


**MHER HARUTYUNYAN\***

*PhD in History, Associate Professor  
Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences  
of the Republic of Armenia  
History Museum of Armenia*

mherharout@gmail.com

0000-0002-0719-8860 

DOI: 10.54503/1829-4073-2025.2.73-91

## **THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE DEFENCE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARTSAKH IN ARMENIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

### ***Abstract***

This article reinterprets the coverage and major assessments of the Defense Army (DA) of the Republic of Artsakh (RA) in Armenian historiography. Although certain episodes in the army's history have been presented in various publications from Artsakh, Armenia, and the Diaspora, the study of the formation and combat path of the DA remains central to scholarly inquiry. The aim of this research is to summarize the evolution of the history of the Defense Army and evaluate key scholarly contributions, with a particular focus on the role of military construction in the development of Armenian statehood in Artsakh. The author analyzes the Defense Army not merely as a military organization but also as an institutional body formed under conditions of political non-recognition and operating under the legitimate right of self-defense enshrined in international law. Drawing on academic works, documentary sources, and media publications, the article examines both the methodological approaches and value-based interpretations that frame the historiographical treatment of military development in Artsakh. Special attention is paid to the army's contribution to the institutional consolidation of

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\* The article has been delivered on 16.04.2025, reviewed on 20.05.2025, accepted for publication on 29.08.2025.

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statehood, the preservation of national identity, the reinterpretation of military traditions, and the politics of historical memory. The study underscores that the historiographical perception of the DA not only reflects broader military-political transformations but also supports the formation of a legitimate discourse surrounding the people of Artsakh's right to identity and collective return. In the context of the 2020–2023 Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression and the occupation of Artsakh, the scientific reevaluation of the Defense Army and the broader military legacy in Artsakh has become especially urgent. From this perspective, the DA is presented as a compelling example of juridico-political self-organization and civic-state integration - an area still insufficiently explored by Armenian historical scholarship.

**Keywords:** *Republic of Artsakh, Defence Army, Armenian historiography, self-defence, unrecognised state, periodisation, historico-political discourse.*

### ***Introduction***

This article reconsiders the assessments of the history of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh (1991–2023) as presented in Armenian historiography, drawing on the latest developments in the discipline of historical studies.

*Relevance of the Research.* The formation and institutional development of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh represent a critical phase in the history of military institutions among unrecognised states in the post-Soviet space. The study of this topic is significant not only within the context of Armenian historiography, but also holds considerable relevance in the international scholarly domain, as it intersects with the fields of war studies, institutionalisation, sovereignty, and state-building in unrecognised entities. In light of contemporary dynamics in international relations and regional security, examining the history of the Artsakh Defence Army may offer valuable insights into effective models for the formation, consolidation, and legitimisation of military structures within emerging or contested sovereignties.

The study and scholarly interpretation of this topic are necessitated by the imperative to reinterpret the historiography of the Artsakh Defence Army and to provide a rigorous academic account of numerous key issues in contemporary Armenian history.

*The aim* of this article is to comprehensively address the historiographical issues surrounding the history of the Artsakh Defence Army from 1991 to 2023, by critically reassessing and reliably presenting the key events of the recent past. Particular emphasis is placed on the military dimension of state-building in Artsakh, examining the priorities, processes, and outcomes of defence construction, as reflected in Armenian historiography. This reassessment seeks to stimulate further scholarly inquiry and the production of thematic studies, including their dissemination in foreign languages. The core objective of the research is to analyse the historical stages of the Defence Army's formation through an investigation of the military-political principles, governance systems, and administrative structures applied in different periods. The article further aims to conceptualise the army's development as a central component in the broader processes of self-determination and institutional state-building.

The study sets forth and examines the following *core research question*: how has Armenian historiography addressed the patterns and principles underlying the formation and operationalisation of a regular army in Artsakh for self-defence purposes? This inquiry aims to contribute to the substantiation of the legality of the actions taken by the people of Artsakh in response to Azerbaijani aggression, within the framework of the internationally recognised right to armed self-defence, and to promote an unequivocal perception of the justice of these actions by the international community.

