Building a Resilient Security Sector:

A Roadmap for Transparent, Inclusive, and Accountable Defense Reforms in Armenia

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Acronyms

AF	Armed Forces
CAT	Committee Against Torture
CPT	Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
FIS	Foreign Intelligence Service
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSS	National Security Service
RA	Republic of Armenia
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations

I. Executive Summary

This roadmap outlines a cohesive strategy to advance Armenia's Security Sector Reform (SSR) by addressing systemic inefficiencies and aligning governance structures with democratic principles. Recognizing that reform efforts are already underway, the roadmap identifies the critical need for a unified, strategic framework that synchronizes existing national strategies and action plans, including judiciary sector reforms, the Anti-Corruption Strategy, the National Strategy for Human Rights Protection, the Action Plan for UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and other strategic documents.

Systemic Priorities:
The roadmap underscores systemic priorities that are essential to ensuring reform sustainability and effectiveness. These include the establishment of a coordinating body, under the Security Council Office or the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Defense and Security, to coordinate the reform process. Additionally, a Reform Coordination Team comprising representatives from all key stakeholders is proposed to ensure alignment and inclusivity. Developing a detailed and harmonized action plan, identifying local and international partners, and defining measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are emphasized as foundational steps.

Institutional gaps will be addressed through legislative reviews, the institutionalization of independent audits, and enhanced resource allocation for oversight bodies. Regular evaluations and the promotion of public education campaigns are recommended to foster transparency and trust. The roadmap also advocates for transitioning from reliance on external support to locally developed governance frameworks.

Strategic Pillars:
The roadmap details actionable recommendations across seven strategic pillars:

Enhancing Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability:
- *Strengthening legislative frameworks, introducing specialized subcommittees, and institutionalizing public hearings to enhance transparency and trust.*

Intelligence Governance and Oversight:
- *Balancing operational secrecy with democratic accountability through structured oversight mechanisms, targeted training, and public transparency initiatives.*

Enhancing Professionalism, Transparency, and Accountability in the Defense Sector:
- *Implementing anti-corruption measures, modernizing defense practices, and fostering collaboration with international partners.*

Promoting Gender Inclusivity:
- *Addressing cultural barriers and integrating gender-sensitive reforms into training, leadership programs, and accountability mechanisms.*

Improving the Welfare and Mental Health of Military Personnel:
- *Establishing robust psychological services, addressing harmful practices, and integrating evidence-based mental health standards.*

Promoting Human Rights:
- *Strengthening legislative frameworks and oversight mechanisms to address systemic human rights issues in the security sector.*

Strengthening Independent Oversight Institutions:

- *Enhancing the capacity and independence of oversight bodies through legal reforms, targeted training, and collaborative networks.*

Implementation Framework:
The roadmap provides a phased approach with short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations, ensuring adaptability and responsiveness to evolving challenges. Immediate priorities include establishing coordination mechanisms, launching targeted training, and initiating legislative reviews. Mid-term actions focus on institutionalizing reforms and expanding capacity-building efforts, while long-term actions aim to embed a culture of accountability and inclusivity across the security sector.

By addressing systemic risks, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and synchronizing SSR with existing national strategies, this roadmap aims to build resilient, transparent, and accountable institutions that uphold Armenia's democratic values and respond effectively to contemporary security challenges.

II. Introduction

State of Democratic Security Sector Governance and Oversight in Armenia:

Armenia stands at a pivotal moment in reforming its security sector amidst complex geopolitical challenges and internal shifts. Historically, Armenia's security institutions have been shaped by their Soviet legacy and the prolonged Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which prioritized military strength over democratic governance and oversight. The Armed Forces (AF), established during the early 1990s, played a critical role in national politics but inherited fragmented structures and practices deeply rooted in Soviet traditions.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh second war and subsequent Azerbaijani aggressions in 2021 and 2022 exposed significant institutional weaknesses, underscoring the urgency of addressing systemic gaps in mobilization, resource management, and operational efficiency. Recent reforms, including the establishment of a Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) and modernization initiatives for the Armed Forces and Police, represent progress. However, these reforms remain fragmented and lack institutionalization. The process excludes meaningful civil society participation, fails to create a framework for stakeholder dialogue, and lacks a central coordination mechanism. This fragmented approach jeopardizes the sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term impact of the reforms.

Challenges in Security Sector Reform:

- **Soviet Legacy and Outdated Practices:** Armenia's security institutions continue to rely on Soviet-era doctrines and operational frameworks, particularly in defense. These outdated practices hinder adaptability and alignment with modern, democratic governance standards.
- **Geopolitical Pressures:** Armenia's reliance on Russian security frameworks and geopolitical alliances, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), complicates efforts to adopt Western-aligned standards. Regional instability and unresolved conflicts further strain reform efforts.
- **Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination:** Reforms are fractional, lacking a centralized framework or mechanism to coordinate efforts across institutions. The absence of structured dialogue among stakeholders, including civil society, undermines inclusivity and public trust.
- **Weak Oversight and Governance:** Parliamentary oversight remains limited due to unclear mandates, inadequate expertise, and insufficient resources. This restricts the National Assembly's ability to hold security institutions accountable.
- **Cultural Resistance to Change:** A culture of secrecy, hierarchical norms, and entrenched corruption in security institutions creates significant resistance to reform, perpetuating inefficiencies and human rights violations.
- **Human Rights and Welfare Gaps:** High rates of non-combat fatalities, suicides, and harassment within the armed forces highlight systemic failures in personnel welfare and human rights protection. The lack of mental health services and gender inclusivity exacerbates these issues.
- **Resource Limitations:** Insufficient funding, technical expertise, and infrastructure pose significant obstacles to implementing comprehensive reforms.

