

Peaceful Protests in Armenia Bringing Democracy or East vs. West Showdown?

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On April 23rd, 2018, the eve of the 103rd anniversary of Armenian Remembrance Day, Armenia's president recently turned Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan [resigned](#) from his newly created post after over a decade in control leading the Yerevan government. His Republican Party still holds 96 of the 105 parliamentary seats in the Republic. Just two Mondays prior to Serzh Sargsyan's surprise resignation, another purportedly unrelated Sargsyan named Armen was quietly sworn into office as the new Armenian figurehead [president](#) in literal "same as the old boss" irony, in surname if not more.

Western media [coverage](#) of the massive Armenian protests prior to the prime minister's historic announcement was virtually nonexistent. But chomping at the bit to broadcast another potentially successful "color revolution" has all the big boys lined up happily reporting recent events from the capital Yerevan. Hundreds of Armenian [soldiers](#) went AWOL to join the [100,000](#) demonstrators in solidarity in the central square. When opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan (image below right) and a few of his supporters were arrested and taken into custody, the crowds reacting through social media swelled into the streets.



Upwards of [20%](#) of the country's population for two straight weeks took daily to the streets in spontaneous youthful protest against Sargsyan's transparent power play to retain political control as prime minister in this tiny impoverished landlocked Christian nation. Because his two presidential terms expired, Sargsyan is said to have manipulated constitutional amendments calling for a new office of prime minister as a ploy to stay in power. Originally from [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), the long disputed Armenian enclave that's had Armenia and Azerbaijan coming to loggerheads for nearly a century, in 2008 Serzh Sargsyan was first elected Armenia's president.

Sandwiched between two hostile Muslim neighbors – Turkey to the west and Azerbaijan to the east, Armenia remains in precarious conflict at its eastern border vying with Azerbaijan over the disputed "breakaway" region of Nagorno-Karabakh that since ancient times has always been populated by an overwhelming Armenian majority.

In 1921 a young Georgian dictator Josef Stalin intentionally set up the endless “divide and rule” [dispute](#) pitting the two Soviet outer states Azerbaijan and Armenia against each other fighting indefinitely over the contested territory. This fate was cast shortly after one third of all Armenians on the planet – [1.5 million](#) – were slaughtered by the Ottoman Turks during World War I. The Netherlands’ February vote brought the latest count up to 23 nations officially recognizing last century’s first genocide that Turkey still denies.

Near daily skirmishes occur between Armenians in defense of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding Azeri troops ever since the bloody war from [1988-1994](#) killed up to 30,000 Azeris and 6,000 Armenians with over a million people displaced. It was two years ago when, with Washington’s complicit blessing, Azerbaijan launched an April Fool’s Day surprise [invasion](#) in what turned out to be an unsuccessful military offensive into the embattled Armenian enclave killing over [200](#) soldiers and civilians. After a near week of open warfare and Azeris committing [atrocities](#), Putin brokered a truce with each side engaging in daily exchange of gunfire leaving the conflict unresolved and still festering. Right up till today this region’s political unrest and violent instability have remained a global hotspot to potentially igniting [World War III](#). And US Empire has taken full advantage attempting to embarrass Putin in his own backyard.

Armenia’s latest culmination of peaceful demonstrations this last week resulted in [42-year old](#) opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan’s so called “[velvet revolution](#),” seemingly a bloodless victory for citizen democracy. The interim Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan, who is a former prime minister and mayor of Yerevan as well as close ally of Sargsyan, broke off negotiations last week with Pashinyan calling it “a show.” Meanwhile, Pashinyan stated that he is armed with the “[mandate of the people](#),” and optimistic that the Constitution calling for the parliamentary vote within a week, will make him the next prime minister. However, within the last few hours the ruling [Republican Party](#) apparently has reneged on its May 1st promise to nominate a replacement candidate, refusing to do so citing “in the interests of the people.” Instead it will wait till all the candidates are nominated by April 30th, and then select which candidate to back.

Image below is Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin



At first glance, it appears as though civil society and democracy have triumphantly prevailed in Armenia over despotic cronyism and corruption. Yet a deeper analysis might characterize recent events as a geopolitical [infowar](#) being covertly fought on the global chessboard between both Western and Eastern forces. Of course the East is led by Putin’s

Russia that has historically viewed Armenia as its close backdoor ally in the South Caucasus with two Russian [military bases](#) located inside Armenia and an [S-300 missile defense](#) system deployed in case NATO member Turkey threatens the Armenian-Russian defense pact. The West is represented by the opposing US Empire-EU-NATO bloc, always eager to steal Armenia (and every nation bordering Russia) away from the Moscow fold, much like it manipulated the 2014 [Ukrainian coup](#) and the former Soviet Iron Curtain now all NATO vassals with [missiles](#) aimed directly at Moscow.