To underscore the importance of a comprehensive historiographical study of the Defence Army and, more broadly, the history of military construction in Artsakh, particularly in the context of the Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression and the occupation of the Republic of Artsakh between 2020 and 2023. Such scholarly engagement is essential for both documenting and legitimising the existence of a regular army and armed forces in Artsakh, not only as institutions exercising the right to self-defence, but also as core symbols of statehood and political identity.

*The scholarly novelty* of the present study lies in its central research question and the comprehensive, historiographically integrated treatment of the subject matter. The article is innovative in several respects. First, it proposes to analyse the history of the Defence Army not merely as a military institution, but as an institutionalised state structure formed and developed through complex historical processes. Second, it adopts a disciplinary framework grounded in institutional theory, applied within the context of state-building processes in

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unrecognised entities. The study also seeks to address the existing historiographical gaps by foregrounding previously overlooked political-military and administrative dimensions.

*Principles and Methods Applied.* The present study is grounded in a number of fundamental scholarly principles designed to ensure both the academic integrity and methodological coherence of the research.

*The principle of objectivity* requires an impartial interpretation of historical facts and developments, irrespective of political affiliations or national identity.

*The primacy of historical fact* underscores the importance of evidence-based analysis, privileging the use of archival, documentary, and verified sources over speculative or anecdotal accounts.

*The principle of multi-source triangulation* is employed to overcome contradictions and to consolidate diverse data, drawing upon official records, academic literature, journalistic narratives, and oral testimonies.

The research has been conducted in accordance with contemporary methodological approaches and principles, with particular emphasis on impartiality and objectivity, and the primacy of historical truth. The study employs the principles of historicity and the historical-comparative method, with due consideration given to causal relationships and historical regularities.

*The historical-comparative* method has been applied to examine the institutional formation of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh within the broader context of the military structures of other unrecognised states. This approach has made it possible to identify both similarities and differences, as well as comparable models of development.

In accordance with the method of the *critical analysis of sources*, a wide range of historical documents, public speeches, media coverage, testimonies belonging to the genre of memory, and official statements have been examined. The source-based inquiry has been aimed at assessing the credibility of the information, uncovering the positions of interested parties, and broadening the scope of discourse platforms.

*Narrative analysis*, as a form of institutional memory, has been employed to examine the constructed recollections of the Defence Army, its symbolic role, and the formation of institutional identity. This method is particularly significant in those narratives concerning the Defence Army function not merely as

memory, but as mechanisms for reinforcing institutional identity - both within the sphere of public rhetoric and across educational and cultural domains.

The study of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh is considered to be a subject within the field of Armenian studies, in the context of institutionalisation processes. Recognising that military power is not merely a physical structure but also a political institution with its own functional role and system of identity, this research seeks to interpret the history of the army as an institutional reality. Accordingly, the methodological foundation of the study is based on the premise that the Defence Army has forged its institutional role not only within the military domain, but also in the processes of political stability, aspiration of sovereignty, and the shaping of historical memory.

*Chronologically*, the study encompasses the historiography of the Defence Army from 1991 to 2023, which emerged almost concurrently with the process of army formation and underwent certain stages of development.

*Degree of Scholarly Coverage of the Topic:* The state of the historiography concerning the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh has, at various times, been assessed by the authors of dissertations written on the subject, as well as by those who later published monographs<sup>1</sup> based on these academic works, particularly in the relevant sections of their studies.

Similar references can also be found in other scholarly works<sup>2</sup> related to the topic, as well as in a number of books.<sup>3</sup>

Several scholarly articles are dedicated to the current state of the historiography of the Defence Army, various key issues, and the justification for further studies in this field.<sup>4</sup> The concise views or reviews of the works by authors addressing specific episodes in the history of the army, within the context of the Artsakh movement and the History of the Armenian National Liberation War, are significant not so much for their informative value, but for their function in reinterpreting these events.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harutyunyan 2015, 11–24, Hovhannisyan 2015, 10–15.