- **Public Distrust:** Decades of corruption, inefficiency, and limited transparency have eroded public confidence in security institutions. Without clear communication and accountability, skepticism toward reforms persists.

This roadmap preliminarily focuses on reforming the defense sector as a foundational step toward broader security sector transformation. It seeks to address systemic challenges through actionable recommendations, emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. By aligning reforms with international standards and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the roadmap aims to build resilient institutions capable of navigating Armenia's evolving security landscape.

III. Systemic Priorities

Context: Armenia's security sector reform (SSR) is advancing amidst growing recognition of the need to modernize and align with democratic principles. However, the reform process faces significant challenges, particularly in its lack of integration with existing national strategies and action plans. These include the Judiciary Sector Reforms, the Anti-Corruption Strategy, the Action Plan Deriving from the National Strategy of Human Rights Protection, and the Action Plan for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. The absence of a synchronized approach undermines the coherence of reforms, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities to maximize their impact.

Further complicating the reform landscape are systemic constraints rooted in reliance on Soviet-era frameworks and external security architectures, which limit Armenia's autonomy in adopting innovative, localized governance practices. Moreover, Armenia must navigate an increasingly complex geopolitical environment marked by regional instability, including the existing Armenian – Azerbaijani conflict, likelihood of erosion of frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus and beyond, the Russia-Ukraine war, Arab-Israeli escalations, and ongoing turmoil in Syria. These global challenges highlight the urgency for a security architecture that is resilient, adaptive, and aligned with best international practices and security partnerships.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Fragmentation and Misalignment:** Limited coordination between SSR and existing national strategies results in inefficiencies and reduces the effectiveness of reforms.
- **Systemic Dependency:** Continued reliance on outdated Soviet-era frameworks and security models hampers the development of autonomous governance systems.
- **Resource Constraints:** Inadequate financial, technical, and institutional capacities hinder the implementation of comprehensive reforms.
- **Geopolitical Instability:** Regional and global uncertainties, including the erosion of frozen conflicts and escalating tensions, disrupt the reform agenda.
- **Weak Stakeholder Engagement:** Limited collaboration among government institutions, civil society, and international partners reduces inclusivity and ownership of the reform process.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Strategic Integration:** Establish mechanisms to align SSR with existing national strategies, ensuring a unified and coherent approach to reform.
- **Autonomous Framework Development:** Transition from reliance on external systems to localized governance models tailored to Armenia's unique needs and challenges.
- **Enhanced Coordination:** Strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders by clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Expand financial, technical, and institutional resources dedicated to reform implementation and oversight.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in institutional and human resource development through targeted training programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives.
- **Risk Adaptation:** Develop flexible frameworks to address geopolitical volatility, with specific strategies to mitigate the risks associated with eroding conflicts.

Operational Recommendations:

Coordinating Structures:

- *Establish a central coordinating body, such as under the Security Council Office or the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Defense and Security, to oversee SSR implementation and ensure alignment with other national strategies.*

Unified Action Plan:

- *Develop a comprehensive SSR Action Plan that delineates specific activities, timelines, and performance metrics, while synchronizing efforts with ongoing reforms.*

Stakeholder Coordination:

- *Form a Reform Coordination Team that includes representatives from government institutions, civil society, and international partners to foster collaboration and accountability.*

Key Performance Indicators:

- *Define shared KPIs to evaluate progress and ensure alignment between SSR and broader national priorities.*

Legislative Harmonization:

- *Conduct legislative reviews to address systemic gaps and ensure that legal frameworks governing SSR complement existing reforms.*

Data Systems:

- *Establish robust data collection and analysis systems to monitor reform progress, identify gaps, and inform policy adjustments.*

Public Education:

- *Implement ongoing public awareness campaigns to build societal support for SSR and highlight its connection to broader national reforms.*

Independent Auditing:

- *Institutionalize procurement audits and financial review systems to enhance transparency and reduce corruption risks.*

Resource Expansion:

- *Strengthen oversight institutions through increased financial, technical, and human resource support, aligned with national and SSR priorities.*

International Partnerships:

- *Collaborate with international organizations to access expertise, funding, and best practices that align SSR with global democratic governance standards.*

IV. Actionable Reform Priorities for Strategic Pillars

1. Enhancing Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability in the Security Sector

Context: Armenia's National Assembly faces significant challenges in effectively overseeing the security sector. These challenges stem from structural and capacity limitations, a longstanding culture of institutional secrecy, and low levels of public trust. The political landscape is further complicated by a lack of collaboration between political factions and an unconstructive political culture, undermining consensus-building on necessary oversight reforms.

A key obstacle is the ambiguity surrounding the parliament's role in security sector governance. Unclear mandates, tools, and responsibilities hinder consistent and effective oversight.

