, Turkish support to Azerbaijan meant that approaching Russia was seen as necessary. Armenia was equipped with weapons, fuel, and credit payments. A year into the war, Russian strategy shifted to a more unilateral approach, taking

a central part of the peace process. A ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994 where outside actors were sidelined (Mirzoyan 2010:31-36).

Then in 1996, several military agreements were signed that defined the relationship onwards. The Armenian-Russian Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance a year later denoted that the two states would lend military support if anyone were to be attacked or threatened by a third party. They also promised to not join any pact or treaty that would threaten either party. Later that year, Armenia agreed to host Russian border troops on its territory and a Russian military base inside Armenia, in Gyumri. These exchanges assured Armenia of Russian military protection, and Russia gained further influence in a geopolitically important region (Mirzoyan 2010:38). Russia also matters economically for Armenia as large proportions of the Armenian economy are Russian-owned (Yavuz & Gunter 2023:4).

3 Theory

3.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional security complex theory (RSCT) is the main theory, and will be used to understand security dynamics in the region since it is, according to its creators Harry Buzan and Ole Wæver, a useful theoretical framework for studying different regions (Buzan & Wæver 2003:3-4). The literature and qualitative content analysis is used to identify "key events" that I analyze with RSCT. RSCT can be used to understand a regional systems' "relative balance of power of, and mutual relationship within it between, regionalising and globalising trends" (Buzan & Wæver 2003:3-4). It is materialist for using distribution of power and the structural scheme of neorealism but also constructivist as it uses securitization theory, meaning that the polarity of the system affects but not decides security relations in the region (Buzan & Wæver 2003:4).

A regional security complex (RSC) is defined by Byzan and Wæver as:

> *...a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.*

> (Buzan & Wæver 2003:44).

Every RSC has a balance of power and consists of different types of powers: Superpowers that can intervene in all RSCs, Great powers that can intervene in a nearby RSC, and Regional powers that act in its own RSC. All other states are restricted to their own RSC and are weak in comparison to the stronger states that shape the balance of power. They play the balance of power game either within the RSC or by seeking help from powers outside its RSC, which is called penetration (Buzan & Wæver 2003:47-49). Apart from balance of power, physical adjacency is also seen as important in forming RSCs, as proximity creates more security interactions. According to Buzan and Wæver: "many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones" (Buzan & Wæver 2003:45).

Regions are presented as a middle level between state and global level. The structure is made up of power relations but also patterns of amity and enmity. According to RSCT, "security

dynamics are inherently relational" (Buzan & Wæver 2003:40-43,49). Buzan and Wæver argue that historical relations as well as specific issues causing cooperation or conflict form a network of "fears, threats and friendships that define an RSC" (Buzan & Wæver 2003:50). These patterns are influenced by underlying factors but are seen as path-dependent to a large part (Buzan & Wæver 2003:50). Relationships are therefore subject to change based on changing perceptions and unfolding of events.

This constructivist strand is made up of securitization theory. Securitization is when an actor (the securitizing actor) paints a security issue as threatening the survival of a referent object. The object can be the state itself, or something more specific like local ecosystems. The referent object is said to be under threat or survival and have a right to survive. What makes securitization separate from other issues is the aspect of survival. Defending the referent object is not subject to normal politics, and the securitizing actor argues that it is valid to use extraordinary methods to solve the issue. When something is labeled as a security issue and securitized, security dynamics emerge (Buzan & Wæver 2003:71).

3.2 Relational Peace

In addition to RSCT, relational peace will be used to understand the relationship, put it into useful analytic terms, and embed the thesis within contemporary peace research. It also rhymes well with RSCT:s emphasis on security dynamics as inherently relational. While mostly used for former foes, the broad understanding of peace advocated by Söderström, Åkebo, and Jarstad enables examining a wide range of cases (Söderström et al. 2021:497). For this reason the theory fits well with the purpose of the thesis: to examine the relationship between two nominally allied countries, Armenia and Russia.

Relational peace is a theory that emphasizes peace as a relationship. It is defined as:

> *A peaceful relation entails behavioral interaction that can be characterized as deliberation, non-domination, and cooperation between the actors in the dyad; the actors involved recognize and trust each other and believe that the relationship is either one between legitimate fellows or between friends.*

(Söderström et al. 2021:496).

Relational peace consists of three components. The first, behavioral interaction, consists of *deliberation, non-domination* and *cooperation*. Deliberation is about exchanging views, where differences and disagreements are allowed to be expressed publicly in an arena for dialogue. It helps define the relationship. The second, non-domination, is about entanglement and power asymmetry between actors. Domination can be measured in what degree the weaker actor changes its behavior due to the stronger. However, some exertion of power can be seen as legitimate if it is mutually recognized and accepted. The third behavioral interaction, cooperation, is about fulfilling goals that complement each other. At a lower level, actors with different goals take actions that benefit the other part. They then embrace the same goals, and at the highest level take on shared interests and redefine the relationship. An important distinction to make, however, is that there is behavior that might seem cooperative but is not peaceful if it happens under conditions of domination (Söderström et al. 2021:489-493).

The second component is subjective attitudes about the other, found in the elements *recognition* and *trust*. Recognition means both recognition as an independent subject (thin recognition) but also recognition of one's self-image and self-esteem (thick recognition). Trust is a very important factor for cooperation, and entails accepting vulnerability expecting positive intentions from the other party (Söderström et al. 2021:494).

The third component is the idea of the relationship, with the distinction between *friends* and *fellows*. Where a fellowship is simple association driven by self-interest devoid of moral obligations, a friendly relationship is one where the actors appreciate each other and display altruism. Friendship goes hand in hand with cooperation, non-domination and trust. Fellows do not need to have friendly feelings and may choose to compete non-violently with each other. However, they may very well choose to deliberate or cooperate as well. A fellowship would correspond to lower levels of cooperation whereas friendships will develop a shared vision. Though fellows will disagree on many issues, in contrast to foes, they recognize each other and deliberate (Söderström et al. 2021:495-498).