<sup>2</sup> Harutyunyan 2000(B), 7–12, Arshakyan 2004, 6–12, Sargsyan 2018, 13–14, Harutyunyan 2019(A), 48–58, Harutyunyan 2021, 5–11, Harutyunyan 2024(A), 6–9.

<sup>3</sup> Harutyunyan 2004, 390–415, Ghahramanyan 2005, 3–6.

<sup>4</sup> Abrahamyanyan 2006, 117–129, Harutyunyan 2016, 112–119, Harutyunyan 2019(B), 111–120.

<sup>5</sup> Yazichyan 2009, 275–279, Kharratyan 2012, 277–279, Minasyan, Vardanyan 2017, 507–512.

***Coverage of the History of the Defence Army in Different Phases***

The historiographical perceptions of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh have been shaped and evolved in accordance with the political situation, societal demands, and the scope of scholarly attention. The coverage of the army's history can be divided into three main phases:

*Creation and War Phase (1991–1994)*: During the formation of the Defence Army and the years of the Armenian National Liberation War in Artsakh, historiography predominantly took on a heroic narrative, limited to brief descriptions based on popular memory, field recollections, and heroic rhetoric.<sup>6</sup>

*Post-ceasefire Institutional Establishment Phase (1995–2015)*: In this period, more substantiated attempts emerged to present the activities of the Defence Army, including strategic assessments, records from the command staff, as well as some analyses of the management structures.

*Reevaluation of Defence and Security Challenges and the Army's Organisation (Post-2016)*: Following the spring aggression of Azerbaijan in 2016 and especially the autumn military campaigns of 2020 and 2023, historiography began to reinterpret the role of the Defence Army, not only from a military perspective, but also from institutional, civilisational, and identity-based viewpoints.

***Typology of Historiographical Approaches***

The historiographical literature on the Defence Army can be categorised as follows:

*Descriptive and Memoir-based Works*: These include recollections from participants, journalistic records, and elements of public discourse, which often possess a subjective nature but are important for understanding the internal discourse of military memory.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mkrtcyan 1992, Arutyunyan 1994, 1997, Kamalyan 1994, Kamalyan 1994, Ulubabyan 1997, Balayan 1997, Marutyan 1996, Petrosyan 2001, Baghryan 1998, Baghryan 2011, Baghdasaryan 2010, Ghahramanyan 1993, Ghahramanyan 2005, Margaryan 1999, Hasratyan 2001, 219–244.

<sup>7</sup> Ayvazyan 2001, Gukasov 2001, Devrikyan 2003, Hasratyan 2015, Hakobyan 2003, The commander 2013, Khachatryan, Ghazaryan, Margaryan 2010.

*Memory-based and Symbolic Analyses:* These are constructed within the field of collective memory and emphasise the role of the Defence Army as a symbol of national resistance and statehood.<sup>8</sup>

*Documentary Studies:* Based on existing documents, press publications, and analytical reports, these works are more substantiated but still lack depth in institutional analysis.<sup>9</sup>

*Military-political Analyses:* These present the role of the Defence Army in regional security, the balance of power, political negotiations, and the process of maintaining sovereignty. These approaches are often associated with political scientists, military strategists, and experts in the field.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Formation of Institutional Memory in Armenian Historiography***

In Armenian historiography, the institutional memory of the Defence Army is still in the process of formation. To date, works with a narrative and national hero-based orientation prevail, but in recent years, there has been a shift within academic circles towards institutional analysis, viewing the army not only as a military force but also as a component of statehood and institutional identity.<sup>11</sup> This change is reflected in the increase of thematic archival work, reports from analytical centres, and a deepening of research approaches. The formation of institutional memory requires continuous analysis, the integration of facts, and interpretations that move beyond politicised narratives, in order to ensure historiographical objectivity and completeness.