Geopolitical factors further complicate reforms. Armenia faces political and economic influence from Russia, which seeks to maintain Armenia within its sphere of interests. This dynamic constrains Armenia's decision-making autonomy and limits its alignment with democratic and Western-aligned security practices. Armenia's economic dependence on Russia exacerbates this issue, with potential risks such as trade sanctions or other forms of coercion. Moreover, Armenia's membership in the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) highlights these challenges. The CSTO framework often prioritizes Russia's geopolitical interests over Armenia's security needs, restricting Armenia's autonomy in adopting Western-aligned practices.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Political Resistance:** Opposition to establishing enhanced oversight mechanisms from entrenched interests within the security sector.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Limited technical expertise and institutional knowledge among parliamentary committees.
- **Public Distrust:** Persistent low confidence in the National Assembly's ability to oversee security reforms effectively.
- **External Pressures:** Geopolitical influences that hinder the parliament's autonomy in addressing security issues.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Capacity Building:** Cultivate sustained parliamentary expertise through structured training initiatives and institutional knowledge exchange.
- **International Partnerships:** Establish lasting partnerships with international organizations to maintain technical support and align with global governance standards.
- **Cultural Transformation:** Transform the entrenched culture of secrecy in the security sector by implementing phased and systemic transparency measures.
- **Mandate Clarification:** Clearly define parliamentary roles, tools, and responsibilities to ensure consistency and effectiveness in oversight.

Operational Recommendations:

Institutional Mechanisms:
- *Establish specialized parliamentary subcommittees dedicated to arms procurement and defense policy. These subcommittees should have access to relevant data and expertise to ensure targeted oversight.*
- *Add a focus on establishing internal procedures for post-legislative scrutiny, allowing for regular evaluations of laws and reforms related to SSR.*

Capacity Development:
- *Organize regular training sessions for parliamentarians and committee members on international best practices in defense oversight, human rights compliance, and intelligence governance.*
- *Integrate expertise, case studies, and peer exchanges into training programs for the Standing Committee on Defense and Security.*

Public Engagement:
- *Institutionalize public hearings to address critical security-related issues, such as allegations of human rights violations in the armed forces. This would increase transparency and public confidence in the oversight process.*
- *Implement measures to enhance public transparency, including the publication of declassified summaries of parliamentary oversight initiatives.*

Expert Collaboration:
- *Enable collaboration between parliamentary committees and independent security experts for evidence-driven policy recommendations.*

2. Intelligence Governance and Oversight

Context: Armenia's intelligence services operate within a culture of secrecy, which limits both transparency and public trust. While this secrecy is partly a response to the need to reduce reliance on external security systems and strengthen the independence of Armenia's security apparatus, the geopolitical sensitivities require an exceptionally cautious approach. This heightened sensitivity makes balancing operational confidentiality and democratic accountability particularly challenging, as Armenia navigates complex internal and external pressures while safeguarding its national security.

Historically, Armenia has lacked a robust culture of oversight for its intelligence operations. The absence of well-defined mechanisms creates a dual challenge: maintaining operational secrecy while meeting the accountability and transparency standards required in democratic governance. This challenge remains acute as Armenia strives to ensure its security institutions are both effective and accountable.

Legally, Armenia's Intelligence and National Security Services are under the direct control of the Prime Minister. However, significant ambiguity surrounds the role of parliament in overseeing these institutions. This lack of clarity hampers parliament's ability to provide effective checks and balances, complicating the establishment of structured oversight mechanisms.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict places persistent pressure on Armenia's intelligence services. In addition to addressing ongoing security threats, Armenia must contend with external actions, including those from Russia and its allies, which are perceived as undermining its security efforts. These geopolitical challenges necessitate a cautious and

adaptable approach to intelligence governance to protect Armenia's sovereignty and advance national interests.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Institutional Resistance:** Intelligence agencies often resist transparency reforms due to concerns about operational exposure.
- **Confidentiality vs. Accountability:** Geopolitical sensitivities make it difficult to balance operational secrecy with democratic standards.
- **Resource and Capacity Gaps:** Limited institutional expertise and funding impede the development of robust oversight mechanisms.
- **External Interference:** Geopolitical pressures and interference risk compromising intelligence operations.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Incremental Transparency Measures:** Gradually implement declassified reporting protocols, beginning with non-sensitive summaries, to build public trust while safeguarding operational security.
- **Parliamentary Capacity Building:** Develop targeted training and resource programs for parliamentarians and committee staff to enhance their understanding of intelligence governance.
- **International Best Practices:** Collaborate with identified countries like Norway and Germany to adapt proven frameworks for intelligence oversight, tailored to Armenia's context.
- **Legal Reforms:** Clarify the legislative framework governing parliamentary oversight to delineate roles, tools, and responsibilities explicitly.

Operational Recommendations:
Structured Oversight Mechanisms:
- *Develop clear guidelines for parliamentary oversight, balancing confidentiality with accountability in intelligence operations.*
Transparency Initiatives:
- *Publish periodic, declassified reports to improve public trust and demonstrate accountability.*
Targeted Training Programs:
- *Equip legislators with the skills to oversee intelligence budgeting and activities effectively through case studies, peer exchanges, and expert-led sessions.*
Adopt International Models:
- *Tailor frameworks from advanced intelligence oversight systems, to address Armenia's unique governance challenges.*
Public Engagement:
- *Facilitate public awareness campaigns to enhance understanding of intelligence governance reforms and foster public trust in the oversight process.*

3. Enhancing Professionalism, Transparency, and Accountability in the Defence Sector

Context: Armenia's defense sector faces systemic challenges, including outdated practices and weak institutional capacities, that hinder its ability to align with modern, democratic standards. Historically, reliance on Russian military doctrines and training systems has

entrenched Soviet-era traditions and ethical norms within the Armed Forces. These influences perpetuate inefficiencies and impede progress toward NATO-aligned standards.