Söderström et al. argue that a case needs to fulfill one element in every component to qualify for the minimal requirement of relational peace. Further, it is important to acknowledge that two actors may think of the relationship in different terms. The authors argue that relationships that are asymmetrical in this aspect are more likely to change (Söderström et al. 2021:497-499).

3.3 Previous Research

Research on Armenian-Russian relations is fairly limited. Much of the literature on the relationship puts emphasis on Armenian-Russian relations compared to the EU. This research provides valuable insights but analyzes foreign policy evolution primarily in relation to EU-Russia conflict lines rather than the Armenian security situation. Examples include Tom Casier from 2022, who compares the EU and Russia's discourses on Armenia compared to Ukraine in 2014. He also writes about Russian coercion towards Armenia in getting them to join the Eurasian Economic Union (Casier 2022). Ter-Matevosyan et al. unfold the motivations of Armenian and Russian motivations behind Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union instead of going into the Association Agreement with the EU, looking both at Russia's aggressiveness in the foreign policy area and geopolitical and socio-political issues in Armenia (Ter-Matevosyan 2017). Aram Terzyan also investigates Russia's use of coercion in influencing Armenian foreign policy decisions in comparison to the EU:s normative power (Terzyan 2017). My contribution to this strand of research is to use their findings but using a different method, putting it in a regional context and classifying the relationship according to the components of relational peace.

One of the more published authors in the area is Aram Terzyan, who has published several articles on the topic. Terzyan has together with John Åberg published an article on Armenian foreign policy evolution, looking both at structure and actor. The two demonstrate how security concerns at the structural level but also the personal convictions of leaders can explain Armenia's choices of cooperating with Russia (Åberg & Terzyan 2018). Additionally, he has published an article on the 2018 Velvet revolution in Armenia, focusing on internal Armenian affairs but also putting them in an international context. He explains how the revolution focused on domestic affairs and continued the previous foreign policy course (Terzyan 2019). This thesis contributes to this research by applying a distinct and not-yet tested theoretical framework by which the events can be understood.

Buzan and Wæver present, apart from their theoretical framework, their analysis of different regional security complexes. Buzan and Wæver identify the post-Soviet space as a *centered* security complex (Buzan & Wæver 2003:55). A centered RSC differs from a standard security complex in that they have a unipolar power at its center that is not only a regional power, but a great power or superpower. The post-Soviet space is an example of the former. It

means that the great power at the center of the security system, Russia, dominates the security dynamics (Buzan & Wæver 2003:55-58).

They identify the Caucasus as a subcomplex within the post-Soviet space. A subcomplex is defined the same as a RSC, patterns of security connections within a region, but situated in a wider RSC (Buzan & Wæver 2003:51). It contains security issues within the subcomplex itself, but also dynamics that interact with the rest of the RSC and regions beyond. For example, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is both a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also has implications beyond the two states as they seek support from Russia, Turkey, the EU, or the USA (Buzan & Wæver 2003:420). While regional actors are the main drivers of conflicts, Russia withholds its power in the region (Buzan & Wæver 2003:419-423). Since Buzan and Wæver's *Regions and Powers* was published in 2003 much has happened, however. For example, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh did not follow a constructive route like they hypothesized it would (Buzan & Wæver 2003:413). Therefore, an updated RSCT analysis of the second war over Nagorno-Karabakh is justified and needed.

Looking at previous research, there is enough scholarly material to lay some foundations, but also plenty of room for exploring how the relationship has changed due to security dynamics in recent years. The research provides meaningful information about the Armenian-Russian relationship which can be analyzed from the theoretical framework of RSCT and relational peace. It describes Armenian-Russian relations, but (apart from Buzan & Wæver) does not have the regional view as its vantage point, or uses the relational peace framework to classify the relationship. The combination of the two theoretical perspectives and the case selection is unique and therefore fills a research gap.

4 Method and Material

4.1 Case Study

By doing a case study, the relationship between the two countries can be analyzed and understood in detail. The advantage of the case study is that it leads to high internal validity through an intense study of the case. A smaller sample of cases is also preferable to generating hypotheses instead of testing them, which is what this thesis does by asking the question how the relationship has changed. By researching this, the ambition is to unravel how it has developed since 2020. In addition to internal validity, however, the case study should also be externally valid in theory, which means that the study should be able to be applied in other contexts (Halperin & Heath 2017:234). My hope is that the theoretical framework of the thesis and its findings can be used to analyze relations in the post-Soviet regional security complex as well as laying a puzzle piece in relations within the Caucasus subcomplex. The case I have chosen should be seen as a critical case, as it is critical to testing the theoretical framework which might be used to understand and analyze other cases (Halperin & Heath 2017:235).

4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis will be used as a method. It is useful for analyzing official, cultural and personal documents, including statements by leaders and news reports, which is exactly the kind of data that will be analyzed. While content analysis differs from discourse analysis as it focuses more on the text itself, qualitative content analysis involves an interpretive analysis where meanings and motives are revealed. It stands in contrast to quantitative content analysis which analyzes the manifest content of the material (Halperin & Heath 2017:373-376). After selecting material, defining categories, choosing the recording unit, coding is required in order to identify the categories and variables that are sought after. It ensures a quick collection of the data related to the theme since the recording units are marked to indicate what category it belongs to (Halperin & Heath 2017:376-380).

A qualitative content analysis goes hand-in-hand with the selected theories. It complements the constructivist elements of RCST as well as the relation-based relational peace, as qualitative content analysis believes it is possible to interpret meanings and motives from the

text. It is also useful since it can be used to classify long texts as an expression of the elements of relational peace.

