

Are Armenia, India, and Serbia “Balancing” Against Russia or “Betraying” It?

All three countries are diversifying their long-standing relations with Russia, but their preexisting institutional memberships are the determining factor in whether this is just geopolitical “balancing” or an outright “betrayal”.

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International politics is in the midst of multiple paradigmatic changes as the [emerging Multipolar World Order](#) progressively replaces the existing unipolar-led one, and this has seen both the development of “non-traditional” partnerships and the weakening of historical ones. There are several examples that could be referenced in proof of this, but the most powerful have to do with Armenia, India, and Serbia’s changing relations with Russia.

All three long-standing Russian partners are diversifying their ties with Moscow to varying degrees and for different reasons, though the end result of their more Western-friendly newfound partnerships hasn’t been lost on the Kremlin.



Indian grenadiers march during the Victory Day parade at Red Square in Moscow, May 2015

Wayward Partners...

Armenia is insistent on signing an “Association Agreement” with the EU and partaking in large-scale multilateral NATO drills in Georgia and Romania, which led the author to write his recent analysis titled “[Armenia Abandoning Russia: Consequences For The Caucasus](#)”.

Similarly, India entered into an unprecedented military-strategic partnership with the US over the past year through its clinching of the LEMOA deal and attendant official designation as the Pentagon’s “Major Defense Partner”, two events which were easily foreseen by the author and predicted in his May 2016 article provocatively posing the question “[Is India Now A US Ally?](#)”, which was in its turn followed up by a “[2017 Forecast For South Asia](#)” in January of this year enumerating the over one dozen analyses confirming India’s pro-Western pivot. Earlier this week, US President Trump even [asked](#) India to “help us more with Afghanistan”, showing that the once-proud “multipolar-independent” state has now turned into the US’ regional “[Lead From Behind](#)” lackey.

As for Serbia, its long-serving strongman Aleksandar Vucic will stop at nothing to bring his country into the EU, and last year he also [signed](#) a very controversial “Individual Partnership Action Plan” (IPAP) with NATO, as well as [recently agreeing](#) to the first-ever joint NATO drills on Serbian territory this October.

...Or Jilted Lovers?

In defense of each of the aforementioned state's pro-Western moves, their leadership might be responding to what they view as "unfriendly" moves by Russia, or those which are disadvantageous to their own national interests.

Armenia understandably doesn't like that Russia has strengthened its ties with Turkey, a complex and multifaceted process that the author predicted and subsequently followed up on in a series of articles listed under his "[2017 Forecast For The Mideast](#)" about the Great Power Tripartite between Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Yerevan also can't stand that Moscow is its rival Baku's top arms supplier, but instead of understanding the neutral strategy behind such a maneuver as explained by the author in his September 2016 piece about how "[Army Expo 2016 Showcases Russia's Success At Military Diplomacy](#)", they see this as only being against them and can't countenance any other explanation. Therefore, some of their leadership is flirting with the radical idea of replacing Russia's traditional role with the West instead.

India is very similar to Armenia in many ways as regards Russia's rapid rapprochement with Pakistan, which has seen the former Cold War-era foes tighten their [diplomatic coordination](#) over Afghanistan, partake in their [first-of-a-kind joint military drills](#) and [commit to more robust military cooperation](#), and even expand their energy relations through a nascent [North-South gas pipeline](#) and [other prospective projects](#). Just like Russia's ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan concern Armenia, so too does Russia's relationship with Pakistan bother India, though neither Yerevan nor New Delhi can "see the forest through the trees" and understand the nuances of Moscow's "military diplomacy" and multipolar balancing act. Importantly, it should be noted that Russia's partnership with Pakistan didn't accelerate until after it was clear that India decided to become an American ally.

About Serbia, there's a common feeling in the country that Russia could always, both in the recent past and presently, have "done more" to help them out of "Slavic Solidarity" and "Orthodox Brotherhood", so one can surely sympathize with the misgivings that some Serbs have had towards Russian foreign policy when all that they receive from it is arms and energy. These are nevertheless substantial yields, but they lack the real-sector economic results and soft power sway that the West is providing, which to a growing number of Serbs is irresistibly attractive. It's true that Russia has entered into a [somewhat unexpected rapprochement process](#) with Croatia over the past year, though this occurred after Belgrade's pro-Western tilt, not before, and is actually unrelated to it in any case.

So Are They "Balancing" Against Russia Or "Betraying" It?

On the surface, there appears to be little difference between the overarching pro-Western shifts that Armenia, India, and Serbia have undertaken, nor the reasons behind them in doing so as a supposed reaction to their dissatisfaction with Russian foreign policy, but the reality is that what Armenia and India are doing is infinitely more destabilizing for Russian interests and those of the multipolar world in general than anything that Serbia could ever do. The reason for this is simple - Armenia and India are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), respectively, and therefore have certain tacit institutional obligations to their fellow members, including Russia, whereas Serbia isn't a member of any of these four groups and doesn't share the same unstated responsibilities.

Russia and its EAEU and CSTO partners never expected that Armenia would endanger their

collective interests by frenziedly trying to reach a deal with the EU and ostentatiously showing off its new ties with NATO, nor did Russia and the other BRICS and SCO countries ever seriously think that India would become the US' military-strategic bridgehead in the Southern Eurasian Rimland. The fact that Armenia and India have undertaken such dramatic policy reorientations in the past year demonstrates that their leaders are applying an extreme "zero-sum" Neo-Realist approach in caring only about their own subjectively perceived self-interests at the expense of their multilateral institutional partners, thereby making them highly disruptive forces in their said organizations and justifying the heightened threat perception that Russia and others see in them nowadays in response to their antics.

This goes far and beyond "balancing" because both states are unreservedly flouting their institutional obligations and deliberately making moves which interfere with the cohesiveness of their said organizations and massively undermining their security.

Serbia, however, is doing none of that, because unlike Armenia and India, it doesn't have any legal obligations to Russia and its organizational partners due to its lack of membership in any of the aforesaid four institutions. Serbia's prospective de-jure membership in the EU and shadow de-facto one in NATO would obviously harm Russia's grand strategic interests if they ever came to pass, but they wouldn't be a "betrayal" of Moscow because there's nothing tangible for Belgrade to betray. Rather, any moves by Serbia in this direction would technically be "balancing" because they wouldn't harm the internal institutional interests of Russia and its organizational partners, whereas similar actions by Armenia and India - due to these two states' shared memberships in two separate but interlinked multipolar platforms - constitute geopolitical "betrayals" since they intentionally sow discord and confusion within these blocs.



Serbian military participating in 2015 Victory Parade in Moscow

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