

Armenia Pivoting to The West, Distancing from Eurasia, Enhancing Military Ties with France

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The Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, has announced his country is "freezing" cooperation with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which may be a step towards leaving the Eurasian bloc altogether. According to Igor Korotchenko, director general of the Caspian Institute for Strategic Studies, this development is a direct result of recent agreements between the Caucasus nation and France, after Pashinyan discussed the matter earlier this month with French President Emmanuel Macron. Paris and Yerevan signed a weapons contract amid a general boost in their military and defense ties, with France having agreed to sell the Thales GM 200 (an advanced air defense system) to Armenia.

France's agenda does not always align with that of the US-led NATO, as [we can see in the Indo-Pacific](#) itself, for example. Paris has of course its own traditional aspirations in the South Caucasus, pertaining to its competition with Britain (the so-called "Fashoda Syndrome"), and also its complex relationship with Turkey, as Paris has long sought to contain Turkish ambitions in the [East Mediterranean](#) and beyond. Be it as it may, the French clearly aspires to "replace" Russia's position in Armenia and the European power is now promising to provide Armenians with short-range surface-to-air missiles, among other things.

Besides that, since 2022, Armenia has also signed various defense contracts worth \$400 million with India, and the Caucasus nation also made a deal to buy PINAKA multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRL), and anti-tank munitions from India. This has led some observers to talk about an emerging Euro-Asian strategic alliance, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific strategy. I have written elsewhere about [the paradoxes of India's "balancing" role](#) between the West and Eurasia, both in the [Pacific](#) and in [Central Asia](#) - with India, member of both the Quad and the SCO, pushing for the former to engage in Afghanistan.

In any case, the complexities of France's agenda apart, the overall Armenian pivoting to the West (through Paris in this case) fits into the larger context of NATO and Western "expansion" and the ["encircling" of Russia](#). As POLITICO described it, France has just "planted its flag" in "Russia's backyard" with the Armenian weapons' deals. However, Pashinyan has also said there is no intention to shut a Russia military base in his country, at Gyumri.

For Korotchenko, the Armenian authorities in Yerevan are gradually pivoting to NATO and Western structures, and "the only thing" keeping the country from "a final break" with the CSTO and Moscow is the economy, for "Armenia enjoys a number of serious preferences from Russia, and also enjoys all the advantages of membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, a regional economic bloc." Some Western analysts are in fact talking about Armenia joining the EU and NATO, which thus far remains pure wishful thinking also due to the economic factor mentioned by Korotchenko. According to Robert M. Cutler (a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of European, Russian & Eurasian Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa), the bilateral agreement regarding the Russian troops in Armenia runs until 2044, and this certainly hampers wider French or NATO ambitions in terms of "Westernizing" that Caucasus nation.

The CSTO, a Russia-led intergovernmental military alliance, consists of Russia and five other post-soviet states, namely, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. Albeit formally formed in 2002, the Treaty's roots can be traced back to the short-lived United Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (1992-1993), which in turn were preceded by the Soviet Armed forces. The Tashkent Treaty was signed in 1993 to create the Collective Security Treaty (CST), taking effect in 1994, and lasting a 5-year period. Its goal was to become a legal framework for guaranteeing military security throughout the post-Soviet area, specifically in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 1999, the Treaty was renewed for five more years – then, in the context of military conflicts with Islamic fundamentalists in Kyrgyzstan, CST signatories agreed on joint military action, and such a development paved the way for the CST to finally become the CSTO in 2002.

Soviet collapse, ideological aspects apart, has in a way left a geopolitical and power vacuum in Eurasia, with security concerns pertaining to Central Asian ethno-political destabilization while [US-led NATO in turn never ceased to expand](#). In this context, regional players and Moscow particularly have been seeking to promote mechanisms towards regional integration and collective security.

Russia has thus been pursuing to strengthen the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) alongside the CSTO itself and the BRICS group. The EEU has been focusing on Eurasian development and economic integration, whereas the CSTO, for its part, has been mostly tasked with security issues pertaining to member states' territorial sovereignty. From an American perspective, such groupings threaten US unipolar hegemony and are thus met with hostility.

The challenge for countries such as Armenia involves precisely "balancing" their bilateral relations with both their Eurasian partners and with an increasingly ["cold war mentality"](#)-driven West. As I [wrote](#) a year ago, Eurasian countries have been increasing trade with Russia in the aftermath of the Western sanctions against Moscow (which have largely [backfired](#)), with exports to Russia surging in Armenia. Such trade trends provided new opportunities for countries such as Armenia itself, a nation which has long envisioned itself as a potential bridge between the Eurasian Union and the European Union (EU).

In October 2023 I wrote on how the Western presence in Armenia was expanding – in spite of its [failure](#). The ongoing and unchallenged Turkey-backed [ethnic cleansing campaign](#) in [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) (also known as Artsakh), conducted by Azerbaijan (also [with the support of Israel](#)) is an eloquent sign of the failure of Yerevan’s turn to the West. Much of the world is in fact increasingly alienated by Western “[alignmentism](#)” and its new Cold War mentality. Any Armenian “Western shift” will run contrary to the current trends of non-alignment, multi-alignment, and “[strategic autonomy](#)” that even France and Germany themselves have been proposing. “Decoupling” from Russia (and Eurasia) would be detrimental to Armenia’s own interests – but that is precisely what the West will most likely demand from it.

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