4.3 Operationalization

To analyze the research question, RSCT and relational peace are used: RSCT to identify and analyze processes of securitization affecting the relationship. Buzan and Wæver offer a method to trace RSC's empirically – looking at the patterns of security connectedness. This is in essence what the theory is about. First, the researcher asks if an issue is securitized successfully by an actor. If so, trace the different connections and interactions: how does this threaten the security of other actors? The security connections then make up what Buzan and Wæver call clusters of interconnected security concerns, which is what constitutes a RSC (Buzan & Wæver 2003:73). Doing this, it is possible to track important events and security dynamics that are relevant to the Armenian-Russian relationship. The analysis only deals with the relationship, and not the entire RSC.

RSCT also mentions patterns of amity and enmity which are shaped by actors' interpretations of events (Buzan & Wæver 2003:40). Buzan and Wæver do not define what classes as an act of amity or enmity, however. I have chosen to complement this lack in RSCT by bringing in another theory – relational peace. It will be used as a framework through which the Armenian-Russian relationship can be analyzed in a coherent manner. The advantage of using Söderström et al:s framework for relational peace is that it is broken down into clear-cut variables that can be studied in isolation, and the authors encourage testing what components and elements are present in different cases (Söderström et al. 2021:).

Table 1. Components of relational peace

Component	Relational peace (ideal type)
Behavioral interaction	Deliberation, non-domination, cooperation
Subjective attitudes toward the other	Mutual recognition, mutual trust
Idea of relationship	Fellowship or friendship

Attachment 1 (Söderström et al. 2021:497).

The material will be coded according to the scheme above. The three *variables* are "behavioral interaction", "subjective attitudes toward the other", and "idea of the

relationship". The *categories* are the ideal types of relational peace: "deliberation, non-domination, cooperation", "mutual recognition, mutual trust", and "fellowship or friendship" (Söderström et al. 2021:497).

Definitions of categories are as follows:

Deliberation

- "the exchange of views combined with the actors involved giving reasons for their positions" (Söderström et al. 2021:489).

Non-domination

- "the degree to which weaker actors' room for action is determined by the other" (Söderström et al. 2021:491).

Cooperation

- Behavior "where the actors involved work and act together on shared issues instead of competing" (Söderström et al. 2021:492).

Recognition

- "a way of extending acceptance of the other actor" (Söderström et al. 2021:489-493).

Trust

- "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998:395).

Idea of the relationship

- Fellowship: "an idea of the relationship that is characterized by legitimate coexistence, where the two actors accept that they share a space or community with one another, making them a legitimate other" (Söderström et al. 2021:495).
- Friendship: A relationship where the two parties cherish each other, show affection, display signs of altruism, moral obligation and possibly developing shared visions (own definition based on Söderstöm et al. 2021:495-496).

Statements and events connected to the "key events" will be coded according to these categories and then analyzed, where the components of relational peace will complement RSCT.

4.4 Material

The empiric material consists partly of books and articles that cover Armenian-Russian relations and the South Caucasus. Secondary sources like these are needed to provide background and material for the analysis. This type of material can also be found in policy reports and documents from NGOs that focus on the South Caucasus. Further, statements by leaders are useful to get an understanding of how the parties view the relationship. This way, it is possible to analyze the relationship based on what the parties say and how they act. Statements can be found directly from the source in for example press conferences, but also as secondary sources via news resources.

News resources are useful source material as they contain large amounts of information compared to other sources (Öberg & Sollenberg 2011:47-49). For this reason, news resources would be preferred. They cover a large quantity of key events and processes that might otherwise be lost, or have not yet been covered (Möller 2011:85-87).

However, since the Caucasus is an underreported area, selection of material has not become an issue. The question has rather been if there is any material rather than what it says. This way, it is possible to collect information without worrying about skewed results. One possible limitation is of course that I speak neither Armenian nor Russian. However, translations from english-speaking media have been available for most statements and news, so this has not been damaging to the research process.

5 Analysis

The analysis will take the following steps: First, analysis of Armenian-Russian relations prior to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War using RSCT and relational peace to provide a benchmark that post-war developments can be compared to. The first subsection will cover RSCT and the second the components of relational peace. The next section covers the post-war developments by also analyzing the situation using RSCT and relational peace. The goal is to identify processes of securitization with RSCT and understand how these security dynamics affected the Armenian-Russian relationship with relational peace.

5.1 Pre-War

This subsection covers security dynamics during former president Serzh Sargsyan's time in office (2008-2018) as well as during current prime minister Nikol Pashinyan's time in office (2018-). These two leader's tenures are chosen because they contain "key events". In 2013 and 2014 under Sargsyan, Armenia made important choices navigating between the EU and Russia. For Pashinyan, his ascension to power in the Velvet revolution meant large political upheaval in Armenia and is therefore a significant moment that needs to be accounted for.

5.1.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

When president Sargsyan came to power in 2008, he sought a foreign policy that would move Armenia closer to the EU and to also approach Turkey. At the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, Sargsyan said that "The people of Armenia have made their historic and irreversible choice (…) For us, it is a homecoming to the European civilization and cultural realm, to which we belong, and where we have been ever present" (Sargsyan 2011). When the Eastern Partnership launched in 2009, Sargsyan gladly welcomed it (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:165).

Attempts to establish relations with Turkey were unsuccessful due to Turkey's ties with Azerbaijan. When the issue of rapprochement was on the table in 2008/2009, Azerbaijan threatened Turkey with changed gas prices and establishment of a transit regime for gas exports. Valuing its economic interests and relations with the "brother country", Turkey backed from establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:166).