A significant challenge is the absence of professional protocols for key defense functions, such as vetting personnel for critical positions and implementing structured anti-corruption strategies. This gap is further exacerbated by the lack of integrity measures in military education, contributing to an opaque and unaccountable defense culture.

Language barriers also obstruct professional collaboration with Western partners, such as France, the United States, and Greece. Limited access to contemporary materials and literature in Armenian restricts the Armed Forces' capacity to adopt modern practices. Additionally, former reliance on Russian military procurement and operational systems reduces Armenia's operational independence, complicating its ability to diversify its security partnerships and align with democratic standards.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Entrenched Corruption:** Persistent corruption in procurement processes undermines accountability and public trust.
- **Resistance to Modernization:** Internal resistance from traditionalist factions delays the adoption of modern practices and systems.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited funding and infrastructure restrict the development of training programs and modernization initiatives.
- **Lack of Multilingual Capacity:** Inadequate language skills and access to translated professional resources hinder collaboration with Western partners.
- **Deficient Ethical Frameworks:** The absence of integrity measures in military education perpetuates unethical practices and weakens institutional accountability.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Independent Audits:** Institutionalize independent audits of procurement processes, supported by international anti-corruption organizations, to enhance transparency and ensure accountability.
- **Comprehensive Defense Modernization Roadmap:** Develop a detailed roadmap for defense modernization with measurable milestones, clearly defined funding requirements, and mechanisms for regular review.
- **Enhanced International Partnerships:** Deepen relationships with Western partners to facilitate technical support, capacity-building initiatives, and knowledge exchange.
- **Language Training Programs:** Expand language education for military personnel and prioritize the translation of critical professional resources to foster integration with Western defense frameworks.
- **Ethics Integration in Education:** Incorporate integrity and anti-corruption strategies into military education and training, promoting accountability and alignment with NATO standards.

Operational Recommendations:
Anti-Corruption Measures:
- *Conduct independent audits of procurement processes.*
- *Establish whistleblower protections to encourage reporting of unethical practices without fear of retaliation.*

Modernized Training Programs:
- *Introduce modules on ethics, governance, and operational efficiency in defense training curricula.*

- *Develop specialized training on anti-corruption strategies aligned with international standards.*

Transparent Decision-Making:
- *Implement clear, accountable, and transparent processes for defense procurement and policymaking.*
- *Mandate regular public reporting on defense sector reforms to build public trust.*

Language Capacity Building:
- *Launch comprehensive language training programs for military personnel to improve collaboration with international partners.*
- *Translate key professional literature into Armenian to enhance accessibility.*

Protocols for Personnel Management:
- *Develop structured vetting processes for recruiting and appointing personnel to critical positions within the Ministry of Defence and General Staff.*
- *Establish transparent criteria for promotions and appointments to ensure merit-based advancement.*

Development of Educational Resources:
- *Invest in the creation and dissemination of updated military education materials to support professional growth and alignment with international standards.*
- *Include case studies and best practices from NATO-aligned countries to enhance the relevance of training programs.*

Public Engagement Initiatives:
- *Involve civil society organizations in monitoring defense sector reforms to ensure broader accountability.*
- *Hold public hearings on significant defense reforms to enhance transparency and foster citizen trust.*

Amendments to Armenia's Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plans:
- *Integrate a dedicated section into Armenia's Anti-Corruption Strategy and its corresponding Action Plans, specifically addressing corruption risks and tendencies within the security sector. This should encompass preventive measures, enhanced oversight mechanisms, and robust whistleblower protections tailored to the unique challenges of the defense and security domains.*

4. Gender Inclusivity in the Security Sector

Context: The underrepresentation of women in Armenia's security sector presents a significant challenge, rooted in deep-seated cultural perceptions and societal stereotypes that hinder gender inclusivity. These barriers are compounded by the absence of gender-sensitive policies and institutional mechanisms to facilitate the representation of women at all levels, particularly in senior military positions. Traditionalist attitudes and structural inequalities perpetuate a work environment that is often unwelcoming to women, with limited access to tailored leadership training and mentorship programs, preventing women from advancing into key roles.

Additionally, gender inclusivity is poorly integrated into military education, leaving personnel ill-equipped to foster an inclusive culture. There is also a lack of mechanisms to address gender-specific issues, such as harassment or discrimination, within the armed forces. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive data collection and analysis regarding gender diversity hinders informed policymaking and progress tracking.

