

Pompeo Might Have Pulled the Plug on Armenian-Iranian Trade

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These two long-running civilizational allies might abruptly see their age-old economic relations disappear after Pompeo threatened to sanction anyone who defies the US' unilaterally implemented punitive measures against the Islamic Republic, and the long-term geostrategic implications of this move could be as far reaching as provoking a more pronounced Chinese-Indian maritime rivalry.

New Secretary of State and former CIA chief Mike Pompeo issued what amounts to a [declaration of Hybrid War](#) against Iran on Monday while speaking at the neoconservative Heritage Foundation think tank about the Trump Administration's so-called "Plan B" for dealing with the country after the US' earlier [withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal](#). America's top diplomat made it no secret that his country would sanction anyone who defies its unilaterally implemented punitive measures against the Islamic Republic, in a stern warning that was directed more at his European "partners" than anyone else. Relatedly, however, this will inevitably have an impact on Armenia as well, which is a tiny, impoverished, and landlocked South Caucasian failing state which [just experienced](#) a pro-Western [Color Revolution](#).

Armenian Ambitions

The Armenians and Persians have always enjoyed excellent relations with one another notwithstanding a few outlier events in their history, and the long-running friendship between these different civilizations disproves Huntington's provocative thesis about the imminence of a so-called "Clash of Civilizations" between Christianity and Islam, which itself has always pretty much just been a 21st-century unipolar blueprint for dividing and ruling the Eastern Hemisphere. Although institutionally connected to Russia through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAO), trade with Armenia's largest partner must pass through [Georgia](#) en route, whereas no such obstacles remain when it comes to neighboring Iran, which just signed a [provisional free trade agreement](#) with the bloc. Moreover, Armenian-Iranian economic relations have always been solid, although their full potential has yet to be tapped.

It's in view of this that Armenia has considered putting its hitherto unattractive political geography to use by pioneering what its former president called a "[Black Sea-Persian Gulf Corridor](#)" (BSPG) through its territory in connecting the European marketplace with the Iranian and South Asian (Indian) one. Should this ever be created, then it could very well [siphon off Indian trade](#) from the prospective North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) through

Iran and Azerbaijan to Russia in order to remove the last-mentioned state from the transit route and more directly trade with the EU. In and of itself, this could indirectly accomplish one of the US' main strategic objectives in "isolating Russia" but at the expense of enhancing Iran's economy, though Pompeo's latest sanctions threats suggest that "isolating Iran" could allow it to do the same without risking the chance of "blowback".

Forcing An Armenian-Russian Wedge

Because of this, both the NSTC and its EU-destined BSPG branch are now endangered, which almost instantly removed whatever strategic economic appeal Armenia could have had to the West when it recently signed the "Comprehensive & Enhanced Partnership Agreement" ([CEPA](#)) with the EU in setting the basis for an unofficial but regulated "free trade" area with the bloc in spite of its EAU membership. Furthermore, Pompeo's insistence on sanctioning those who violate American sanctions against Iran could pretty much pull the plug on existing Armenian-Iranian trading relations as well because the country's companies might fear that they'll become "untouchable" to the Europeans if the US blacklists them, which would basically shut them out of the EU marketplace and nullify one of the main reasons why this poverty-stricken state agreed to CEPA in the first place.

Another point to keep in mind is that many businesses in Armenia are somehow or another officially or unofficially linked to another larger Russian one and de-facto function as its "subsidiaries", meaning that they too could prospectively be sanctioned by the US if their Russian "parent company" defies American threats and trades with Iran, whether or not any of this occurs on Armenian territory. This sobering reality will probably be abused by new Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as he carries out a silent "lustration" of all Russian-linked political and economic forces in the country despite his public assurances to the contrary, thereby representing yet another fault line in Russian-Armenian relations and the EAU more generally. Speaking of externally provoked wedges against multipolar interests, the US is betting that it can exacerbate the existing one between India and China, too.

Manipulating New Delhi

With India forced to rely on maritime means for trading with the EU and unable to streamline an overland one through Iran via the NSTC and/or BSPG to diversify away from its sole dependence on this route, there's an increasing likelihood that New Delhi can be [pushed into a collision course](#) with Beijing in those very same transit waters along the western edge of the Afro-Bengali Ocean that have become ever more important for China in recent years as it [expands its strategic-economic presence](#) in Africa. The US is already planning for a [100-year-long military-strategic partnership](#) with India that significantly includes a crucial naval component intended to make the South Asian state a "counterbalance" to China, and it's accordingly expected that the [LEMOA-like "military logistics" pact](#) that India just concluded with fellow "Hex" member France will allow it to use the latter's naval bases all throughout this massive space and specifically in Djibouti.

The odds of avoiding a pronounced Indian-Chinese maritime rivalry are substantially decreased so long as New Delhi remains reliant on maritime trade routes with Europe and unable to diversify via overland ones through Iran (whether the NSTC and/or BSPG), which is a long-term grand strategic objective that the US is trying to accomplish as part of its new anti-Iranian sanctions regime. Washington could therefore kill two birds with one stone by masterfully wielding the summer 2017 "Countering America's Adversaries Through

Sanctions Act” ([CAATSA](#)) as a Hybrid War weapon against both Armenia and India, as the first-mentioned would become much more dependent on the West and might enter into economic conflict with its Russian partners because of this while the second one would be pushed closer to clashing with China one of these days as the two Great Powers vie with one another for supremacy in the Afro-Bengali Ocean.

Concluding Thoughts

On the whole, Pompeo’s unofficial declaration of Hybrid War against Iran is veritably a game-changing development that will affect much more than just the Islamic Republic, as it’s already been seen to have the effect of getting the Europeans to [balk on trading](#) with the relabeled “pariah state”. India might have been comparatively less pliable if it had been able to successfully convince the Trump Administration that a trans-Iranian trade route through Armenia on the way to the EU could cut Russia out of the economic equation and strengthen the South Asian state’s potential to one day “counter China”, though provided that Washington was willing to tolerate a stable Iran.

That, however, is now a pipe dream because the US wants to weaken Iran with sanctions in order to [provoke identity-based conflict](#) within it that could then be guided in the direction of regime change, and moreover, America would rather dominate the EU as its own captive market than share it with India if it had the choice.

It’s all around “better” for the US to “isolate” Iran, which in turn does the same to Russia in neutralizing its NSTC with India, and resultantly improve the prospects of Armenia pivoting closer to the EU while provoking an Indian-Chinese maritime rivalry after New Delhi remains reliant on the same seafaring trade routes to reach Europe as Beijing does. The only possibility for disrupting this scenario is if the pro-Western authorities in both Armenia and India come to realize that their civilizations have more to gain in the long term by embracing multipolarity at the defiance of the US’ anti-Iranian sanctions, though this remains to be seen and isn’t something that observers should bet too much on happening.

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