The critical assessments in Armenian historiography have addressed key issues related to the chronology<sup>12</sup> of the formation of the Defence Army and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Artsakh, the progress and consolidation of the Artsakh Armed Forces through individual operations,<sup>13</sup> organisational and

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<sup>8</sup> Melkonian 2007, Sarents 1993, Danielyan 2000, Martikyan 2012, Margaryan 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Hasratyan 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Ohanyan 2007, Ohanyan 2012, Hovhannisyan 2015, 2017, Harutyunyan 2024, 6–7, 280–281.

<sup>11</sup> Harutyunyan 2024 (B), 239–250, 252–255.

<sup>12</sup> Harutyunyan 2000(A), 78–88, Harutyunyan, Harutyunyan 2017, 173–184.

<sup>13</sup> Harutyunyan 2012(A), 59–67.

structural transformations,<sup>14</sup> military construction,<sup>15</sup> the defence and security system,<sup>16</sup> and other significant processes.

***Analysis of the Periodisation of the History of the Defence Army***

*Comparison of Existing Periodisations:* The periodisation<sup>17</sup> of the history of the Defence Army in historiographical literature is not unambiguous, due to the varying quality of sources and the influence of military-political discourses. In general, several key periodisations circulate in academic and memoir-based works:

*The Liberation Struggle and Formation Period (1991–1994):* This includes the organisation of armed resistance, the formation of self-defence units, and the process of the official establishment of the army. The end of this period coincides with the establishment of the ceasefire and the transition to a structured system of governance.

*Post-ceasefire Consolidation Period (1995–2007):* Characterised by the institutional stabilisation of military structures, retraining and rearmament programmes, as well as the consolidation of the army's legal status.

*Period of Changing Challenges (2008–2020):* Includes revisions of defence doctrines, retraining of personnel, as well as political and technological measures to respond to changes in the security environment. The spring military campaign of Azerbaijan in 2016 marks a boundary point in this period.

*Crisis of Decision-Making and Institutional Instability (Post-2020):* The consequences of the war, the disruption of the balance of forces, and institutional losses have brought to the forefront the process of structural, political, and societal re-evaluation of the army.

The principal divergence among the various periodisations stems from the differing methodological foundations employed. For instance, some focus on the phases of combat operations, while others emphasise transformations in command structures and organisational frameworks.

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<sup>14</sup> Harutyunyan 2000(A), 2015, 78–88.

<sup>15</sup> Harutyunyan 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Harutyunyan 2010, Harutyunyan, Harutyunyan 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Sargsyan 2002, 13–14, Hovhannisyan 2015, 324.



### ***The Role of Institutional Structures in Strategic-Political Decision-Making***

The periodisation of the Defence Army's history is inseparable from the evolution of its institutional structures. Initially, military formations emerged on the basis of self-defence imperatives; however, in subsequent stages, they became increasingly integrated into the broader framework of state governance, actively participating in the process of strategic and political decision-making.

*In the early 1990s*, military decisions were predominantly made within the framework of semi-operational groups and the command staff. Over time, however, a unified command hierarchy emerged, marked by increased political-military centralisation.

*From the 2000s onwards*, the Defence Army began to assume not only a military but also a strategic planning role, influencing processes related to foreign policy, security negotiations, and the articulation of national positions.

During the Azerbaijani offensives of *spring 2016, as well as the campaigns of autumn 2020 and 2023*, institutional limitations became apparent: the Defence Army was no longer aligned with management models capable of responding adequately to new military and technological challenges. The subsequent collapse and systemic crisis reflected a weakening of institutional mechanisms at the level of political-military decision-making.

Thus, the periodisation of the Defence Army's history should not be seen merely as a chronological succession of combat operations, but rather as a reflection of the formation, operationalisation, and gradual structural transformation of the military institution as a decision-making actor.