Internationally, gender inclusivity is a cornerstone of modern security sector reforms promoted by organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Council of Europe. Armenia's limited representation of women in senior roles undermines its ability to meet

these global expectations, which are often tied to funding, partnerships, and credibility. Aligning with international frameworks would strengthen Armenia's partnerships and reinforce its commitment to democratic values and human rights.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Cultural Resistance:** Entrenched societal stereotypes and traditionalist attitudes resist the implementation of gender-sensitive policies.
- **Inadequate Enforcement:** Poor enforcement of existing mandates limits the effectiveness of gender policies.
- **Structural Barriers:** Systemic challenges, such as the absence of leadership development programs and mentorship opportunities, prevent women's advancement.
- **Data Gaps:** The lack of reliable data on gender representation and inclusion impedes evidence-based policymaking.
- **Harassment and Discrimination:** Insufficient mechanisms to address harassment discourage women from pursuing or continuing careers in the security sector.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Leadership Development Programs:** Establish mentorship initiatives and leadership training tailored to women's needs in security roles to facilitate career advancement.
- **Cultural Transformation:** Implement public awareness campaigns and in-house training programs to challenge stereotypes and foster gender equality.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Develop and enforce policies with accountability mechanisms to ensure gender-sensitive practices are embedded across institutions.
- **Data-Driven Policy Frameworks:** Institutionalize gender-based data collection and analysis to inform policy adjustments and track progress.
- **Supportive Work Environments:** Create robust mechanisms to address harassment and discrimination, ensuring a safe and equitable workplace for all personnel.

Operational Recommendations:
Inclusive Recruitment Policies:
- *Develop and implement targeted strategies to increase the participation of women in armed forces, military police, and other security roles.*

Military Education Reform:
- *Integrate gender sensitivity into military academy curricula to cultivate an inclusive culture across all ranks.*

Leadership Development:
- *Introduce structured leadership training and mentorship programs to equip women with the skills needed for advancement.*

Accountability Mechanisms:
- *Establish robust monitoring and reporting systems to ensure compliance with gender inclusivity policies and address violations effectively.*

Support Systems:
- *Implement clear protocols for handling harassment and discrimination, ensuring a confidential and fair process that protects victims and encourages reporting.*

Awareness Campaigns:
- *Launch public campaigns highlighting the value of gender inclusivity to challenge societal stereotypes and foster cultural change.*

Data Collection and Transparency:
- *Establish systems for collecting gender-related data and publish annual reports to track progress, inform policy decisions, and enhance accountability.*

International Partnerships:

- *Collaborate with global organizations to access resources, technical expertise, and best practices for implementing gender-sensitive reforms.*

Amendments to UN 1325 National Action Plan:
- *Implement amendments to Armenia's National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. These amendments should strengthen alignment with the goals of promoting women's participation, protection, and leadership in the security sector, as well as enhance inter-agency coordination to achieve measurable results.*

5. Improving the Welfare and Mental Health of Military Personnel

Context: These challenges stem from unresolved psychological struggles associated with the complexity of military service and the demands of the military profession, compounded by inadequate mental health systems and the absence of a professional military psychology framework. The psychological toll of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and subsequent skirmishes has further exacerbated these issues, leaving many personnel grappling with sustained trauma and stress.

A significant barrier to addressing these challenges is the entrenched presence of criminal subcultures within the military. These subcultures discourage personnel, particularly conscripts, from seeking help or engaging with officers due to fears of being labeled as "informers." This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of stigma, mistrust, and unresolved mental health challenges, further weakening the effectiveness of psychological support systems.

Military psychologists operate under the direct command of unit leaders, which compromises their autonomy and confidentiality. This hierarchical structure undermines trust and limits their ability to address systemic issues effectively. Furthermore, the profession lacks financial incentives, clear career progression opportunities, and localized training programs, resulting in a persistent shortage of qualified psychologists.

Adding to these challenges, Armenia's reliance on outdated training frameworks, such as those from Moscow's Military University, embeds practices that fail to align with modern, evidence-based approaches or NATO-aligned mental health standards. Transitioning to an autonomous, locally developed framework is essential for addressing these unique challenges and fostering a healthier, more supportive environment for military personnel.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Cultural Stigma:** Criminal subcultures and entrenched norms discourage personnel from seeking psychological support.
- **High Suicide Rates:** Unresolved mental health challenges contribute to high suicide rates and other criminal acts.
- **Limited Psychologist Autonomy:** Dependence on military hierarchy undermines confidentiality and trust.
- **Outdated Training Models:** Reliance on outdated training institutions restricts the adoption of modern, localized practices.
- **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient financial and institutional resources hinder the implementation of reforms.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Develop an Independent Psychology Framework:** Establish a dedicated structure for military psychology, independent of the military chain of command, to foster trust and ensure confidentiality.

- **Address Criminal Subcultures:** Implement systemic reforms and accountability measures to dismantle harmful subcultures and create a supportive environment.
- **Localize Training Programs:** Develop Armenian-based training programs for military psychologists, emphasizing evidence-based practices and alignment with international standards.
- **Raise Awareness:** Launch comprehensive campaigns to destigmatize mental health issues and encourage personnel to utilize support systems.
- **Institutionalize Data Collection:** Establish mechanisms for regular data collection on mental health trends to inform targeted policies and programs.