This successful securitization of the Armenian-Turkish relations in turn led Sargsyan to believe that for Armenia to be secure, it would have to rely on Russia (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:167). In a speech from the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in 2011, Sargsyan effectively securitized the EU-Azerbaijan energy partnership, saying that the uneven development of the region (strengthening Azerbaijan), would undermine regional stability and possibly fuel conditions for a new war (Sargsyan 2011). Therefore, while continuing working with the Eastern Partnership, believing both cooperation with the EU and Russia was possible, the strategic partnership with Russia became top priority for Sargsyan (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:167). The Armenian foreign policy has been self-described as a "policy of complementarity", but has after 2013 been described instead as a policy of supplementarity where more focus is attributed to Russia (Vasilyan 2017:33).

The Armenian choice to focus on its Russian relations despite moving closer to Europe came as a result of Russia disrupting the latter process. In 2013, when Armenia was approaching the Association Agreement with the EU, Russia put pressure on Armenia to instead join the Eurasian Customs Union. The measures that Russia took to protect its interest was to use its energy advantage. Since Armenia is dependent on Russia for its energy, Russia raised the price of gas by 50% to give a hint of what might come if Armenia would not join the customs union. Once Armenia had joined the union, the prices were lowered again. President Sargsyan used the hypothetical hardships that were to come with not following Russia (Terzyan 2017:190-191, Casier 2022:1682). As he put it, the choice was economical instead of civilizational (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017:350). This shows a clear securitization of the Association Agreement by Russia, with Russian interests as the referent object threatened by the agreement with Armenia, thus justifying extraordinary action in the form of economic extortion.

Another set of security dynamics that influenced the decision was security dynamics in Ukraine. Sargsyan made references to the 2014 events in Ukraine, where president Yanukovich was ousted and Russia annexed Crimea, motivating the decision with not wanting to provoke Russia, rather staying under its protection (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:168-169).

Instead of signing the Association Agreement, Armenia would sign the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2017. It excludes important parts of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area that were part of the Association

Agreement as well as provisions on foreign policy, as these areas are incompatible with the membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (Casier 2022:1677-1678).

Sargsyan's approach to the EU and the following events demonstrate the usefulness of RSCT, as it describes the role of Russia vis-a-vis Armenia well. As a unipolar power in a centered RSC, Russia is very sensitive to penetration into "its own RSC" as the main actor influencing the security dynamics, which it perceives itself to be entitled to. The EU can be seen as a penetrating power to which Russia eventually decided to resist. Russia securitizes when it feels that states in its RSC are coming closer to the EU or NATO, which is clear in the case of Armenia. When this happens, relations might deteriorate further. With penetration, balance of power and physical adjacency also matters. The competition between Russia and the EU was much more fierce, within the same RSC, in the context of the Ukrainian Association Agreement (Casier 2022). The physical proximity between Russia and Ukraine makes it more of a security threat in the Russian perspective, in addition to the power asymmetry between Russia and Armenia, with the latter being far more dependent on Russia. Because of its role in the RSC, however, Russia securitized Armenia to hinder its entry into the Association Agreement with the EU.

The 2018 Velvet revolution in Armenia was a key event in Armenian political history which constituted a mass-movement for social change (Shougarian 2019:27), and will therefore be part of the analysis. It was less of a radical evolution of Armenian-Russian relations, however, and rather demonstrated a continuity in the previous policy course.

The revolution was caused by the low approval rate of President Serzh Sargsyan. The political system was severely corrupt, and Sargsyan's Republican Party held a monopoly over Armenian politics. Long-term economical difficulties caused by the 2008 financial crisis was also a key factor that reinforced dissatisfaction with the political system. The demonstrations were ignited when it became clear that Sargsyan would become Prime Minister after his outgoing term as president. The peaceful revolution was led by Nikol Pashinyan, with road-blocks, civil disobedience and mass strikes as part of the protests. Pashinyan was detained, but when the protests became more and more intense, Sargsyan stepped down as Prime Minister and Pashinyan became prime minister (Miarka 2019:42-46).

Revolutions in post-Soviet countries have otherwise led to Russian skepticism and have been seen as setbacks for Russia. However, the 2018 revolution in Armenia was not securitized as

a threat to Russian interest in the same way as in countries like Ukraine and Georgia (Terzyan 2019:25).

Before the revolution, Pashinyan was skeptical towards Armenian dependence on Russia. His faction in parliament proposed to withdraw from the Eurasian Economic Union and framed Russian policy as intervening in Armenia's domestic affairs. Once in power, however, the course changed (Terzyan 2019:25-27). A week after becoming prime minister, Pashinyan met Vladimir Putin in Sochi where he said about the relationship, "...there are also things that do not need any discussion" (Reuters 2018). Pashinyan described how there is a consensus and no doubt in Armenia over the importance of the relations, and that he appreciated Russia's constructive position on the protests. Putin in turn wished Pashinyan success and hoped the relations would continue to develop favorably (Reuters 2018). He added that the two states have always supported each other on the international arena, especially in the UN (Terzyan 2019:29-30). Looking for example at the issue of Crimea, this is true, since Armenia under Pashinyan continued to vote against the annual UN General Assembly resolutions aimed at Russia (United Nations General Assembly 2018, 2019).

5.1.2 Relational Peace

5.1.2.1 Behavioral interaction

Deliberation

Although there were, as demonstrated below, elements of domination in the interaction between Armenia and Russia during the pre-war period, there were elements of deliberation in the relationship. It would at least be unfair to claim that there was no deliberation. It fits into the minimum definition of deliberation that Söderström et al. uses: "individuals provide public reasons for their positions and decisions" (Söderström et al. 2021:489). On the one hand, the Russian attempts to dominate Armenia speak against this, but on the other hand, statements from President Sargsyan demonstrate the reasoning for making the choices he did (Terzyan 2017:190-191, Casier 2022:1682).

