

Could Armenia Really Ditch the CSTO Sometime Soon?

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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There are four possible scenarios for how everything could unfold:

- 1) Armenia remains in the CSTO and doesn’t receive US military equipment;*
- 2) Armenian remains in the bloc but ends up receiving such aid;*
- 3) Armenia announces its withdrawal from the bloc;*
- 4) Armenia unilaterally hosts US forces and is kicked out of the CSTO.*

US Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s [trip to Armenia](#) and the very warm welcome that she received while in that country prompted speculation among some that America is attempting to “poach” this Russian ally from the CSTO mutual defense pact. Secretary of the Security Council Armen Grigoryan [expressed dissatisfaction](#) with the bloc’s response to Azerbaijan’s undeclared “[special military operation](#)” from earlier this month, declaring that his country’s expectations weren’t met despite having thought that an intervention similar to the one [carried out in Kazakhstan](#) in January could be in the cards.

Armenian Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan, meanwhile, [compared](#) the CSTO to a gun that doesn’t fire and said that Azerbaijan therefore isn’t deterred by it.

He ominously noted that Armenia has drawn conclusions from the latest events, but just like Grigoryan, Simonyan also downplayed the possibility of withdrawing from the bloc. In response to Pelosi’s quip in the Armenian capital that her hosts “were disappointed they got fact-finders and not protection”, mission chief Col. Gen. Anatoly Sidorov [stated](#) that the organization “prioritizes political-diplomatic methods” and is “not in a rush to draw the saber.”

It’s against this contentious backdrop of newly reinvigorated Great Power competition between Russia and the US over Armenia’s military loyalty that observers have begun to

once again speculate about the future of that South Caucasus country's membership in the CSTO. There are four possible scenarios for how everything could unfold:

- 1) Armenia remains in the CSTO and doesn't receive US military equipment;
- 2) Armenian remains in the bloc but ends up receiving such aid;
- 3) Armenia announces its withdrawal from the bloc;
- 4) and Armenia unilaterally hosts US forces and is kicked out of the CSTO.

The first and second are the most likely of these four, with everything leaning closer to the latter. Regarding the first, Armenia's top officials have already signaled that they're planning to gradually diversify from their military-security dependence on Russia. To not go through with that to some extent would be akin to pulling a gun that doesn't fire, which is exactly how Simonyan criticized the CSTO. This leads to the second scenario of receiving US military aid, which is possible in spite of its continued membership in the CSTO as proven by the Turkish precedent with Russia's Central Asian allies.

That West Asian NATO member, which boasts the bloc's second-largest military, is rapidly becoming a strategically significant security partner for CSTO members Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan [as documented in this detailed piece](#) from May. It therefore wouldn't be the first time that a NATO country makes military-security inroads in a CSTO one upon the latter's request in the event that the US begins sending equipment to Armenia. That, however, would worsen Washington's already fraught relations with Ankara and contribute to its sense of encirclement considering recent US inroads in [Cyprus](#) and [Greece](#).

Moving along to the third scenario of Armenia announcing its withdrawal from the CSTO just like Uzbekistan did a while back, this is unrealistic to expect since it would create a dangerous window for Azerbaijan and/or Turkey to unilaterally employ military means against it. After all, Russia wouldn't care in that case what happens to Armenia afterwards and would thus be unlikely to protect it after being ditched for the US. Plus, Azerbaijan and/or Turkey could attack in the time before US troops arrive, which would doom Armenia since there's no way that it could defend itself without a Great Power ally.

The fourth scenario is the most dramatic and is probably the path that Armenia would take in the very unlikely event that it decides to leave the CSTO. This would see it unilaterally hosting US forces in contravention of the [CSTO's 2011 agreement](#) that the deployment of military infrastructure on their territory must be consensually approved by all the bloc's members. By dropping such an unpleasant surprise on everyone, Armenia can immediately replace Russian troops with American ones without the dangerous window that the third scenario could create for enticing an Azerbaijani and/or Turkish attack.

Seeing as how the second scenario of receiving US military aid while remaining in the CSTO per the Central Asian-Turkish precedent is the most likely, especially since Armenia might rightly be reluctant to place full trust in America by unilaterally hosting its troops and thus being kicked out of the Russian bloc that it presently participates in, Russia must urgently correct their growing differences of perception. It's incumbent on its officials and influencers to explain to their counterparts and their society that there's no comparison between their earlier Kazakh mission and their current Armenian one.

The first was a hybrid anti-terrorist and peacekeeping mission while the second is a fact-finding mission that's implemented at the gradual pace that it presently is in order to avoid a major regional war by miscalculation. It would be unwise for the CSTO to immediately enter into conflict with Azerbaijan, which is NATO-member Turkey's de facto mutual defense ally after June 2021's [Susha Agreement](#), hence the need for calmly and carefully gathering all the facts about what just took place. Of course, they'd promptly defend themselves if attacked by Azerbaijan while doing so, but Baku is unlikely to do that.

Over the years, Armenian leaders took advantage of the public's lack of understanding about what exactly the CSTO is and how it operates to manipulate their perceptions in such a way as to get them to oversimplify its purpose by imagining that the bloc is a so-called "geopolitical fire brigade". What's meant by this is that people wrongly assumed that it'll rush to their rescue if Azerbaijan attacked them even a single time regardless if their side was the one that provoked it, which would lead to a Russian-Azerbaijani war that they expected Moscow to soundly win.

The reality is altogether different since the Kremlin never had any such intentions of the CSTO functioning in such a way, but it can nevertheless be constructively critiqued for failing to compellingly articulate this to Armenian society over the years, which regrettably resulted in [wishful thinking](#) and the false expectations associated with them proliferating through that population. The inevitable outcome of such wishful thinking is that those who held such unrealistic views ended up sorely disappointed and thus became very emotionally susceptible to weaponized infowar narratives from hostile third parties.

America immediately realized that it could maximally exploit Armenians' wishful thinking, false expectations, and subsequently deep disappointment with the CSTO by dispatching Pelosi to that country to explore the possibility of US arms shipments to this Russian ally. There wouldn't have been any fertile ground for this latest [Hybrid War](#) plot to take root had Russia preemptively and compellingly clarified its military-strategic calculations vis a vis Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the CSTO. This [politically tough takeaway](#) should therefore hopefully incentivize it to make up for lost time as soon as possible.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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About the author:

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