Operational Recommendations:
Dedicated Counseling Services:
- *Create independent counseling programs and peer support networks within military units to provide accessible and confidential mental health resources.*

Leadership and Cultural Training:
- *Train military leaders to identify and address mental health issues while actively combating harmful subcultures.*

Autonomous Reporting Structures:
- *Redefine the roles and reporting structures of military psychologists to operate independently from direct military hierarchy.*

Localized Training Modules:
- *Develop domestic training programs for military psychologists, incorporating best practices and NATO-aligned standards.*

Awareness Campaigns:
- *Implement public and in-house campaigns to reduce stigma around mental health, fostering an inclusive, supportive culture within the military.*

Data-Driven Policies:
- *Institutionalize systems for collecting and analyzing mental health data to guide evidence-based decision-making.*

Resource Development:
- *Produce Armenian-language professional materials for military psychologists to address unique challenges within the national context.*

6. Promoting Human Rights in the Security Sector

Context: Armenia's security sector faces persistent challenges, including high rates of non-combat fatalities, ill-treatment of conscripts, and negative perceptions of the military police. An entrenched criminal subculture within the military exacerbates these issues, fostering norms that discourage personnel—particularly conscripts—from reporting violations or cooperating with investigations. This culture of mistrust weakens oversight mechanisms and perpetuates systemic abuses.

Outdated legislation governing the military police further compounds these challenges. The lack of clearly defined roles and accountability mechanisms hinders the effectiveness of the military police in addressing human rights violations. The Ministry of Defence's restrictive policies on information access and limited collaboration with civil society reduce public engagement and transparency, further eroding trust in the security sector.

Collaboration with institutions like the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs and the Human Rights Defender's Office remains limited. These gaps in oversight and advocacy for human rights protections within

the military undermine efforts to align Armenia's security sector with international human rights standards.

As a member of the Council of Europe, Armenia is obligated to adhere to its human rights standards and comply with rulings from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Numerous cases involving the Armenian military have been adjudicated by the ECHR, exposing systemic shortcomings requiring urgent reform. Armenia is also committed to implementing recommendations from the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, the anti-torture committee (CPT), and the United Nations' Committee Against Torture (CAT). Meeting these obligations not only improves Armenia's human rights record but also bolsters its international credibility. Establishing compliance with NATO's human rights standards and aligning practices with broader UN frameworks can support Armenia's efforts to modernize its security sector while fostering stronger international partnerships.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Resistance to Reforms:** Entrenched interests within the military resist structural changes aimed at addressing human rights violations.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited capacity to effectively investigate abuses due to inadequate resources and expertise.
- **Public Distrust:** Skepticism about the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms undermines trust in their accountability.
- **Restrictive Transparency Policies:** The Ministry of Defence's restrictive information-sharing practices hinder collaboration with civil society and public engagement.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Legislative Modernization:** Update and clarify the legal framework governing the military police to clearly define roles, reduce ambiguities, and enhance accountability.
- **Human Rights Training:** Strengthen training programs for military police and command structures to align with international human rights standards.
- **Independent Investigative Mechanisms:** Institutionalize impartial mechanisms for investigating non-combat fatalities, ill-treatment, and other abuses.
- **Secure Reporting Systems:** Develop secure, anonymous channels for reporting abuses, accompanied by protections for whistleblowers to ensure confidentiality and prevent retaliation.

Operational Recommendations:
Legislative Modernization:
- *Revise the legal framework governing the military police to establish clear roles and accountability mechanisms. Integrate international human rights standards and best practices to enhance transparency.*
Targeted Training:
- *Provide comprehensive training on human rights for military police and command structures, aligned with international frameworks such as those of the Council of Europe and the United Nations.*
Strengthened Investigative Bodies:
- *Enhance the capacity of investigative entities to thoroughly examine non-combat fatalities and other abuses.*
- *Equip them with the necessary resources, tools, and training for impartial investigations.*
Secure Reporting Mechanisms:
- *Implement accessible, anonymous reporting channels to address cases of abuse, including guidelines to ensure consistent handling of reports and whistleblower protection.*

Institutional Collaboration:
- *Build stronger partnerships between the Ministry of Defence, civil society organizations, the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, and the Human Rights Defender's Office. Establish formal protocols for oversight and advocacy.*

Independent Oversight:
- *Reinforce external oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability within the security sector, emphasizing transparency and public trust.*

Amendments to the National Strategy of Human Rights Protection and Judiciary Reform Strategy:
- *Introduce targeted amendments to the Action Plan Deriving from the National Strategy of Human Rights Protection and the Judiciary Reform Strategy, specifically focusing on addressing human rights challenges within the security sector. These amendments should include measures to prevent violations, enhance accountability, and promote compliance with international human rights standards across all security institutions.*

7. Strengthening Independent Oversight Institutions

Context: Armenia's oversight institutions face significant structural and operational challenges that hinder their ability to ensure effective accountability and transparency. Constitutional and legal limitations restrict the authority of these institutions, while unclear mandates create confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities. This ambiguity undermines cooperation between oversight institutions, parliament, and security agencies, particularly on sensitive issues such as alternative service, fatalities in the military, and procurement practices.

Minimal collaboration with civil society actors further limits external scrutiny and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, weakening the overall accountability framework. A deeply ingrained culture of secrecy exacerbates these challenges, impeding transparency and public trust. The absence of independent procurement audits and financial governance mechanisms fosters inefficiencies and creates opportunities for corruption. Limited resources, capacity, and expertise further constrain oversight bodies, impairing their ability to perform their mandates effectively and independently.

Armenia's obligations under international frameworks, such as the Council of Europe, emphasize the importance of robust and independent oversight institutions. Strengthening these bodies is critical for aligning with democratic governance standards and international best practices. Armenia's aspirations to adhere to NATO governance standards and leverage European Union support present a valuable opportunity to enhance institutional capacity and credibility. By addressing these gaps, Armenia can reinforce public trust and its commitment to democratic values.