Cooperation

The security dynamics vis-a-vis Azerbaijan and the EU led to the idea of Russia as an indispensable ally being reinforced (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:167). This in turn resulted in more cooperation through participation in the Eurasian Customs Union and the continued

strategic cooperation. There is one caveat, however. As Söderström et al. points out, cooperation under conditions of domination does not fulfill ideal cooperation (Söderström 2021:489). The components of relational peace should not be seen as binary, however, and it is therefore justified to say that there was a degree of cooperation. The two countries had strong relations despite its hardships and asymmetry, but the cooperation is definitely at a lower level.

Non-domination

There are strong signs of domination in the Armenian-Russian relationship prior to the 2020 war. First, Russia's securitization of the Association Agreement and Armenia changing its mind due to Russia's economic influence (Terzyan 2017:190-191, Casier 2022:1682). Second, Russian posturing towards other countries in its RSC seems to also have influenced the Armenian leadership to be careful not to provoke Russia (Åberg & Terzyan 2018:168-169). The revolutionary movement and then administration led by Pashinyan also made a U-turn when it decided to change its Russia-critical policies and instead opt for strategic cooperation (Terzyan 2019:25-27, Reuters 2018). Thus, it would be unfair to call the relationship as containing non-domination.

5.1.2.2 Subjective attitudes

Recognition

Not that much can be said about recognition. At the most basic level, recognition is about the acceptance of the other's existence. A thicker recognition, on the other hand, is about self-esteem and being appreciated for one's unique features, and is connected to values such as dignity (Söderström et al. 2021:493). Although a bit difficult to translate to state-level, one can argue that it is a thin rather than thick recognition. The two states have had close cooperation for a long time, but at the same time Russia is not afraid to act tough when it wants to (Terzyan 2017:190-191, Casier 2022:1682), which does not signal recognition and deep respect for the other's identity and desires.

Trust

It is evident that Armenia leaned towards Russia based on the supposed security umbrella it offers. Especially Pashinyan's move to side with Russia seems to have been motivated by a certain degree of trust, albeit its motivations not entirely pure. Looking at the definition:

"Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998:395), one can argue that trust was present. Despite its previous criticism towards Russia, Pashinyan and his movement sought deliberately to keep the revolution as a domestic affair (Terzyan 2019:24). It must therefore be understood as a type of bargain, compromising one's belief and showing weakness in anticipation of receiving positive behavior from Russia in return. It is more difficult to translate the trust component to Russia, as it is much more powerful than Armenia and less dependent on any positive expectations of Armenian behavior. What could be argued however – is that Russia showed trust in showing restraint and acceptance for a movement that might otherwise have been perceived as anti-Russian.

5.1.2.3 Idea of the relationship

When analyzing the Armenian-Russian relationship during this time period, it is evidently guided by pragmatism and realism rather than any warm feelings of belonging. As Sargsyan himself motivated when sticking to the Eurasian Customs Union instead of the EU, the choice was economical instead of civilizational, with security and economical aspects guiding the choice instead (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017:350). Under Pashinyan this trend continued. Despite his own previous criticisms of dependence on Russia, he took the realpolitik choice of aligning his country with Russia when he got into power (Terzyan 2019:24). Therefore, the relationship should be classified as a relationship between fellows. Even though Armenia and Russia were closely aligned on the international stage, it would be a stretch to call it peace between friends considering the domination and path of events. For Russia, the same is true. Russia coerced Armenia into joining the customs union. That is not behavior between friends, but rather between fellows who according to Söderström et al. can compete with each other (Söderström et al. 2021:496). Despite both sides' warm words on the Armenian-Russian cooperation, the relation must be seen as one between fellows rather than friends.

5.2 Post-War

This section will analyze how the security dynamics in conjunction with and following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 have affected the relationship between Armenia and Russia.

5.2.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

To understand the contemporary relationship demands an understanding of the war of 2020 and following security dynamics. As Russia was not a belligerent, the war itself will not be subject to great analysis but rather its consequences. RSCT will be used to identify security dynamics that have served a crucial role in shaping the relations between states within the security complex. The next subsection will then evaluate how these security dynamics have affected the relationship between Armenia and Russia.

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 proved that Azerbaijan now had the upper hand in the conflict. Propped up by Turkish arms not in the least drones, Azerbaijan's army recaptured much of the territory that was lost to Armenia in the first war (Kinik & Çelik 2021:170, Rubin 2021:7-8). The war also proved that Russia had a red line where it felt obliged to respond, but did not outright support Armenia. A ceasefire agreement was signed, however, on the 9th of November by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin as mediator (Semercioğlu 2021:57). Apart from ending hostilities, the agreement dictated that Armenian forces were to leave the districts captured by Azerbaijan. The ceasefire agreement also dictated that Russian peacekeepers were to be deployed inside Nagorno-Karabakh as well as along the Lachin corridor which is a route connecting Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (President of Russia 2020).

Attachment 2 (BBC 2023).

The controversy over the Lachin corridor has been one of the most pressing security issues after the end of the 2020 war. Azerbaijan has been able to reap benefits from successfully securitizing the issue. The way Azerbaijan did this was to frame gold mining inside Nagorno-Karabakh as a threat to the environment. The measures it took was to support what Azerbaijan calls "eco-activists", which it denies any ties to, who demonstrate and block the road into Nagorno-Karabakh (CNN 2023). The protestors are believed to be backed by the state, however. The blockade has

seriously affected the 120,000 inhabitants' access to food and medical supplies. Basic health care and medicine are scarce, and even the most basic food items are difficult to get hold of (Amnesty International 2023). Supply of gas and electricity has also been disrupted as a result of the blockade. The state denies allegations that any goods are hindered, instead blaming the Russian peacekeepers for any disruptions. Armenia, meanwhile, has criticized the Russian peacekeepers for not doing anything about the blockade (Crisis Group 2023).

