

Protests in Armenia, as US works on anti-Russian alliance in south Caucasus

Andrea Peters
18 June 2024

Political turmoil is gripping the south Caucasus nation of Armenia, as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan moves the country ever-closer to Washington and NATO. Anti-government protests led by nationalist Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan have been ongoing in the capital, Yerevan, for weeks. Protesters, whose numbers range from the hundreds to the thousands or more, are demanding the resignation of Pashinyan, whose approval ratings have plunged to 17 percent.

Police are cracking down, using stun grenades and mass arrests to break up demonstrations and unblock streets. Over 98 people were arrested and 101 injured, including journalists, at last Wednesday's protest. Pashinyan defended the violence, saying security forces fulfilled "the functions assigned to them by the law strictly within the framework of the law."

Since then, 12 more people have been detained on charges of "hooliganism" and participating in "mass disturbances." The headquarters of the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) were raided on June 14 and several of its members arrested. Authorities also searched and seized computers from the offices of Armenia's leading taxi service, whose founder spoke out in support of the anti-government demonstrations.

Washington, which is working to cement ties with Pashinyan's government, has said nothing about the violence. Indeed, US government representatives were in Yerevan last week conducting talks as police assaulted protesters. In contrast, Washington and its European allies have denounced the ruling party of Georgia, which borders Armenia to the north, for cracking down on protests supported by NATO.

The demonstrations in Yerevan were sparked in April by the government's decision to cede four northern villages under Armenian control to neighboring Azerbaijan, amid efforts to secure a peace deal between the two countries, which have gone to war repeatedly over the last three decades.

Washington is pressing for this peace agreement, seeking

to stabilize inter-state relations in the south Caucasus so it can use the region as a staging ground for war against Russia, secure new energy corridors that bypass Russia, and undermine Iran. US State Department representative Richard Verma is in Yerevan this week conducting discussions with the government about a potential resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

The Azerbaijani government is demanding changes to Armenia's constitution, which enshrines claims to territory in Azerbaijan and in Turkey in its opening passages.

The opposition movement against Pashinyan is controlled by layers in the Armenian ruling elite who advocate an orientation more to Russia, with which Armenia has close economic, political and cultural ties. Armenia's 2023 trade with Russia was valued at \$7.3 billion, as compared to \$670 million with the US. Russian is widely spoken in Armenia as a first and second language.

Archbishop Galstanyan, who currently leads the anti-government demonstrations, is calling for "new dialog" with Moscow and has declared his ambition to be prime minister. Appealing to nationalism, the Hayastan alliance and Tavush for the Homeland movement insist that Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party is betraying Armenia. They aim to tap into Russian sympathies in the population and to stir up hostility to Azerbaijan.

Last year, the Azerbaijani government executed a lightning military operation and seized Nagorno-Karabakh, a majority Armenian-populated region fought over by the two states. It has now been almost entirely cleansed of its Armenian population, and 100,000 to 120,000 refugees have fled to Armenia. With this influx of people, shortages of homes, jobs and social services have mounted in Armenia, where the average monthly wage is \$300 to \$400—fueling discontent with the government.

Pashinyan's government has sought to deflect popular anger over the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis by blaming political leaders in that region, several of whom are now in Azerbaijani jails, for failing to defeat Azerbaijani forces. "They are cowardly deserters, cowardly deserters, cowardly

deserters,” Pashinyan screamed on the parliament floor last week. He claimed they wanted to create a refugee crisis to bring down his government.

Protesters, in turn, accuse Pashinyan of being “pro-Turkey,” as Azerbaijan seized Nagorno-Karabakh with Turkish military support. This is politically explosive since, in 1915-1916, the Ottoman Empire of Turkey waged a genocidal campaign against the Armenian people. Between 667,000 and 1.2 million people lost their lives.

The present crisis in Armenia is historically rooted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist Communist Party in 1991. When the Stalinists liquidated what remained of the conquests of the Russian Revolution of 1917, nationalist warfare erupted between the emerging capitalist ruling elites of the former Soviet republics, over control of the resources and social wealth of the former Soviet Union. Armenia and Azerbaijan, previously independent republics in a united Soviet state, waged war over Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in thousands of deaths.

The United States and Europe’s imperialist powers rapidly sought to use the newly independent states for their own interests. The proximity of the south Caucasus to Russia and Iran and its place in the global movement of goods and energy resources makes it extremely valuable from their standpoint.

As they initiate the opening stages of World War III by waging war with Russia in Ukraine, Washington and the European imperialist powers are working to secure their foothold in the region. The military setbacks suffered by their Ukrainian puppet regime have only made them more reckless in their reactionary maneuvers to integrate Armenia and the entire south Caucasus into their war alliance against Russia.

Within this context, a section of the Armenian ruling elite is abandoning Armenia’s traditional ties with Russia and reorienting toward the United States and its allies. Prime Minister Pashinyan, who has said Armenia will leave the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, attended a pro-Ukraine NATO war summit in Switzerland this week. He recently visited Bucha, Ukraine, where NATO claims Russia carried out a massacre in 2022.

On June 11, Armenia’s army chief met with his counterpart in France. Paris has now signed a deal to provide Yerevan with advanced weapons, radar, air-defense systems, armored carriers and night-vision resources. The same day, the US announced a new customs agreement with Armenia. On June 21, Armenia’s parliament will have hold hearings on a potential national referendum on joining the EU.

Concluding a round of talks with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan last week, US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia James O’Brien tweeted:

“Our discussions focused on democratic development, economic diversification, defense reforms, and Euro-Atlantic cooperation.” He promised to “work on” closer security ties with the country.

For his part, Mirzoyan told the US-Armenia Strategic Defense Capstone Meeting: “Today’s meeting is yet another expression of high-level political dialogue between our two countries that will give another impetus to the evolving partnership between Armenia and the United States ... The bilateral agenda continues to expand and include dimensions critical for the resilience and sustainable development of Armenia.”

Russia has spoken out against the turn in Armenian foreign policy. In a June 13 interview with the Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin insisted that remaining in the CSTO was essential for Armenia’s security and “meets the aspirations of the Armenian people.”

The more pro-Russian factions of the Armenian ruling elite are, in the final analysis, as bankrupt as the overt supporters of NATO. As for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime, they represent the same bankrupt capitalist oligarchy that emerged in Russia but also in Ukraine, Armenia and all the former Soviet republics during the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The slogans the leaders of Armenia’s anti-Pashinyan movement promote do not demand solutions to the socioeconomic problems facing workers, but appeal for the defense of “Armenian land” and appeal to anti-Azerbaijani and anti-Turkish hatreds. This does not resolve but inflames the conflicts in the region driven by the NATO war with Russia. Stopping capitalism’s descent into war in the south Caucasus and across the former Soviet Union requires unifying the working class based on a Trotskyist perspective against Stalinism, capitalism and imperialist war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)