### ***Research Challenges and Unexplored Areas in the Historiography***

*Uneven treatment in the historiography of the Defence Army of Artsakh and limitations of the factual-documentary base.* The historiography of the Defence Army (DA) remains in a formative phase and is characterised by a number of methodological and substantive limitations. It is important to note that the current state of Armenian historiography does not yet provide for a comprehensive analysis of the DA as an institutional structure.

*Thematic silences.* Numerous key subfields such as internal governance structures, professional military education, institutional reforms, mechanisms of

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civilian oversight, and models of management, are nearly absent from historical scholarship. These silences stem both from the closed nature of the political-military structures and from historiographical tendencies towards narrative-based approaches.

*Partial analyses.* Analyses related to the DA are often based on selective sources and tend to focus on particular or politically favourable episodes. These works lack consistent methodological foundations and frequently fail to address the broader perspective of institutional development.

*Limited access to open sources.* Both state and military archives remain largely inaccessible to researchers, thereby hindering the production of evidence-based analyses. The unavailability of archival materials, official reports, operational directives, and strategic planning documents significantly constrains the depth of historiographical evaluation.

These factors contribute to a form of institutional fragmentation within the historiography, wherein the Defence Army is presented in partial or fragmented terms – lacking a comprehensive account of its organisational integrity and structural evolution.

#### ***Directions for Future Research***

The historiographical study of the Defence Army of Artsakh requires systematic new approaches, grounded both in the theoretical framework of institutional history and in the re-evaluation of military-political foundations. Possible directions for future research include:

Analysis of institutional dynamics, including the study of governance models, systems of oversight, and mechanisms for operational decision-making.

Examination of civil-military relations, aimed at understanding the DA's relationship with political authorities, structures of public accountability, and broader state institutions.

Exploring the role of memory and identity formation within the army, focusing on how the DA has been represented through education, culture, media, and political discourse, and how these representations have influenced the construction of institutional identity.

Integrative research combining archival and oral histories; through the synthesis of unpublished sources and testimonial narratives, to reconstruct

institutional transitions and re-contextualise the historical trajectory of decision-making processes.

The advancement of these directions will require not only methodological rethinking but also an institutional willingness to allow historiography to engage with the military past unencumbered by revisionism or emotional primacy.

### **Conclusion**

*Summary of scholarly findings.* The present study reveals the complex and insufficiently represented dynamics of the historiographical perception of the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh as a military institution. The study of the DA's history extends beyond the mere narration of military operations; it encompasses the systematic analysis of institutional formation, governance, decision-making, identity construction, and national memory. Throughout the study, it has been confirmed that existing historiography does not yet provide a comprehensive understanding of the army as an institutional actor. Evaluations of the DA are often grounded in fragmentary narratives and memoir-based accounts.

*The mission of Armenian historiography in the context of institutional recognition.* A new imperative lies before Armenian historiography: to move beyond a memory-centred and often emotionally charged historical perspective, towards the construction of institutional history. The case of the DA demonstrates that Armenian historiography must evolve by adopting approaches that assess institutional development not merely as a function of military effectiveness, but as an indicator of statehood and sovereignty. Armenian historical scholarship has the potential to become one of the instruments of such institutional recognition – by critically reassessing its methodologies, source base, and analytical depth.

*Towards Comparative Historiography and Integration into the International Scholarly Discourse.* The reinterpretation of the history of the Defence Army is possible not only within national academic frameworks, but also in the field of comparative historiography. Similar institutional transitions – military structures formed during wartime, their politicisation, and subsequent transformations – have been studied in the context of various international conflicts. By advancing its institutional perspective, Armenian historiography may find meaningful integration into this scholarly domain, juxtaposing the Artsakh experience with

studies on the military institutions of other unrecognised or partially recognised states. Such engagement will not only enhance the global relevance of the research on the Defence Army's history, but also contribute to the scholarly recognition of Artsakh's institutional historical experience.