In response to the blockade of the Lachin corridor, Armenia has securitized the issue in return. It frames the blockade as a threat to the survival of Armenians inside of Nagorno-Karabakh, calling it an attempt of ethnic cleansing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2023). Naturally, the Azerbaijani state is seen as the main threat to the referent object of Armenians. Interestingly enough, however, the Russian peacekeepers have also come to be seen as a threat in the securitization process. The demonstrations have, after all, occurred on territory under the Russian peacekeepers' authority, and they are therefore in the eyes of Armenia permitting a developing threat towards Armenians in the region (JAMnews 2022).

Further, Russia's war in Ukraine is another security dynamic that has had regional repercussions. Crisis Group lists the war in Ukraine as one of the factors that has motivated Azerbaijani military action during 2022 (Crisis Group 2022). It is indeed noteworthy that Azerbaijan has begun several attacks against Armenia and Artsakh during 2022, when Russia had become bogged down in Ukraine. The first two came in March and August, and in September Azerbaijan's military occupied positions on Armenian territory. The operation in March saw Azerbaijan capture the village of Farukh in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is supposed to be protected by Russian peacekeepers. The offensive in August was also directed at Nagorno-Karabakh where Azerbaijan managed to capture strategically important positions (Crisis Group 2023). The attacks in September were larger, and Azerbaijani military attacked along a 200 km wide front over two days where according to Armenia, Azerbaijan's military captured 10 square km of Armenian territory (Crisis Group 2023). As such, the securitization move by Russia against Ukraine and subsequent war presented Azerbaijan with new alternatives, where it decided to go on the offensive against Armenia. As such, it is an example of how the centered character of the RSC means that the great power's security dynamics creates ripple effects through the system.

The war in Ukraine has also had some other, rather unexpected consequences for Armenia and Russia. After the clashes in September 2022, Armenia wanted to be able to prosecute war crimes by ratifying the statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague (Open Caucasus Media 2023). The constitutional court approved for the parliament to enact the ratification in March 2023. However, this approval came only one week after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin over war crimes committed in relation to the war in Ukraine. Armenia has been warned with "extremely negative consequences" if the parliament goes ahead and ratifies the statute, and Russia views it as unacceptable for Armenia to accede concerning the, according to Moscow, illegal warrants (Reuters 2023, Open Caucasus Media 2023). This move has in turn deteriorated relations further as Russia a week later securitized Armenian dairy as a threat to its national consumer markets, imposing a ban. According to the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Supervision, Rosselkhoznadzor, the decision was allegedly taken as Armenian products could not meet Russian standards (Lomsadze 2023, Open Caucasus Media 2023, Kerobyan 2023). Considering the timing, however, political motives are not difficult to find. Russia has done several similar bans on nearby countries' food products in conjunction with strained relations (Lomsadze 2023, Lomsadze 2015). So while it might seem trivial, the decision will have an impact considering Armenia's heavy reliance on trade with Russia.

Lastly, the latest developments along the Lachin corridor have followed the same patterns as before. Azerbaijan has now established its own checkpoint at the road, as it once again securitized the use of the road. The referent objects in this case is the agreement and safety along the road, which Armenia is allegedly threatening, motivating the action to establish its own checkpoint in territory that is supposed to be controlled by the Russian peacekeepers. The MFA claims in a statement that the road has been used for illicit transport of weapons, ammunition, terrorists, natural resources, and cultural property (Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023). Armenia once again used this as an opportunity to securitize Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, with the Armenian MFA directly issuing a statement. In this statement, the Armenian ministry of foreign affairs heavily criticizes Azerbaijan as they mean the installation of the checkpoint violates the agreement and is part of a plot of ethnically cleansing Nagorno-Karabakh. It also calls on Russia to fulfill its obligations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2023).

5.2.2 Relational peace

This subsection will demonstrate how the security dynamics since 2020 that were identified in the previous subsection have directly influenced the Armenian-Russian relationship.

5.2.2.1 Behavioral interaction

Deliberation

When looking at statements from the Armenian side, representatives of Armenia express their positions relatively freely and motivate them accordingly with regards to Russia.

When looking at the situation around the Lachin corridor between Armenia and Azerbaijan, there are examples of deliberation between Armenia and Russia. One is a statement by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs a few weeks into the blockade of the Lachin corridor. The blockade is labeled a "policy of ethnic cleansing" and emphasizes the urgent situation. It is then made clear that they "expect the Russian Federation to undertake precise efforts to eliminate this flagrant violation without any preconditions." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2023). Rather than expressing views that comply with some kind of consensus or mirroring the Kremlin's narrative, Armenia is evidently confident in making demands towards Russia and voicing its concerns.

Statements by Armenian prime minister Pashinyan reinforce this view. In a government meeting in 2022, Pashinyan very clearly demonstrated his frustration with the Russian peacekeepers and their reluctance to act with regards to the Lachin corridor. When the blockade was established in late 2022, Pashinyan asked with the background of the worsened security situation what Russia's plan to upkeep the ceasefire agreement was, arguing that the case should be referred to the UN security council or be strengthened with a multinational force if Russia cannot fulfill its obligations. While showing support and appreciating the Russian peacekeepers for being present, the prime minister described its position as "unacceptable to us" (JAMnews 2022). In response, spokesperson for the Russian MFA Maria Zakharova labeled Pashinyan's criticism "unacceptable", claiming that the peacekeepers are doing everything they can to improve the situation (JAMnews 2022, Ghazanchyan 2022). Thus, one can certainly say that there is deliberation, although frustrated and strained at times.

