

Putin Has Shown Weakness in Armenia and Syria - Is His Credibility Collapsing?

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Global Research, May 06, 2018

[Russia Insider](#) 4 May 2018

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[Russia and FSU](#)

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"Since the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014, to many observers of the Russian scene it was clear that Putin was not a master strategist who plots his moves well ahead of his opponents. ... At best he is a manager who keeps divergent forces within Moscow's power structure in balance, rather than a statesman."

Tens of thousands of Armenians converged on the capital Yerevan on Wednesday morning, blocking roads and government buildings in protest over the ruling party's reluctance to transfer power in the country to opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan.

Protesters said they would stay on the streets for as long as it takes to oust the ruling Republican Party and install Pashinyan as prime minister. Apparently it worked: by the end of the day [Pashinyan announced that all parties would support his bid for power](#), and called for an end to protests.

"The issue has practically been solved," he told the cheering crowd at a rally in Yerevan. "All [parliamentary] factions say they will support my candidacy."

The regime-change operation in Armenia has been a textbook [color revolution](#) every step of the way, tried and tested in Belgrade (2000), Tbilisi (2003), and most notably Kiev (2004, repeated 2014). There is a significant difference, however. Unlike Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine, Armenia is a formal ally of the Russian Federation, a member of the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEC)—two pillars of President Vladimir Putin's presumed geopolitical strategy. Significantly, Armenia also hosts a major [Russian military base in Gyumri](#), leased until 2044, which the current government's defense minister Vigen Sargasyan described last year as "a vital component of our country's national security system."

Armenia is *déjà vu* all over again.

"[Envision people from all walks of life](#)—students, teachers, workers, artists, journalists, clergy, soldiers—smiling, laughing, and hugging one another," a friendly observer gushed. "A sea of flags . . . fills the square, and taxi drivers are honking their horns and popping champagne. The atmosphere is stirring and electric! These are ordinary people who stood up for transparent and accountable government. They mobilized to fight for a cause from a grassroots level, and they eventually won against almost impossible odds."

Unsurprisingly, the “ordinary people” interviewed for major Western networks just happened to be young, well-groomed, fluent English-speakers. Initially they demanded the resignation of recently appointed prime minister Serzh Sargasyan, who had been Armenia’s president for a decade before arranging—contrary to earlier promises—the sideways move to the new post, which would let him keep old power. In the early days of protests Sargsyan appears to have expected support and advice from Moscow, and—[failing to get it](#)—resigned on April 23 with a strangely worded statement:

“The street movement is against my tenure. I am fulfilling your demand.”

But his admission of defeat no longer satisfied the protesters, however, who shifted their demand to an outright regime change, *i.e.* immediate transfer of power to Pashinyan.



Source: Russia Insider

The demand was hardly in line with the protesters’ claim to reverse “democracy.” Described as “a muckraking journalist turned politician,” Pashinyan has modest electoral credentials. His [Way Out Alliance](#) won just under 8 percent of votes in Armenia’s 2017 parliamentary election, the legitimacy of which has not been disputed, and currently has only nine deputies in the country’s 105-seat national assembly. “Way Out” is a classic “pro-Western, pro-EU,” self-avowedly liberal party, intricately linked to a tight network of foreign-supported NGOs. It is opposed to Armenia’s membership of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and has been fiercely critical of what it regards as the current government’s excessive reliance on Moscow.

The script was familiar in every detail, including the unwillingness (or inability) of the Kremlin to anticipate and influence events.

[“In general, Russia acted with incredible caution,”](#) noted a protest-friendly Armenian analyst, which is to say that Russia remained invisible.

There was nothing “incredible” about the Kremlin’s inertia, however: Moscow was equally unable or unwilling to exert influence in other color revolution theaters, most notably in Ukraine in 2014. When an openly Russophobic regime came to power in Kiev after the February *coup d’etat*, [Putin merely warned](#) of the “tragic consequences of the wave of so-called color revolutions.”

