

Armenia Says Won't Host Russia-Led Military Drills This Year

By [AFP](#)

January 10, 2023



Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. primeminister.am

Armenia will not host Russian-led military exercises this year, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said Tuesday, signaling growing frustration with Moscow.

Pashinyan's announcement came after the leader of the ex-Soviet republic criticized Moscow and the work of Russian peacekeepers in the South Caucasus, which has been plagued for decades by fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Speaking to reporters, Pashinyan said he saw no reason for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to stage military drills in Armenia this year.

"These exercises will not take place," he told reporters.

"Armenia does not believe it is expedient to conduct CSTO exercises in the republic this year."

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Analysts say Russia — distracted by its protracted war in Ukraine — is losing influence in the Southern Caucasus after decades of playing the role of power broker.

Pashinyan noted the organization had refused to condemn Azerbaijan, which fought a six-week war with Armenia for control of the majority-Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020.

The conflict claimed more than 6,500 lives and ended with a Russian-brokered truce that saw Yerevan cede territories it had controlled for decades and Moscow send peacekeepers to Karabakh.

Turkey, Azerbaijan's main weapons supplier, backed Baku in the conflict.

Despite the end of the large-scale fighting, tensions over their borders persist.

In May 2021, Armenia accused Azerbaijan of violating its territorial integrity and moving forces into its territory.

'Close ally'

Pashinyan implied Russia, which Armenia had thought of as an "ally number one," had let his country down at the time.

"Armenia expected concrete actions from its Russian partners and other partners in the field of security," Pashinyan said Tuesday, referring to the 2021 incursion.

"This issue is important from the point of view of building further relations," he added.

Headquartered in Moscow, the CSTO groups Russia and the former Soviet republics of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The security alliance said Tuesday it was looking for other locations for the exercises.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called Pashinyan's announcement "a rather new statement."

"In any case, Armenia is our very close ally," he said.

"We will continue the dialogue. Including on those issues that are now very complex."

Analysts have pointed to Russia's unwillingness to butt heads with Turkey and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus.

Pashinyan has also repeatedly accused Russian peacekeepers of failing to protect ethnic Armenians in Karabakh and called for a multinational peacekeeping force to step in.

Yerevan says Azerbaijan since mid-December has been blocking a key road linking Armenia with Karabakh, spurring shortages of food, medicine and fuel. To deal with food shortages, local authorities say they plan to introduce ration stamps.

As part of the 2020 ceasefire, Russian peacekeepers are responsible for maintaining security over the link, referred to as the Lachin corridor.

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