These geopolitical dynamics are uniquely further complicated by the fact that the Armenian nation is indelibly connected to its international [diaspora](#) whose numbers exceed the population inside Armenia. With an estimated [2.2](#) million Armenians living in nearby Russia and another 1.5 in North America alone, they together vastly outnumber the 2.9 million Armenians living in Armenia. The total size of Armenian diaspora is about [8 million](#). Thus the close-knit diaspora's direct ties to Armenia contribute much needed financial support as well as exert considerable political influence over Armenians' ancient homeland that credits itself as history's first Christian nation state back in [301 AD](#).

The long impoverished people of Armenia have struggled in economic despair starting with the devastating 1988 [earthquake](#) that virtually wiped out Armenia's second largest city Leninakan with 290,000 residents in the northwestern part of the country. Shortly afterwards the dissolving Soviet Empire in 1991 granted Armenia its long awaited independence but without Moscow's subsidized assistance, the post-earthquake reconstruction grinded to a halt.

Subsequently the fledgling republic's economy faltered, resulting in a brain drain where a sizeable portion of educated citizenry left the country with many never returning. For a poor nation Armenia possesses a relatively well-educated populace of human capital. But in the last quarter century, Armenia's chronically depressed economy has compelled [25%](#) of its population to seek greater employment opportunity elsewhere, relocating and residing outside their homeland, mainly in Russia, Europe and North America. Armenia depends on the [half billion](#) dollars sent home each year by its citizens working in foreign countries. Meanwhile, the national unemployment rate stands at a hefty 16% and the poverty rate has hovered near [30%](#) for a decade, indicating Armenians subsist barely on less than [\\$3.20](#) a day.

Currently there are two diaspora factions locked in a geopolitics power struggle taking place inside Armenia within the framework of the larger West versus East cold war that's been heating up despite Trump's broken campaign promise to partner with [Putin](#). But the Donald's only demonstrated that he's a [compromised](#), controlled puppet of the [neocon Zionist](#) ruling elite just like all his predecessors. At the intercontinental crossroads of Europe and Asia lies Armenia where a prominent Western contingent of Armenian American oligarchs primarily from [California](#) are in a faceoff against Eastern expatriated Armenian oligarchs headquartered mostly in Moscow and vicinity.

After several weeks of nonviolent protest, today's state of political flux and uncertainty in Armenia while awaiting the parliament's all-important vote scheduled on May Day Tuesday to elect the next prime minister, former-journalist Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party holds a meager 9 members or [8%](#) of the Yerevan government. But with Sargsyan now deposed and overwhelming populist support from the nation's younger generations actively demanding economic change and democratic reform, the baton of power now hangs in the balance.

The West's mainstream media is portraying the ousted Serzh Sargsyan as representing Armenia's historically corrupt, ruling [oligarchic elite](#) that maintains close alliance with Putin, while the bearded camouflage-shirted revolutionary Nikol Pashinyan symbolizes the new populist, David vs. Goliath, good guy democracy warrior. The bigger, behind the scenes picture indicates that the new kid in town is simply the West's exploitable poster boy heralding a monumental covert power surge to recreate another humiliating US Empire victory over Putin much like the Ukraine debacle. And the most likely outcome is a "same as the old boss" scenario with Eastern favored oligarchs replaced by Western ones smelling unprecedented golden opportunity to seize power under the pretext of another "democratic [color revolution](#)."

If this West vs. East story unfolds as described, a very disenchanted Armenian population will have their current idealistic fervor shattered as soon as Putin begins calling for payment on Armenia's outstanding debt loans and decides to withhold arms from Armenia as oil rich Azerbaijan's acquisition of Russian made state of the art weaponry threatens a weakened, overpowered Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Pashinyan knows Armenia cannot survive without Putin's [support](#) both militarily and economically. For now the Kremlin is simply watching with great interest but not about to intervene. But with US Empire sharks financing the popular opposition leader's sudden meteoric rise, and their feeding frenzy's buying power taking hold in Armenia, they're counting on Putin pulling the plug on his old misbegotten ally. Or if Putin commits to confronting Western tentacles grappling for control over his ally still very much dependent on Russia, risk of a larger war between the West and East could break out.

Meanwhile, predatory Western interests are eagerly working to separate and undermine Armenia from its current binding [membership](#) in the Russian led military Collective Security Treaty Organization and Eurasian Economic Union, while dangling its EU carrot stick after last year enticing Armenia to sign a revised Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership with the [European Union](#). But just as the EU promise failed to save [Ukraine](#) from its disastrously bloody quagmire, Armenia may not fare much better if it allows itself to be unwittingly courted, swallowed up, bought and brought to the point of no return.

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