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## **NEW CONTROVERSY LOOMING BETWEEN ARMENIA, RUSSIA, OVER FATE OF CONVICTED SOLDIER**

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Eurasianet, August 24, 2016, by Joshua Kucera The Bug Pit Armenia Russia

A Russian soldier who killed six members of an Armenian family after deserting his military base has been found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. But questions remain over where he will serve his sentence, setting the stage for another conflict between the two allies over Russia's increasingly contentious military presence in Armenia.

The soldier, Valeriy Permyakov, wandered off the 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia's second city, last January 12, broke into the house of the Avetsiyan family and shot six of them to death. He was captured trying to cross the border into Turkey.

The case shocked Armenia and led to unprecedented protests in Gyumri and Yerevan against the Russian military presence in the country. The Russian presence is largely welcomed in Armenia, as protection against Turkey and Azerbaijan, but lately there has been increasing resentment of Russia's heavyhanded behavior in Armenia. Russia wanted to try Permyakov in a military court on the base, but the protests led Moscow to back down and allow him to be tried in an Armenian court.

Now the conflict could turn to where Permyakov serves his sentence. The judge, apparently contrary to standard procedure, declined to say where he would be sent. Some Armenian media reported that a deal is in the works to exchange Permyakov for an Armenian prisoner currently serving time in Russia.

"The authorities of Armenia and Russia, knowing well that the handover of Permyakov could cause a wave of discontent among the population of Armenia, are discussing the 'exchange' of the soldier for a citizen of Armenian, Hrachya Harutyunyan, sentenced for a July 13, 2013, traffic accident [which killed 18 people in Russia]," the Armenian newspaper Zhoghovurd reported before the verdict was handed down. "That is, when they send Permyakov to Russia, they will immediately announce that Harutyunyan will be handed over to Armenian law enforcement."

A Russian lawyer who specializes in extradition, Ruslan Zakalyuzhniy, told the newspaper Kommersant that according to the base agreement between the two countries, "Armenia has the right to hand Permyakov over to Russia to serve his sentence, but not the obligation to do so."

But a Russian Justice Ministry source also told Kommersant that "a preliminary agreement that Permyakov would serve his sentence in Russia was already reached during the joint [between Armenia and Russia] criminal investigation." The fact that the case was tried on the Russian base

and that Permyakov didn't appeal are evidence of this agreement, the source continued. (The Bug Pit doesn't entirely follow this logic, but Kommersant didn't explain further.)

Permyakov's lawyer told reporters that he didn't know where the soldier would serve his time. Would the handover of the truck driver be enough to placate wounded Armenian pride if Permyakov was shipped back to Russia? We'll see.

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Kaynak/Source: