WHY PASHINYAN'S WESTWARD DRIFT MAY BACKFIRE

Posted on August 13, 2025 by Keghart



Categories: Editorials, Opinions

Editorial by Karen Mkrtchyan, Yerevan, 9 August 2025

As Armenia stands at a geopolitical crossroads, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government has embarked on what many see as a quiet, careful pivot away from Russia. This reorientation, couched in vague declarations of "sovereignty" and "independent foreign policy," is presented as a path to greater national dignity. But beneath the surface may lie a political strategy that is not only short-sighted but also self-defeating.

Since the 2018 revolution that brought Pashinyan to power on the back of popular discontent, his administration has deliberately failed to cultivate or empower any serious pro-Western political force outside his party. Instead of transforming Armenia's domestic political scene in line with the so-called democratic and pluralistic ideals championed during the Velvet Revolution, he has chosen a convenient rivalry: one where the only visible opposition is the discredited remnants of the former regime. By keeping this binary alive—himself as the flawed but preferable reformer, and the Kocharyan-Sargsyan camp as the specter of the past—Pashinyan has succeeded in perpetuating a false dichotomy. Many Armenians, disillusioned and wary, have re-elected him not out of confidence, but out of fear of regression.

In the current National Assembly, both opposition factions are dominated by figures associated with the old guard. This is not a reflection of popular enthusiasm for their return, but a testament to Pashinyan's deliberate exclusion of other political alternatives, including some of his former alliance colleagues as well as those in civil society, youth activism, and diaspora-backed movements. Some of these groups have largely failed to grow into political entities and continue to render outside support to Pashinyan in his fight against what they call Russia's "fifth column" in Armenia. The others, who don't belong to the pro-Krelmin camp, have been deliberately sidelined by Pashinyan. This calculated gatekeeping has suffocated the political space needed for a truly pro-Western democratic force to grow. He has allowed the narrative to be shaped as "us or them," with "them" conveniently labeled as Kremlin-backed. In doing so, he has inadvertently ensured that when he eventually falls—which history suggests every populist inevitably does—the vacuum may only be filled by the very forces he claimed to have overthrown.

Adding to this already crowded and imbalanced field, Russia-based businessman Samvel Karapetyan, who owns the Tashir Group conglomerate, has announced the formation of a new political force. Karapetyan is currently facing charges of allegedly conspiring to usurp power following an interview he gave in support of the Armenian Church amid the ongoing tussle between Catholicos Karekin II and Prime Minister Pashinyan.

While its full platform has yet to be revealed, early indications suggest it will be non-Western in orientation and unlikely to share Pashinyan's vision for Armenia's foreign policy direction. With substantial resources, high name recognition, and a potential base among voters dissatisfied with both the government and the existing opposition, the movement is likely to become a significant

player. Its entry into the political scene underscores a key concern: instead of encouraging the emergence of strong, consolidated pro-Western forces since the 2018 revolution, Armenia's political spectrum continues to be reshaped largely by actors operating outside that vision.

Now, with the ink barely dry on a US-brokered peace pact between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the stakes are even higher. The agreement, hailed by Washington as a step toward stability, is not yet fully finalized and still requires sensitive follow-up negotiations on implementation. A change in government—especially if its foreign policy orientation differs sharply from Pashinyan's—could complicate or even derail parts of the process. Without a shared national consensus on the pact's terms, any shift in leadership might bring re-interpretations or adjustments that could unsettle the fragile momentum. The absence of a broad, cross-party commitment to the deal, thanks to Pashinyan's refusal to consider outside voices, leaves it vulnerable to the political winds of the moment.

We need only to look at Georgia for a cautionary tale. After years of aspiring toward EU and NATO membership, and building a reputation as a democratic pioneer in the post-Soviet space, Georgia has in recent years seen its government turn inward, and arguably eastward. Though they too claim to play a "balancing" game between the West and Russia, the policies of the ruling Georgian Dream party increasingly resemble appeasement to Moscow's interests. The much-criticized "foreign agents" law and the alleged attacks on civil society have raised alarm across Europe. This regression happened not because of a Russian invasion, but because the pro-Western movement there lost its momentum and failed to institutionalize its gains, thus allowing a Kremlin-backed Government to take on the reigns in Tbilisi.

Armenia may soon face the same fate, if not worse.

Pashinyan's retreat from Russian dependence might have been defensible had it been accompanied by a genuine effort to institutionalize a Western-leaning alternative at home. But the very civil society actors and political reformers who might have shouldered that vision have been sidelined, ignored, or subtly discredited. Now, as Armenia faces growing external threats, declining security guarantees, and an uncertain regional future, his government continues to speak of "independence" while dangerously hollowing out the foundations needed to sustain it.

What happens when Pashinyan is gone? The reformist camp remains scattered and leaderless. No viable centrist or pro-Western political formation exists, at least for now, that can step into the breach. Meanwhile, the pro-Russian parties, refreshed by years in opposition and emboldened by the public's disillusionment of this Government, wait in the wings. If they return, it won't be to the Armenia of 2018. It will be to a nation weakened, betrayed, stripped of Artsakh, and now regarded with suspicion or even more resentment in Moscow.

In that case, the US-brokered peace deal, already a delicate diplomatic "achievement", may not survive the first storm of political reversal. If drifting away from Russia was meant to give us "real

independence," we risk ending up back under the Kremlin's influence, but much weaker, bruised, and without the leverage we once had.

What was supposed to be a pivot to independence could end in the worst possible place: back under the Kremlin's shadow, but this time as a humiliated, defeated, and expendable vassal.

Pashinyan's strategy may well become Armenia's tragedy. Unless urgent steps are taken to foster genuine political pluralism, to invest in civil society as a political actor and not just an "anti-Moscow" movement, we may soon find ourselves asking: was the revolution worth it, only to leave us with the same oligarchic opposition, a weakened state, a fragile peace accord, and a vengeful former patron?

The time to prepare for a post-Pashinyan Armenia is now. If not, we may soon wake up to find that our supposed "independence" was nothing more than a perilous illusion.

Comments

Artisan – 2025-08-18 09:30:46
We went from General Andranik Ozanian to Secretary Antony Blinkin in one generation.

Vahe H Apelian – 2025-08-17 18:25:24
It is not the end of the Armenian world. There is a formidable front against this deal led by Catholicos Karekin II Nersisyan, his brother the prelate of Moscow Yezras, former presidents Kocharian and Sargsyan led opposition, Archbishops Galastanyan and Achabahian, Russian Armenian oligarchs such as Samvel Karapetyan and Ara Abrahamyan This front appears to have vast financial resources. They can put a coalition together and in 10 months, on June 2026 bring about a new government in Armenia, that will scrap this deal and chart a new course that will have the best interest of Armenia and will placate the Diaspora segment who opposes the American brokered peace deal and the TRIPP.

Keghart – 2025-08-17 14:13:30
Comments containing inappropriate remarks, personal attacks and derogatory expressions will be discarded.

Art – 2025-08-17 02:19:40
My posts are being censored and removed by the site administrator. This is the extent of Armenian discourse. This is why we fail. Because you can't stand reality. I won't bother writing anything here again.



Art – 2025-08-16 22:25:31
Hovsep, Hayastancis act like they own Armenia, like they are the real Armenians who created Armenia. Whereas the only reason Armenia exists was the Soviet Russia's invasion and conquest. Otherwise the turks would have finished them off. This attitude is the opposite of the stance of the Israeli jews. It's stupid and self-defeating. We diasporans have as much of a right and DUTY to govern the homeland; to have a say where it goes. Do not change the subject. It's stupid and disingenuous. That most of the diasporans themselves are nothing to write home about, is a GIVEN. However doing what is right and necessary is the concern here. Right action.



