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Armenia Is Breaking Up With Russia – And Putin Can't Stop It

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Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Vladimir Putin. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

For decades, Armenia was one of Russia's most reliable post-Soviet allies — a small but loyal partner nestled in the volatile South Caucasus. But that marriage of convenience is now rapidly unraveling.

Today, Yerevan is no longer whispering discontent. It is shouting it from the rooftops. And Moscow? It is scrambling to salvage the remains of its diminishing influence with soft power schemes and desperate political maneuvers.

The writing is now on the wall. Armenia is done waiting for a protector that never arrives.

The rupture can be traced most clearly to 2021 and 2022, when Azerbaijani forces launched cross-border attacks on Armenian territory and killed hundreds of Armenian soldiers. A founding member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO),

Armenia expected solidarity. Instead, it got silence.

From Armenia's perspective, Azerbaijan likely would not have moved on Nagorno-Karabakh if Russia had not invaded Ukraine. The war drained the Kremlin's resources and attention, leaving a power vacuum in the South Caucasus. Baku seized the moment, knowing Russia was too distracted and weakened to respond.

The CSTO's refusal to intervene shattered the illusion that Russia would uphold its end of the bargain. When Nagorno-Karabakh, a region long supported by Armenians, was blockaded and then swiftly captured by Azerbaijan in 2023, Russian peacekeepers stood idly by.

To Armenians, this was betrayal. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has already suspended Armenia's participation in CSTO activities and refused to attend recent summits. Senior figures in his government told me last week that Armenia will never become a full participant again and may even leave altogether.

Armenia is now rapidly shedding its long-standing dependence on Russia as its primary security guarantor and shifting toward a policy of strategic diversification.

No longer content to be a geopolitical satellite, Armenia is pursuing deeper ties with the European Union, strengthening cooperation with the United States, and seeking normalization with Turkey. This pivot is not just symbolic. It is a decisive move to anchor Armenia's future in a multipolar world where security is not outsourced to a disinterested patron but built through balanced, pragmatic partnerships.

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In late May, I attended the second Yerevan Dialogue, an international forum on peace, security, and cooperation. What stood out was not just who was there, but who was not. There were speakers and senior politicians from India, France, the U.K., Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the U.S., Iran and the EU. But, notably, no one from Russia was there — a clear sign of the region's shifting geopolitical landscape.

Senior figures from Pashinyan's party confided in me about "Russian-backed actors trying to destabilise Armenia's democracy." One even quipped that the only silver lining in Armenia's relationship with Russia is that they do not share a physical border, limiting Moscow's direct influence.

What once might have been a subtle influence now feels like a Cold War psyop. Moscow is attempting to retake Armenia — not with tanks, but with Telegram channels, paid influencers, and geriatric loyalists.

According to Vedomosti, Sergei Kiriyenko, Vladimir Putin's First Deputy Chief of Staff, has been tasked with reviving Russian influence in Armenia ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections.

This will not be easy. Russian sources themselves admit there is now "no one to speak for Russia" in Armenia. Aside from aging ex-presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan,

both tainted by corruption and nostalgia for authoritarianism, the pro-Russian camp is a virtual ghost town.

Kiriyenko's playbook reportedly begins with "informational work." In other words, propaganda. Moscow is also grooming Kremlin-approved opposition figures, quietly flying them to Moscow for consultations.

But it is hard to win hearts with empty promises, especially from the country that abandoned you in war. The Armenian public, especially the youth, is more interested in visas to Paris and tech jobs in Silicon Valley than Soviet fairy tales.

Armenia is not just drifting away from Russia. It is actively building new bridges. A peace deal with Azerbaijan is inching closer, one that may finally open the closed borders with Turkey and transform Armenia from a landlocked outpost into a regional hub.

Yerevan is also deepening ties with the European Union and the United States. Armenia has welcomed a European Union civilian border mission, turning down a similar offer from Russia. This follows last year's agreement for Russian border guards to withdraw from Zvartnots Airport in Yerevan and key border areas near Azerbaijan, highlighting Armenia's move away from Moscow's direct control.

European aid, investment and security dialogue are expanding while American diplomats are visiting more frequently. In April 2024, the U.S. and Armenia launched a new Strategic Dialogue focused on democratic reforms and security cooperation. These are not just diplomatic niceties; they are lifelines.

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Armenia understands that its future lies not in the shadow of a declining empire but among liberal democracies that value sovereignty and partnership.

The country's public trust in Russia has plummeted. A 2024 poll by the International Republican Institute showed just 31% of Armenians viewed ties with Moscow positively, down from 93% in 2019. In the eyes of most Armenians, France has emerged as their country's top political ally, with the U.S. close behind.

But Putin will not back off so easily. The appointment of Kiriyenko is part of a last-ditch effort to stem the tide, but it's likely too little, too late. Kremlin-friendly voices in Armenia are losing credibility, and the Armenian public is no longer afraid to question Russia's motives or competence.

On the streets of Yerevan, the influx of Russians who arrived post-mobilization has already faded. The majority of the estimated 100,000 Russian exiles have since returned or moved on, disillusioned by limited opportunities. The Russians are not missed. In fact, one Armenian friend complained that her rent almost doubled in a year from 100,000 drams ($250) to 180,000 ($475) due to the spike in housing demand.

Armenia may be rethinking its security alliances, but it won't become a separate planet in the South Caucasus. Geography is destiny. Russia remains a neighbor — even without a shared

border — and trade with Moscow is still a key pillar of Armenia's economy.

Russian brands like VTB, Gazprom and Yandex Taxi still mark Moscow's presence in Armenia. The country also remains heavily dependent on Russia for natural gas and electricity.

Even the recent surge in trade, fuelled by sanctions evasion, is seen as temporary. Beneath the surface, Russia's influence is waning, and even in central Yerevan, many young people no longer speak or understand Russian.

Pashinyan's visit to Moscow for Victory Day on May 9 was a calculated gesture to reassure the Kremlin that Armenia's Western pivot does not mean cutting Russia off entirely.

But in a sign of growing unease in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to Yerevan last month for talks with Pashinyan — a visit widely seen as an attempt to reassert Russia's fading influence.

The optics were clear: Armenia is no longer looking to Moscow as its default protector. Lavrov arrived not as a trusted ally, but as a messenger from a power whose security guarantees have repeatedly failed.

If Russia truly wants to remain relevant in the South Caucasus, it needs to reckon with the fact that coercion no longer works.

Armenia has learned the hard way that Moscow's promises are conditional, unreliable and ultimately self-serving. Now, Yerevan is charting its own course. Russia may still be present, but it is no longer calling the shots.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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