PASHINYAN'S WASHINGTON MISSION TANKS

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By Margarita Krtikashyan, Yerevan, 16 February 2025

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Washington, initially expected to enhance Armenia-U.S. relations, ended up as a diplomatic misstep. Despite the anticipation surrounding his trip, Pashinyan's efforts to secure a stronger political footing were ultimately thwarted by a lack of engagement with key decision-makers and a misalignment between Armenia's expectations and U.S. priorities.

A significant factor contributing to the visit's failure was the timing. With Donald Trump newly re-elected as president, his administration was still in the process of defining its foreign policy direction. As a result, Armenia did not figure prominently on Washington's agenda. Pashinyan's attempts to secure clarity on U.S. policies regarding the South Caucasus and Armenia's place in this broader strategy went largely unanswered.

The absence of high-level meetings further undermined the trip. Pashinyan met briefly with Vice President James David Vance, but such a meeting was largely symbolic, as the vice president's role does not involve direct involvement in foreign policy decisions. More crucially, Pashinyan did not meet with President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, or any senior figures in Congress. While foreign leaders on diplomatic visits generally expect at least some engagement with senior officials, Pashinyan's inability to secure these meetings indicated that Washington had little to offer in terms of substantive support.



Another factor was Pashinyan's participation in the International Religious Freedom Summit and the National Prayer Event. Given his secular stance and the presence of officials like MP Arsen Torosyan, known for his critical views on the church, it appeared that the religious events were more of a diplomatic maneuver than a genuine interest in religious matters. This added to the perception that the visit lacked sincerity in its stated objectives.

Moreover, the Trump administration's "America First" approach means that U.S. foreign policy is largely driven by pragmatic, strategic and transactional interests. Armenia, as a small player in the global arena, does not occupy a top priority for Washington. The U.S. is primarily focused on its relations with Russia, China, and the Middle East, leaving little room for Armenia's concerns. Pashinyan's visit failed to shift this dynamic, as Washington remained focused on other geopolitical issues.

Pashinyan's balancing act between Russia and the West also contributed to the failure. Armenia's strained relations with Russia and stagnation in its ties with Iran indicate a desire to pivot towards the West. However, without strong assurances from Western allies, this shift remains precarious. If U.S.-Russia relations improve under Trump's leadership, Armenia could find itself caught in a difficult position, lacking guarantees from either side.

Ultimately, Pashinyan's Washington visit underscored Armenia's diplomatic vulnerabilities. Despite the desire for U.S. backing, the visit's lack of concrete outcomes, symbolic nature, and absence of high-level engagement illustrated the challenges Yerevan faces in navigating the complex world of international diplomacy. The trip served as a reminder that for small nations like Armenia, timing, alignment with global priorities, and the ability to secure meaningful engagement are key factors in achieving diplomatic success.

In the end, Pashinyan's visit to Washington was not just a diplomatic miscalculation—it was a stark reminder of Armenia's limited leverage on the global stage.

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Comments



David Boyajian – 2025-02-20 10:14:33
I must respectfully disagree with the author when she writes, "Armenia, as a small player in the global arena, does not occupy a top priority for Washington." The obvious support for Armenia by the US and Europe are indicative of their desire to use Armenia to penetrate the Caucasus, Caspian, and even Central Asia, especially given renewed Russian pressure on Georgia. In 2024, the US State Dept's James O'Brien specifically cited Armenia's value as a route to Central Asia. Georgia and Armenia form a physical wall between the west and territories to the east, the latter being highly desired by Western nations. One example of this is Russian anger at Armenia for its closer relations with the West. Russia knows Armenia's importance to maintaining a Russian foothold in the Caucasus. To what extent this may change under Trump is unclear.