
WHAT ARE FRANCE'S MOTIVES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS?

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As widely reported, France has recently agreed to sell an advanced air defence system, the Thales GM 200, to Armenia. In addition, the two countries have signed a memorandum of understanding according to which France will sell Armenia the Mistral short-range air defence system sometime in the future. Armenia, however, is already covered by a joint air-defence system with Russia. This was agreed between the two countries in 2015, and in 2016 the Armenian parliament ratified the agreement.

One might reasonably question why a NATO member is selling advanced technology to a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russias operational control over Armenias air defences makes it certain that the Russian military will scrutinize this technology and perhaps even appropriate it.

These relations raise the likelihood that the system will be inspected and reverse-engineered by Armenias (and Russias) ally Iran, which has already significantly penetrated Armenias military-industrial complex. Iran has also exported drones and drone-manufacturing capability to Russia for use against Ukraine.

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