Key Risks Hindering Reform Efforts:
- **Legal and Constitutional Constraints:** Unclear mandates and limited authority reduce the effectiveness of oversight institutions.
- **Institutional Resistance:** Pushback from security agencies against reforms promoting transparency and accountability.
- **Resource Deficiencies:** Inadequate funding, technical resources, and expertise hinder oversight bodies' operational capabilities.
- **Limited Civil Society Engagement:** Minimal collaboration with civil society reduces external advocacy and weakens scrutiny.

- **Absence of Audit Mechanisms:** The lack of independent procurement and financial audits creates governance gaps and enables corruption.

Mitigation Trajectories:
- **Clarifying Legal Frameworks:** Reform and update laws to clearly define the roles, mandates, and authority of oversight institutions, ensuring they can act independently.
- **Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Allocate financial and technical resources to enhance the operational capabilities of oversight bodies.
- **Targeted Training Initiatives:** Develop specialized training programs for oversight personnel, focusing on modern auditing practices, human rights monitoring, and procurement reviews.
- **Building Collaborative Networks:** Foster partnerships between oversight institutions, parliament, and civil society organizations to enhance accountability and advocacy efforts.
- **Introducing Independent Audits:** Institutionalize robust and impartial mechanisms for financial and procurement reviews, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Operational Recommendations:
Legislative Reforms:
- *Amend existing laws to provide oversight institutions with clear, actionable mandates and greater independence. Include whistleblower protections to encourage reporting and impartial investigations.*

Establish Independent Audit Mechanisms:
- *Create transparent systems for auditing military procurements and financial transactions, ensuring impartiality and preventing inefficiencies and corruption.*

Enhance Collaboration with Civil Society:
- *Develop formal agreements with civil society organizations for joint oversight initiatives, including regular information sharing and consultations.*

Comprehensive Training Programs:
- *Introduce training modules for oversight personnel on advanced auditing techniques, procurement scrutiny, and compliance with international human rights standards.*

Mandate Transparency Initiatives:
- *Require oversight institutions to publish regular reports detailing findings, actions, and recommendations. Make these reports publicly accessible to build trust and accountability.*

Promote a Culture Shift:
- *Launch public education campaigns to challenge the prevailing culture of secrecy and emphasize the value of transparency and accountability in democratic governance.*

V. Roadmap to Security Sector Transformation

Strategic Pillars	Short-Term Actions (1 Year)	Mid-Term Actions (up to 3 Years)	Long-Term Actions (3+ Years)
Systemic Recommendations	- Define a coordinating body, such as under the Security Council Office or NA's Standing Committee on Defense and Security. - Establish a Reform Coordination Team with representatives from all relevant key stakeholders. - Create a comprehensive Action Plan that assigns specific activities, deadlines, and metrics to each entity involved in Security Sector Reform. This plan should be synchronized with already existing national strategies and action plans. - Identify Local and International support structures: partners and experts. - Jointly define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) acceptable to all stakeholders. - Initiate legislative reviews to address systemic gaps.	- Institutionalize independent procurement audits and financial review systems. -Based on the implementation progress and priorities of the Security Sector Reform process, introduce targeted amendments to existing national strategies and action plans. These amendments should address the evolving needs of the security sector, ensuring consistency, synchronization, and alignment with broader governance, human rights, and anti-corruption objectives. - Develop comprehensive systems for collecting and analyzing reform-related data. - Expand financial and technical resources for oversight institutions.	- Conduct regular evaluations of institutional effectiveness and refine frameworks accordingly. - Promote continuous public education campaigns on reform outcomes. - Transition from reliance on external support to locally developed frameworks for governance and reform.
Enhancing Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability in the Security Sector	- Amend legal frameworks to clarify parliamentary roles in oversight. - Establish specialized subcommittees for defense procurement and policies. - Organize training sessions on procurement reviews and oversight practices.	- Institutionalize public hearings on security issues. - Deepen collaborations with civil society and international partners. - Publish annual parliamentary findings and recommendations.	- Define post-legislative scrutiny indicators and regularly evaluate and refine oversight mechanisms. - Achieve alignment with NATO and international standards.
Intelligence Governance and Oversight	- Define declassification protocols for non-sensitive intelligence reports. - Provide specialized training for intelligence governance. - Collaborate with international partners for best practices.	- Establish Parliamentary oversight Sub-committee to ensure compliance with democratic norms. - Publish annual declassified intelligence summaries to build public trust.	- Fully operationalize independent mechanisms for intelligence oversight. - Transition to Armenia-specific training frameworks for intelligence personnel.
Enhancing Professionalism, Transparency, and	- Conduct independent procurement audits with international assistance.	- Expand defense personnel training to include ethics and anti-corruption measures.	- Institutionalize ongoing training programs for defense personnel.

