



Armenia's "Offensive" Strategy?

OE Watch Commentary: While the Armenian government's recent announcement of its acquisition of Russian Su-30SM fighters (with an estimated delivery of 2020) provided some insight into the direction of Armenia's armed forces, recent statements in the accompanying excerpted article by Minister of Defense David Tonoyan, offer more information on how the government plans to continue in this area. The article, from the Armenian news website *lin.am*, reports on a statement from Tonoyan during a radio interview that the country's armed forces "were not going to remain on the defensive position." Tonoyan also referred to the government's acquisition of the Su-30SMs as making "it possible to neutralise the ambitions of the adversary."

The article also discusses how the acquisition "symbolises changes in the defence system" of Armenia, specifically that it is moving from a Soviet strategy to a "Western model, which assigns an important role to air forces." A Russian military analyst interviewed for the article states that "four units of fighters are only sufficient to defend oneself" in reference to the reported number of

Su-30SMs that Armenia will be acquiring. He goes on to suggest that an Armenian squadron of 12 fighters "will definitely have dominance in the air over Azerbaijan" and this highlights the lack of clarity regarding the acquisition. The initial reports on it mentioned that the Armenian government would acquire four Su-30SMs, but there have also been reports that this number could be as high as 12 and the article notes another statement from Tonoyan that the Armenian government "wanted to buy a squadron of multirole fighter planes." While it could be some time until the exact number of Su-30SMs Armenia will acquire is known, the government appears to be planning to have a full squadron of fighters.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)

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Sukhoi Su-30SM in flight.

Source: Alex Belyukov [CC BY-SA 3.0 GFDL 1.2], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sukhoi_Su-30SM_in_flight_2014.jpg.

Source: Aram Sargsyan, "Армения переходит к наступательной стратегии: единственный выход – разгром противника (Armenia is switching to an offensive strategy: the only exit – the destruction of the enemy)," *lin.am*, 1 March 2019. <https://ru.lin.am/1253606.html>

Serious conceptual changes are taking place in Armenia's general defence policy in view of global trends, the situation in the region, and the conflict with Azerbaijan. Our Armed Forces are switching from defence strategy to offensive strategy. Armenian Defence Minister David Tonoyan said on the air of the Armenian Public Broadcaster that our Armed Forces were not going to remain on the defensive position and if the situation led to renewed combat operations against Azerbaijan, we would not hesitate. Asked whether we would launch an attack or not, David Tonoyan replied: "Why not?"

...The defence minister spoke about strategic changes...He said that Armenia's demographic and economic potentials made it impossible to compete with the adversary in quantitative terms. This is precisely why we focus serious attention on quality issues and maintaining a quality balance. Even now, the army is being supplemented with the weapons and military hardware, which will make it possible to neutralise the ambitions of the adversary. Tonoyan confirmed that this implied fighter aircraft Su-30SM.

...He emphasised that the life of every soldier of the Armed Forces, be it those [serving] on a regular or contract basis, is more precious than any weapon, and that if two pilots in a Su-30 fighter could carry out a combat mission hundreds of kilometres away from the front line instead of a thousand military men, there can be no talk about the "costliness" of Su-30s...

Perhaps, it is not by chance that the defence minister is speaking about strategic changes, using the example of modern multirole fighters. The purchase of Su-30 fighters effectively symbolises changes in the defence system of our country...many experts believe that it is time to renounce the strategy of Soviet times, which is aimed to strengthen ground forces and the air defence system, and switch to the Western model, which assigns an important role to air forces, including fighter aviation, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), robotics, and the development of modern technologies...

The deputy director of the Moscow-based Centre for Political and Military Analysis Alexander Khramchikhin, considers these changes to Armenia's military policy as unambiguously natural, given the same factors, which the Armenian defence minister highlighted, i.e. limitations in Armenia's economic, financial, and human resources...According to Khramchikhin, four units of fighters are only sufficient to defend oneself. In the presence of one squadron (12 units), Armenia will definitely have dominance in the air over Azerbaijan. However, this is not going to seriously increase Armenia's offensive potential...

For reference, last week, the Armenian defence minister told the Russian RIA Novosti news agency that the Defence Ministry of the Republic of Armenia wanted to buy a squadron of multirole fighter planes.