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**ՄՀԵՐ ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ**

*Պալմական գիտությունների թեկնածու, դոցենտ*

*ՀՀ ԳԱԱ պալմության ինստիտուտ*

*Հայաստանի պալմության թանգարան*

mherharout@gmail.com

0000-0002-0719-8860 

**ԱՐՑԱԽԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՊԱՇՏՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ԲԱՆԱԿԻ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՎԵՐԱԻՄԱՍՏԱՎՈՐՈՒՄԸ ՀԱՅ  
ՊԱՏՄԱԳՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԳՆԱՀԱՏՄԱՄԲ**

Ամփոփում

Սույն հոդվածում վերաիմաստավորված են Արցախի Հանրապետության (ԱՀ) Պաշտպանության բանակի (ՊԲ) կազմավորման և զարգացման գործընթացի լուսաբանումը հայ պատմագրության մեջ ու պատմագրական առավել կարևոր գնահատականները: Թեև ՊԲ-ի պատմության առանձին դրվագներ լուսաբանվել են Արցախում, ՀՀ-ում և Սփյուռքում հրատարակված բազմաթիվ գրքերում ու ժողովածուներում, ՊԲ-ի կազմավորման ու անցած մարտական ուղու պատմությունը շարունակում է մնալ ուսումնասիրողների հետաքրքրության առանցքում:

Հետազոտողի նպատակն է ամփոփել ՊԲ պատմագրության էվոլյուցիան և գնահատել հիմնական գիտական աշխատանքները՝ կենտրոնանալով Արցախում հայկական պետականության կայացման գործում ռազմական շինարարության դերի վրա: Հեղինակը դիտարկում է ՊԲ-ն ոչ միայն որպես ռազմական կազմակերպվածք, այլև որպես ինստիտուցիոնալ մարմին, որը ձևավորվել է քաղաքական չճանաչվածության պայմաններում և գործել միջազգային իրավունքի շրջանակներում՝ ինքնապաշտպանության օրինական իրավունքի հիման վրա: Հոդվածում փորձ է արվում ամփոփել ՊԲ պատմագրության զարգացումը՝ բացահայտելով թե՛ մեթոդաբանական հիմքերը, թե՛ արժեքային ընկալումները, որոնց միջոցով պատմագրությունը ընդհանրացնում է ԱՀ-ի ռազմական շինարարության փորձը: Հոդվածում կարևորվում է պետականության ինստիտուցիոնալ կայացման և պատմական հիշողության, ազգային ինքնության պահպանման և ռազմական ավանդույթների

վերաիմաստավորման գործում ՊԲ-ի ունեցած դերակատարությունը: Ընդգրծվում է, որ ՊԲ-ի պատմագրական ընկալումները ոչ միայն արձագանքում են ռազմաքաղաքական ձևափոխումներին, այլև նպաստում են Արցախի ժողովրդի ինքնության, իրավագրկման պայմաններում դիմադրողականության և հայրենի եզերք վերադառնալու իրավունքների արդարացված ընկալման ձևավորմանը: Վերլուծության արդյունքում հեղինակը հանգում է այն եզրակացությանը, որ 2020–2023 թթ. ադրբեջանա-թուրքական ագրեսիայի և Արցախի բռնազավթման համատեքստում հատկապես արդիական է դառնում ՊԲ-ի, ինչպես նաև ԱՀ-ում բանակաշինության ամբողջական պատմության գիտական վերաարժևորումը: Այս տեսանկյունից ՊԲ-ն ներկայացվում է որպես իրավաքաղաքական ինքնակազմակերպվածության և հասարակական-պետական ինտեգրման ուշագրավ օրինակ, որի լիարժեք ուսումնասիրության գործում հայ պատմագիտությունը դեռ անելիք ունի:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Արցախի Հանրապետություն, Պաշտպանության բանակ, հայ պատմագրություն, ինքնապաշտպանություն, չճանաչված պետություն, պարբերացում, պատմաքաղաքական դիսկուրս: