PUTIN PUNISHES RUSSIA'S KEY ALLY

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By David Boyajian, Massachusetts, 8 November 2023

Oddly, few Western writers on the South Caucasus have ever grasped Christian Armenia's significance as Russia's only ally and military outpost among the region's three countries.

Simply put: Were Russia to lose Armenia, the U.S./NATO/EU and pan-Turkism would inevitably dominate the Caucasus/Caspian and, perhaps, beyond. Putin understands this.

Georgia and Azerbaijan are, after all, headed *away* from Russia.

Though always under Russian pressure, Georgia's an unofficial NATO candidate with sizeable Western investments. NATO countries and Israel have been modernizing its military. Tbilisi's also the middleman for Baku's gas/oil pipelines extending to Turkey and elsewhere.

Azerbaijan's fossil fuel deposits, pipelines, and U.S./European commercial/economic ties are well-known.

Less talked about are the Aliyev autocracy's pan-Turkic ideology; formal alliance with NATO's Turkey; deployment of international terrorists; dependence on Israeli weapons/military prowess; and longtime backing by America's Jewish lobby.

Elected ostensibly as a democratic reformist in 2018, Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan grew friendlier with the West than had Yerevan's previous leaders.

This enraged Putin. That's problematic: Armenia's dependent on its ally for gas, oil, the nuclear power plant, weapons, remittances from Armenians in Russia, and more. However, Pashinyan didn't break with Moscow.

Nevertheless, Putin resolved to *punish and humiliate* Armenia to force it *totally and irrevocably* under Russian domination.

Punish and Humiliate

In 2020, Putin silently but indisputably greenlighted Azerbaijan, Turkey, international terrorists, and Israel to sledgehammer Christian Armenia and Armenian-populated Artsakh/Karabagh into submitting to Russia.

We know that near its borders Russia's extremely NATO-and-terrorist-phobic.

And yet:

In Azerbaijan's 44-day war in 2020 (Sept. 27-Nov. 9) against Artsakh's Armenians, Turkey *openly* delivered *American-supplied F-16s,* Bayraktar drones containing NATO parts, additional weapons, generals, troops, and *several thousand* jihadist terrorists to Azerbaijan.

Tellingly, the Kremlin was *unruffled*.

Moreover, Tel Aviv — the West's friend, not Moscow's — overtly *re*supplied Baku with hi-tech weapons.

The Kremlin, again, voiced *no particular alarm*.

Post-war, however, Russia revealed that it'd been in charge all along. During the fighting, for instance, it was Moscow — *not Baku* — that had offered Yerevan a "peace" deal (which Pashinyan declined).

Artsakh — gifted to Azerbaijan by Stalin but indigenously Armenian for millennia — lost the war, as did Armenia. Buffer zones around Artsakh gained by it in the early 1990s were also forfeited.

Putin's fingerprints were, not surprisingly, all over the Nov. 9, 2020 agreement among Moscow, Yerevan, and Baku.

In what *remained* of Armenian-populated Artsakh, the pact *awarded Russia*:

- An armed, 2000-troop "peacekeeping" mission *plus* guardianship over the only road — the Lachin corridor — between Artsakh and Armenia proper (Points 3/4/6).
- Military control over *future* routes through Armenia between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave (Point 9).

That Russia greenlighted a war against Armenia/Artsakh isn't a total surprise.

Moscow's always sought to keep Yerevan apprehensive and dependent. The Kremlin has for decades permitted repeated Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia *despite* Yerevan's defense pacts with Moscow and the Russian-led CSTO alliance.

None of this is intended to defend PM Pashinyan. He has failed and should resign.

And please ignore the nonsense that Russia, shaken by setbacks in Ukraine, couldn't prevent the 2020 war. Putin's invasion of Ukraine came much *later*: February of 2022.

Punishment Without End

Throughout 2021-2023, Azerbaijan invaded, occupied, and fortified over 80 sq. miles of Armenia's internationally recognized southeast.

Hurling the Azeri attacks in Armenia's face, the Kremlin sarcastically termed them mere "border demarcations." The Azeris are still there.

Russia/CSTO had again willfully violated their defense treaties with Armenia.

Meanwhile, despite Russia's 2020 pledge, its "peacekeepers" permitted incessant Azeri assaults on Artsakh from 2021 on.

Then, in December of 2022, Azerbaijan sent military and other officials disguised as "eco-activists" to

block the Lachin corridor.

The armed "peacekeepers" could've moved the Azeris off the road in 5 minutes. Instead, the Russians feigned helplessness as food and medical supplies to Artsakh were blocked. Meanwhile, the well-fed Russian soldiers offered to sell food to the starving Armenians at inflated prices.

Baku also cut off gas, electricity, and communications to Artsakh. Yet again, despite its signed agreement, Moscow said little and did nothing.

The blockade, declared former International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, fit the UN definition of genocide: "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction."

Thus, "Christian" Russia and its half-Turkic Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu blatantly violated Nov. 9, 2020's accord while Artsakh was attacked and starved.

On September 14, 2023, Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Yuri Kim testified that the Biden administration "will not countenance any effort — short-term or long-term — to ethnically cleanse Artsakh."

Then came September 19's genocidal cleansing.

Genocidal Cleansing

Azerbaijan launched a genocidal military assault on Artsakh. 120,000 Armenians fled their democracy of 30+ years lest they be murdered if they stayed. Some were, in fact, killed, tortured, and murdered.

Russian "peacekeepers" let it happen. No surprise.

Artsakh's millennia-long nationhood — gone in a flash.

The White House clearly "countenanced" the cleansing, as did Europe and the UN. America often prioritizes authoritarian regimes over human rights and common decency.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention recently issued a Red Flag Alert "due to the alarming potential for an invasion of Armenia by Azerbaijan in the coming days and weeks."

The Geopolitical Future

Russia has certainly not finished punishing Armenia and PM Pashinyan.

Invasions by Azerbaijan and even Turkey are quite possible.

In that case, Russia would likely "save" Armenia, which would sign over its sovereignty to Moscow. Armenia might even become a Russian Union State, like Belarus.

Assuming *near total Russian control of Armenia*, the U.S./NATO/EU would find it very difficult to

totally penetrate the Caucasus even if Armenia's borders with Turkey/Azerbaijan eventually open.

Putin's been trying for years to entice Turkey and Azerbaijan into his web. The Turkic twins have played along but aren't fooled.

But as Russia rightly fears pan-Turkism, it would probably permit only *limited* penetration through Armenia by Ankara and Baku. Thus, a Russian-controlled Armenia would become a buffer, not a U.S./NATO/EU pathway. But nothing is certain.

To keep the West totally at bay, Russia could invade Georgia and control the pipelines originating from Azerbaijan.

Another danger to Russia would be an *extraterritorial corridor* (not just the existing roads) from Turkey through northwest Iran — occupied by masses of Azeri speakers — to Azerbaijan.

That's one reason why Turkey, Azerbaijan, and probably the U.S. and Israel wish to dismember Iran, attach its northwest to Azerbaijan, and cut off Armenia's access to Iran. Moscow and Tehran know this well.

Will Russia's punishment of Armenia ultimately benefit the Kremlin?

Or will Russia receive its just desserts for the vile, unwarranted punishment of its ally?

David Boyajian's primary foreign policy focus is the Caucasus. His work can be found at https://armeniapedia.org/wiki/David_Boyajian. Twitter: @Boyajian_Writer

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There are no comments yet.