The recent developments along the Lachin corridor also display deliberation. The statement by the Armenian MFA is directed at Azerbaijan but also Russia as it affirms that the area is under the responsibility of the Russian peacekeepers, as well as calling upon Russia to "finally fulfill the the obligation under provision 6 of the Trilateral statement by eliminating the illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor and ensuring the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from the entire security zone of the corridor" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2023). The statements from the Armenian ministry of foreign affairs clearly demonstrates that the Armenian authorities are disappointed in the Russian peacekeeping delegation and they disagree with the way that Russia acts in this issue. The Armenian authorities clearly argue the reasons for their position and do not hold back when mentioning the shortcomings of their supposed ally. As such, it clearly signifies deliberation. In this aspect and situation, attitudes can be seen as more of a type of partnership in contrast to enmity or subordination.

Cooperation

The Russian mediated ceasefire and the subsequent deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh is an excellent example of where one could point to initially lower levels of cooperation, Where the parties have different goals but take actions that happen to benefit the other party. They do not cooperate as allies with a shared vision and common goals, but the presence of the Russian peacekeepers guarantees some foreign policy goals of Armenia and gives a sense of security. As time has gone by however, it is more reasonable to say that there is little to no cooperation in this regard, since the Russian peacekeepers have been consistently passive with regards to the security situation in the Lachin corridor.

Pashinyan has even gone so far as to call the presence of Russian military personnel a threat to Armenian security rather than a guarantee for Armenian security (JAMnews 2023, Avedian 2023). This demonstrates a clear lack of cooperation and shared vision between the supposed allies. Although Armenia in principle appreciates the presence of the peacekeepers, that appreciation seems to be driven by the fact that someone rather than no one is stepping in to protect Armenia. The Russian motivation for placing the peacekeepers seems to be driven more by a will to control the peace process of two former subjects that it wants to maintain good relations with. Thus, the peacekeepers are understood differently for both parties, a difference that Armenia has been realizing over the last two years. Relational peace describes how some signs of domination, in this case the presence of military personnel, can be

cooperation if it is seen as legitimate by both parties (Söderström et al. 2021:491). This could perhaps describe the situation early on in the deployment. Russia vowed to protect Armenian territory if it were to be attacked (Deutsche Welle 2020), but has as of yet not taken direct action to enforce the ceasefire agreement. Instead, Armenia has shown its frustration of what it sees as an ally letting them down.

Non-domination

When it comes to non-domination, focus is on Russia since it is, as has been shown, a dominant regional power within the regional security complex. Russia has certainly shown tendencies of domination against Armenia when it does not see that the latter conforms to its foreign policy vision, the dairy ban being one such example (Lomsadze 2023, Open Caucasus Media 2023, Kerobyan 2023). The difference is that Armenia seems to be less concerned with not threatening Russia and instead trying to chart its own course independently.

Not in the least can this be observed with its increasing cooperation with the EU. In late December of 2022, right before Prime Minister Pashinyan criticized the Russian peacekeepers for their inability to act, Armenia invited the EU for deployment of a civilian observer group. The mission was established on the 23d of January 2023, and consists of a staff of 100 civilians (Council of the EU 2023). This sparked outrage in Moscow (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023), which demonstrates how Armenia is less intent on making provocations towards Russia when its own security is at stake.

5.2.2.2 Subjective attitudes

Recognition

As for recognition, not much can be said. As already stated, Russia is mostly interested in securing its interest in the South Caucasus rather than any deep extension of concessions or acceptance that matches the others' self-image. Therefore, it is a thin recognition just like during the pre-war conditions.

Trust

While there is certainly a recognition of the strong shared bonds between Russia and Armenia, trust between the two states appears to have been faltering since the 2020 war.

The recent security dynamics have directly affected Armenia's trust in Russia. Armenia has been questioning the missing help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Mejlumyan 2022), a regional security organization consisting of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan that is on paper supposed to guarantee collective security to its members but have never truly developed such commitments (Baev 2014).

While CSTO is an organization that contains other members than only Russia, the disappointment transfers to bilateral relations as well. As previously mentioned, Nikol Pashinyan criticized the Russian military presence and suggested that the matter should be directed to the United Nations Security Council if Russia is unable to provide security (JAMnews 2022). Pashinyan's statements suggested that Russia is a security threat to Armenia rather than guaranteeing its security. This is certainly serious for the trust between the two states as Russia's security guarantees are the cornerstone for trust between the two. It demonstrates disappointment and that Armenia is questioning Russia's will to uphold its bargains.

There is still some trust and sense of mutual recognition of security relations, however. While criticism has certainly been directed towards Russia, Armenian officials have at the same time been careful to also emphasize that it in principle agrees and appreciates the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces. In the same press conference where Pashinyan criticized the Russian peacekeepers he also mentions that "we are not criticizing them, we are voicing our concerns" (JAMnews 2023). Still, following the previous patterns this might very well be a sign that Armenia does not want to anger Russia too much, even though it is questioning its reliability.

Taking into account these recent diplomatic activities, it is clear that Yerevan feels it can no longer put all its trust in Moscow to protect against Azerbaijani military action.

5.2.2.3 Idea of the relationship

If anything, it has become clear to Yerevan since the 2020 war that Moscow can certainly not be regarded as a "friend" when it comes to protecting vital Armenian security concerns. As mentioned before, the relationship is best regarded as a fellowship before the 2020 war. Using an interpretive approach of the relationship it can be said that there before was at least a formal narrative or idea of friendship with Russia, which has started to deteriorate as it is

becoming more and more clear that Russia is not showing the will and power to manage the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

5.3 Summary: The Indispensable Ally?

To sum up the analysis, what change can be observed due to security dynamics in the RSC? Several security dynamics have been identified that have shaped the relationship. Pre-war, the securitization processes regarding the EU and the association agreement and Pashinyan's consistency in keeping with previous tradition meant *deliberation*, a degree of *cooperation* and Russian *domination*. Both parties displayed a thin mutual *recognition* and partially *trust*. The relationship is classified as a *fellowship* rather than friendship since it is one between legitimate others with signs of cooperation but also domination.