Accountability in the Defence Sector	- Initiate language training for better collaboration with Western allies. - Draft a roadmap for defense modernization milestones.	- Strengthen partnerships with Western entities for modernization support. - Develop clear personnel vetting protocols.	- Fully align defense practices with NATO standards. - Develop locally rooted modernization frameworks.
Promoting Gender Inclusivity in the Security Sector	- Launch recruitment campaigns to increase women's participation. - Establish mentorship programs for women aiming for leadership roles. - Incorporate gender sensitivity into training curricula.	- Develop accountability mechanisms for tracking gender inclusivity progress. - Implement harassment reporting systems and support networks. - Strengthen international collaborations for gender-sensitive reforms.	- Embed inclusivity through sustained public campaigns. - Publish annual gender reform progress updates.
Improving the Welfare and Mental Health of Military Personnel	- Draft protocols for psychological services. - Launch awareness campaigns to reduce mental health stigma. - Pilot counseling and peer support networks.	- Develop domestic training programs for military psychologists. - Establish mechanisms for tracking mental health trends. - Address entrenched harmful practices (criminal subcultures) through systemic reforms.	- Institutionalize independent psychological support systems. - Fully integrate NATO-aligned mental health standards. - Expand support networks across all military units.
Promoting Human Rights in the Security Sector	- Modernize the legislative framework for military police. - Develop secure reporting channels for whistleblowers. - Conduct targeted training on human rights compliance.	- Institutionalize effective investigations into abuses. - Create a comprehensive database of human rights violations. - Strengthen the capacity of oversight bodies. - Publish declassified reports on human rights compliance.	- Fully operationalize independent oversight mechanisms. - Address entrenched harmful practices, including criminal subcultures, hazing, and discrimination, through systemic reforms informed by a comprehensive database of such practices.
Strengthening Independent Oversight Institutions	- Initiate legislative reforms to clarify institutional mandates. - Conduct capacity-building workshops for oversight personnel. - Begin public awareness campaigns to build trust in oversight mechanisms.	- Institutionalize independent audit systems for procurement and finances. - Strengthen collaboration with civil society and international partners. - Publish annual oversight findings.	- Fully operationalize autonomous oversight frameworks. - Align Armenia's oversight institutions with international governance standards. - Create a centralized database for oversight reports.

VI. Responsibility Mapping for Key Activities

Activity	Primary Responsibility	Supporting Entities
Reforming the legal and policy frameworks while harmonizing Security Sector Reform (SSR) with ongoing national reform strategies.	Parliamentary Committees	MoD, NSS, Civil Society, International Partners, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Establishment of a coordinating body	Security Council Office or the NA's Standing Committee on Defense and Security	Oversight Institutions, MoD, Parliament
KPIs and monitoring progress	Security Council Office or the NA's Standing Committee on Defense and Security	All stakeholders
Procurement audits and financial reviews	Audit Chamber, NA's Standing Committee on Defense and Security	MoD, Local and International Anti-Corruption Organizations
Addressing systemic human rights violations	MoD	NA's Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, RA Prosecutor's Office, RA Investigative Committee, Human Rights Defender's Office, Local and International Human Rights CSOs
Addressing corruption issues	MoD	RA Anti-Corruption Committee, RA Prosecutor's Office, Anti-Corruption Organizations
Mental health and welfare programs	MoD	Academia, CSOs, International Mental Health Organizations
Training and capacity-building initiatives for the MoD	MoD, Vazgen Sargsyan Military University, Military Police, etc.	Local and International Experts, Parliament
Public awareness campaigns	Media Organizations, CSOs	MoD, Human Rights Defender's Office
Institutionalizing gender inclusivity	MoD, Human Rights Defender's Office	CSOs, Local and International Organizations dealing with Gender Inclusivity
Intelligence governance reforms	FIS	Parliament, International Partners
Cultural and ethical transformation	Military Leadership	MoD, CSOs
Independent oversight mechanisms	Human Rights Defender's Office, Audit Chamber	CSOs, Parliament

VII. Factors Influencing Governmental Acceptance of Reforms

Factors Supporting Acceptance

1. **Alignment with International Obligations:**
   - *Many recommendations are tied to Armenia's commitments under international frameworks, such as the Council of Europe or UN standards, making them harder to reject without undermining international credibility.*

2. **Public Pressure for Reform:**
   - *The demand for accountability and transparency has been growing among Armenian civil society, particularly following recent conflicts and governance challenges, creating a favorable environment for reform.*

3. **Potential for Capacity-Building:**
   - *The roadmap includes partnerships with international organizations, which could offset resource limitations by providing technical and financial assistance, making it more appealing to the government.*

4. **Incremental and Phased Implementation:**
   - *The proposed short-, mid-, and long-term phases allow the government to adopt reforms gradually, reducing resistance from entrenched interests.*

5. **Broad Scope and Flexibility:**
   - *The roadmap addresses diverse aspects, from parliamentary oversight to human rights and mental health. This breadth increases the likelihood of partial adoption based on government priorities.*

Factors Hindering Acceptance

1. **Political Resistance:**
   - *The recommendations challenge entrenched interests, particularly within the military and intelligence sectors, which may lobby against increased oversight and transparency.*

2. **Limited Institutional Capacity:**
   - *Implementation requires significant expertise and resources, which Armenia's existing institutions may lack, leading to potential delays or diluted reforms.*

3. **Geopolitical Pressures:**
   - *Armenia's reliance on Russian security frameworks and the CSTO may create external and internal resistance to adopting Western-aligned reforms, especially in intelligence and defense sectors.*

4. **Cultural Barriers:**
   - *The deeply ingrained culture of secrecy and hierarchical structures, and criminal subcultures in the military and security institutions could resist initiatives like whistleblower protection or independent audits.*

5. **Lack of Political Will:**
   - *Without strong advocacy or public demand, some recommendations may be deprioritized, especially if perceived as politically sensitive or low-yield for electoral purposes.*