Arevik Abaghyan – 2025-08-15 08:02:20
There is only one Republic of Armenia and if Art is so upset with its population let him or her create another one that will satisfy the divide and rule tactics of our enemies won't it? When it comes to the article itself I agree that we need an alternative to Pashinyan but shouldn't blame Pashinyan for not having it.I do not understand why the author thinks that "The absence of a broad, cross-party commitment to the deal, thanks to Pashinyan's refusal to consider outside voices, leaves it vulnerable to the political winds of the moment." ? How does Pashinyan refuse to consider outside forces? He did try to include them after the last elections and even created an unprecedented body for the parties that did not enter the parliament and held consultations with them. What else could he do? How should he include outside forces, do you have any practical example to suggest? If you really care about Armenian statehood to survive you shouldn't underestimate all the money and networking Russia is investing into YES the fifth column which is a sad reality and not a tool used by Pashinyan. By the way I am not at all happy with Pashinyan. I wish we had a force that could replace him but we will create it by underestimating the fifth column or by blaming Pashinyan, we should come up by practical suggestions and initiatives and always remember that the fifth column may very well penetrate into it if we disregard that danger.



Hovsep – 2025-08-14 23:48:42
Dear Art, I, too, am a Diasporan, and I share your indignation. However, I find it over the top to paint all people in Armenia with the same colour. Aren't there bad apples also in the Diaspora?



Art – 2025-08-14 20:50:10

Enough with the usual nonsense. We have a problem and the problem is US (menkenk). Hayastancis (eastern [a]rmenians) gave away Artsakh to the turks on a silver platter. They had diaspora's money and 30 years to prepare their defenses. They had tanks, planes and artillery. They had missiles and they could have bought more effective systems to defend against the turkish and israeli drones. They could have dug tunnels and reinforced their fortifications. What did the Hayastancis do? They embezzled funds sent by the diaspora and sold their arms to the enemy in wartime. They betrayed the patriots fighting in Artsakh. 20,000 of our best young men were killed or maimed for life. Their homeland is under azeri occupation and what do they do? The Hayastancis jail the opposition and attack the Armenian church instead of the azeri invaders occupying Armenian lands (in Armenia proper, not just Artsakh). Then they go to a Jennifer Lopez concert like it's 1999. Look at what the Palestinians achieved for two years, under blockade, without tanks or planes. Hayastancis? They betrayed the real patriots fighting in Artsakh. We all know that Hayastancis hate Armenians of the diaspora. They call us 'garbage' (aghp-er, a play on words). They just want our money. They think we're not real Armenians whereas they're all craven depraved traitors - otherwise they'd all be in the streets dragging pash... a.. to jail like yesterday. Save your money, energy and sanity for your family and Armenian patriots like yourself. NOT A SINGLE CENT TO ARMENIA WITHOUT CONSTITUTIONALLY-MANDATED OBLIGATORY 50 PERCENT DIASPORA REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT. Like Monte Melkonian said: we lose Artsakh we lose the homeland. Stop succoring the Hayastanci failures.



Bedros Tovmassian – 2025-08-14 18:05:34

All Armenians should all read Mr. David Davidian's web site and articles....
https://shadowdiplomat.com/



Bedros Tovmassian – 2025-08-14 18:04:13

Armenians are in a deep slumber... all of them, including the diaspora.... The last sentence is too innocuous. A failure of Armenians to awaken from their slumber could very well mean Armenia disappears into the pages of history, never to be seen again. So much to say in support of this article. In sum, Armenians need to understand that first and foremost they need an independent nation, free from the clutches of the West and East because, well, no one is our friend. Germany and all of Europe and their open, unapologetic support of Turkic marauders... secure my energy future... no help. Russia and the US... the same degenerates exercising their "great power politics" China and India.. silent... and also not very smart.... Armenians must unite to first secure the nation.... then worry about which degenerate politician takes power. But then, the people must still remain vigilent.. as in any nation.