After the 2020 war, the sides are still *deliberating* and Armenia is showing signs of *non-domination* as it is pursuing many own policies while being less coerced by Russia despite its dissatisfaction. *Cooperation* between the two appears to be deteriorating as the non-complementarity of both sides' goals are becoming more clear. They still have thin *recognition* of each other, but *trust* has dropped and Armenia is now questioning whether Russia really can be trusted to shoulder its security promises. The view of the relationship should still be classified as a *fellowship*, as they are not foes.

In conclusion, security dynamics within Armenia and Russia's RSC have worsened relations between the two states. Armenia has been forced to reevaluate its relationship with Russia as a consequence of these security dynamics while still being heavily dependent on Russia. However, looking at the chart below that summarizes the findings, not much has really changed in the bigger picture. It is also important to keep in mind that Söderström et al. do not see all components of relational peace as binary (Söderström et al. 2021:492). Despite some changes in the components of relational peace, the relationship in itself has not changed drastically. Meanwhile, this does not mean that the security dynamics and changed relations will have no substantial impact on policy or the security situation. While the nature of the relationship is still much the same, the post-war developments will likely have serious implications for long-term security and relations.

	Pre-war	Post-war
Behavioral interaction		
Deliberation	Yes	Yes
Non-domination	No	Less domination
Cooperation	Yes	Yes
Subjective attitudes		
Mutual recognition	Yes, thin	Yes, thin
Mutual trust	Yes, partially	No
Idea of relationship		
Fellowship	Yes	Yes
Friendship	No	No

6 Discussion

What can be generalized from the analysis? Applying the theoretical framework shows that wars in a centered RSC can lead to worsened relations between the unipolar great power and smaller states, as smaller states want to maintain their security and the great power its position.

As RSCT points out, relations between states are path-dependent and are in a way their own best explanations. What the analysis has shown, in essence, is that between a smaller state involved in a conflict and a regional power, war affects how the parties view each other and their relationship. It is, perhaps not shockingly, most visible in *trust* between the states as wars result in questions and dilemmas of responsibility for the regional power. The findings also show that relations are indeed path-dependent, discrediting the idea that there is any perfect formula that explains the phenomenon. What this particular case has shown is that in a centered RSC, the unipolar great power has incentives to maintain its influence and good relations with both smaller states, leading to responses that are seen as insufficient, which in turn risks deteriorating relations. Therefore it is interesting and relevant to refine, develop and use the theoretical framework to analyze similar (or different) cases.

As for the case itself, the findings can reveal interesting policy implications to reflect upon. The ambiguous position of Russia and constraints caused by the war in Ukraine might start a development towards decreased Russian influence in Armenia. Should it decide to try to keep Armenia in its sphere of influence, however, relations could turn antagonistic. Whether Russian influence over Armenia will decrease more or not depends on whether Russia has the means to keep its influence. Otherwise it is possible that Armenia can become even more bold in seeking foreign support, seeing as it perceives itself to be threatened.

It is also possible that there are other important factors that are not covered as much in the analysis. The consequences of the war in Ukraine could certainly be analyzed even more, although it would require a larger scope and the consequences are difficult to assess. While the analysis itself is enough to stand on its own legs, other interesting factors to look at could be relations between Russia and Azerbaijan to embed the analysis even more in regional dynamics. That would require a much wider scope, however.

When it comes to theory, it is also relevant to ask whether there are any relevant factors that are not covered by the theoretical framework. Although Buzan and Wæver (2003) cover different regional security complexes in their *Regions and Powers,* the theory in itself is quite generic. Therefore, a more country-specific theory might find other interesting things that are not covered by this thesis' theoretical framework. An example of this would be the literature produced around the concept of the "Near Abroad", which is about Russia's geospatial identity. This framework might very well benefit an analysis of Russia and the Caucasus. This would, however, include a third theoretical field, critical geopolitics. Once again, including it as an additional theory is beyond the scope of the thesis and does not obstruct its findings.

7 Conclusion

The research question was:

- *How has security dynamics following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 shaped the Armenian-Russian relationship?*

The thesis has demonstrated how security dynamics have influenced the relationship between Armenia and Russia for the worse. The post-war developments in Nagorno-Karabakh where Russia has gained a foothold after intervening to settle a ceasefire agreement has put a strain on Armenian-Russian relations. While the trust has decreased between the two states as a consequence of the threats to Armenian security, Armenia has also become more "free" in the sense that it appears to not regulate their behavior with regards to Russia as much as before.

With regards to more general findings, the thesis addresses how a smaller state in an RSC interacts with the unipolar regional power in the context of changing security dynamics. The analysis has shown how wars in a centered RSC can lead to worsened relations between the unipolar great power and smaller states. The conclusion from this analysis is that wars can serve as an important catalyst for changing relations.

This thesis proposes a framework that can be used to analyze the post-Soviet space but also other regional security complexes in motion. By using regional security complex theory and relational peace, security dynamics' effect on relations can be better understood. This particular thesis has focused on a centered RSC, but there are few limitations on the potential use of the framework. To test the framework and its methodology, further research is encouraged and needed.

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Attachments

Table 1. Components of relational peace

Component	Relational peace (ideal type)
Behavioral interaction	Deliberation, non-domination, cooperation
Subjective attitudes toward the other	Mutual recognition, mutual trust
Idea of relationship	Fellowship or friendship

Attachment 1 (Söderström et al. 2021).

Attachment 2 (BBC 2023).