



A New Turn in Armenian-Russian Relations?

OE Watch Commentary: The Armenian government's relationship with Russia has appeared at times to be strained since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan assumed office in May 2018, but as the accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate, this relationship took a new step when a reported 83 Armenian soldiers deployed to Syria in response to a request from the Russian government. The article from *News.am* reports some information on the deployment, including how the contingent of Armenians "arrived on 8 February in the Syrian city of Aleppo" and that their mission is to provide "humanitarian and medical assistance" in addition to "carrying out demining work." The article also includes a statement from Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, who stated that Armenia was the "first who responded to our call to provide help to the Syrian people."

The article from *First Armenian News* provides another perspective of the deployment, including how the Russian government had "regularly proposed" bringing in contingents of Armenian soldiers, but that the previous administration of "Serzh Sargsyan was not inclined to it." The article notes how "Yerevan is officially part of the Russian campaign in Syria," and as such, is relying on Russian logistical support during the deployment. Ultimately, it was thought that Pashinyan's administration would not have as good of relations with Russia as Sargsyan had, but the deployment shows how the relationship is taking shape. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"They will provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the population of Syria outside combat zones, as well as carrying out demining work."



The Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan (2019)

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Besuch_des_Ministerpr%C3%A4sidenten_von_Armenien,_Nikol_Pashinyan,_im_K%C3%B6niglichen_Rathaus-2162.jpg, CC 4.0.

Source: "ВШОйгу поблагодарил Армению за гуманитарную помощь Сирии (Shoigu thanked Armenia for the humanitarian aid to Syria)," *News.am*, 8 February 2019. <https://news.am/rus/news/495299.html>

Defense Minister of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Sergey Shoigu thanked the head of the Armenian Defense Ministry, David Tonoyan, for taking part in providing humanitarian aid to Syria... "You were the first who responded to our call to provide help to the Syrian people," said Shoigu...

It was previously reported that a group of 83 Armenian specialists arrived on 8 February in the Syrian city of Aleppo. They will provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the population of Syria outside combat zones, as well as carrying out demining work...

Source: Sargis Artsruni, "Сирийский блеф правительства Армении, или лесть Путину за счет армянского флага? (The Armenian government's Syria bluff or flattery to Putin at the expense of the Armenian flag?)," *First Armenian News*, 9 February 2019. <https://ru.1in.am/1252242.html>

...Moscow regularly proposed such a program even to the previous Armenian government, but the team of Serzh Sargsyan was not inclined to it.

There are no rational arguments from the political point of view in support of dispatching the humanitarian group to Syria. First, Yerevan is officially part of the Russian campaign in Syria, which will definitely cause certain problems in the West...The weakest argument in support of dispatching the humanitarian mission to Syria is that we are going there to defend our [Armenian] community. However, it is unclear, how de-mining specialists and doctors are going to defend the Armenian community.

Second, the motives of the Syria campaign are unclear, particularly as this step by Nikol Pashinyan seems to be pursuing the objective of pleasing Putin...

However, it is most alarming that the status of the Armenian mission is unclear...And in general, did the government have the right to dispatch such a mission without parliament's consent?...Previously, Serzh Sargsyan "passed by" this demand by Moscow, saying that Armenia could participate in the Syria campaign only in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) format...