As we now see, his warning was purely rhetorical. Four years later, with the same old scenario unfolding, he did nothing to prevent the reprise in Armenia—even though its objective was to topple the lawful government of a country (one of very few), which has entered both a military and an economic alliance with the Russian Federation.

Putin’s apologists in the Russian media and elsewhere were quick to claim that the change in Yerevan would not mean much in geopolitical terms, supposedly because its causes were “purely internal and any future government would need to rely on Russian protection against Turkey and/or Azerbaijan. With the same dismissive indolence, pro-government media have hardly taken note of the decision of Kazakhstan to [discard Cyrillic and adopt](#)

[Latin](#) as the national language script. They consistently ignore the signs of [estrangement of Belarus](#), where President Lukashenka is quietly trying to make himself grudgingly acceptable to the West . . . just as Montenegro's Milo Djukanovic had successfully done in the waning days of Milosevic's power.

(Talking of Montenegro, the Russians [invested heavily](#) in the tiny former Yugoslav republic in the early 2000's, and [actively supported its separation from Serbia in 2006](#), only to be rewarded by the imposition of sanctions by the Djukanovic regime in Podgorica in 2014, and its joining NATO in 2017.)

If the remaining two non-Russian members of the EAEC go, and the writing is on the wall, there will be literally nothing left. Moscow seems to display an extraordinary degree of complacency in areas Russia regards as safely within its historic sphere of influence, foreign affairs analyst James Jastras warns, even though the West—and especially the United States—explicitly rejects such assignment:

“The neglect Russia showed toward Ukraine after 1991 is now revealed to have been replicated in Belarus, Armenia, and Kazakhstan. After they're ‘flipped,’ what does Russia have left except its own territory? Then Russia itself will be treated with no greater respect by the authors of regime change operations. [As I have pointed out recently](#), Russia really IS America's No. 1 enemy (as per Mitt Romney's assessment), if ‘America’ means the ruling establishment, which is totally united in its Russophobia.”

It is not coincidental that the Armenian operation came in the immediate aftermath of Russia's display of weakness in Syria, after the false flag operation in Douma (April 8) and the ensuing bombing of Syrian government targets by the United States, Britain and France (April 14). Putin has been indecisive and weak throughout the crisis, [I concluded in these pages two days later](#), doing nothing after his senior officers repeatedly warned of a forthcoming stage-managed atrocity leading to a Western attack, and leaving Bashar al Assad's air-defense units to their own modest devices.

On April 16 Putin merely reinforced the impression of weakness when he said that yet *another* such attack on his nominal Syrian ally would “cause chaos.” Predictably, this has prompted the Russophobic full-spectrum hegemonists in Washington (and their minions in London) to demand decisive escalation, because “Putin has blinked” and “[Russia has shown itself to be a paper tiger](#).” One predictable consequence is that Assistant Secretary for [Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell, during his visit to Kiev](#) and Tbilisi, urged Russia [to “withdraw troops from Georgia”](#) (meaning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, an utterly impossible demand) and expressed support for both Ukraine's and Georgia's bid to join NATO.

Eventually the Russians may be forced to respond to ever-escalating provocations. The price of their current appeasement will be a radically reduced maneuvering space, however, and therefore an exponentially greater danger of lethal escalation. Part of the problem, according to an astute British analyst of Serbian origin, is that Russia simply does not understand soft power, its economy is about the size of Spain's, its nuclear arsenal is useless in localized power plays, its conventional forces have not impressed anybody, and Putin is too frightened of confronting the West except when things threaten to go over the top (Georgia 2008, Crimea 2014): “Russia is not behaving like a superpower because it isn't one.”

An additional sign of disorientation and utter feebleness in the Kremlin is [the news that former finance minister Alexei Kudrin will be brought back](#) to “mend fences with the West” in order to revive Russia’s economy. Kudrin has repeatedly said that unless Russia makes her political system more democratic and ends its confrontation with Europe and the United States, she will not be able to achieve economic growth. Russia’s fifth-columnists were exalted:

“If Kudrin joined the administration or government, it would indicate that they have agreed on a certain agenda of change, including in foreign policy, because without change in foreign policy, reforms are simply impossible in Russia,” said Yevgeny Gontmakher . . . who works with a civil society organization set up by Mr. Kudrin. “It would be a powerful message, because Kudrin is the only one in the top echelons with whom they will talk in the west and towards whom there is a certain trust.”

Putting Kudrin—an opponent of de-dollarization and an upholder of the Washington Consensus—in charge of Russia’s international outreach would be equal to putting Bill Clinton in charge of a girls’ school. It would mark Putin’s *de facto* collapse as a leader. We shall know very soon. Either way, if anyone wondered what the approach to Russia would be from Bolton and Pompeo, we now know: they will play very hard ball with Putin, regardless of what he does (or doesn’t do), and with carefree readiness to risk an eventual snap.

Last but not least, over the past four weeks Israel has acted in a manner almost calculated to humiliate Putin. “[Russia blames Israel for strikes on Syrian base](#),” the Western media [reported on April 9](#), and Russia was right—Israeli jets did pound Syria’s T-4 facility near Homs, killing 14 people, seven of them Iranians, and turning the base to rubble. Israel did not officially declare that its aircraft attack the base at Tiyas, but [Israeli military sources confirmed it](#). Calmly and deliberately, the government in Jerusalem thus ended its “[deconfliction](#)” arrangement with Russia which was negotiated between Putin and Israel’s prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) in September 2015. The agreement gave Israel a free hand against weapons transfers from Iran to Hezbollah, and allowed continued Israeli deterrence on its northern border.

Putin responded meekly, [literally pleading with Netanyahu](#) on April 12 to refrain from further action in Syria. The response [from Israel could hardly have been more harsh and offensive](#). Israeli defense minister Avigdor Lieberman announced on April 25 that Israel would be prepared to strike at any S-300 missile defense system in Syria threatening Israeli planes. This effectively means that Israel declared its readiness to attack *Russian-operated* systems if they are not granted a free run, since Moscow had abided by its decision—made originally at Israel’s request!—not to send the S-300 to Bashar’s forces. As if to make the point, Israeli jets mounted a massive attack on [another Syrian military base near Hama](#) on April 29, [allegedly destroying 200 Iranian missiles](#) and killing over 20 military personnel. Yet again Russia did nothing (verbal condemnations and warnings are no longer worthy of mention). As a Washington insider told me, the war hawks inside the Beltway are delighted:

“When all is said and done, Israel is behaving as a world power, and Russia isn’t. With its strikes in Syria and threats against Russia and Iran, Israel—backed up by the U.S.—feels free to act with impunity. Moscow meanwhile restrains itself under some fictive notion of ‘partnership’ with western powers. This only spurs further provocations under the expectation, based on experience to date, that it is cost-free.”

The interventionists believe that it is now time to take advantage of Putin's weakness by chasing the Russians out of Syria altogether, reopening the Ukrainian front, completing the regime change in Armenia, and encouraging the implosion of the remnant of the Russian-led security and economic alliances. My prediction is that they will also sabotage the FIFA World Cup, which is due to be held in Russia June 14 – July 15, by encouraging their proxies to stage another false-flag operation (which will be blamed on Moscow directly), or to carry out a terrorist attack on one of the competition's venues.

Ever since the second Ukrainian crisis erupted in the winter of 2013-2014, to many observers of the Russian scene it was clear that Putin was not a master strategist who plots his moves well ahead of his opponents. As [I noted here during my visit to Moscow a month ago, after 18 years in power](#) he has been shockingly unable to sort out the structural deficiencies of Russia's economy, which is still dominated by corrupt oligarchs and globalist fifth-columnists. At best he is a manager who keeps divergent forces within Moscow's power structure in balance, rather than a statesman.

Over the past three weeks his credibility has been deeply eroded. It is uncertain whether he can regain it—belatedly acting more like Churchill than Chamberlain—and thus make the danger of nuclear holocaust less acute.

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