Armenia: Tweeting   **Wednesday 9ᵗʰ May 2018**

By Chris Hernon and Victor Madeira

Eduard Abrahamyan, a long-term associate of the Institute for Statecraft and postgraduate student at Leicester University, came to the Institute office on 1 May to brief us on the latest detail of the protests in Armenia, which at that time were reaching their peak. He has been in regular personal telephone touch with Pashinyan. We immediately started to monitor the Twitter environment around the situation. We retweeted media organizations and Armenians supporting Pashinyan and tweeted some observations about Kremlin disinformation.

It was clear that supporters of protest leader Nikol Pashinyan, who was voted in as prime minister on 8 May, had learned the lessons from previous protests such as Ukraine's Maidan about the value and power of shareable and memorable images. However, they thankfully did not suffer violence from the authorities, so the power of peaceful protest was on display.

Aram Shahinyan @aramiggs

Everything is special about The Armenian Revolution, even the ways of roadblocking. #RejectHHK #AmenianProtests #Yerevan #Armenia Photo: Helena Melkonyan

https://twitter.com/aramiggs/status/990831217925869568

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Hettie (Wereldtekst) @HettievanderVen

Land in omwenteling. Vorige week was ik nog daar. RT @MikeMinasyants: Very touching photo. The kid is blocking the street with his **toy cars**. May 2nd, Yerevan. Via Infocom #Yerevanprotests #rejecthhk #armenia

https://twitter.com/HettievanderVen/status/991918227222663169

The value of having peaceful, large crowds with flags and symbols in the centre of the capital was also seen:

Robert Merriman @RobertHMerriman

This reminds me of the spirit of the Catalans. Massive and sustained peaceful **protests**. Dancing in the streets (it looks like the Sardana!), non-violent civil disobedience. Change can happen.

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The Kremlin initially gave cautious backing to a potential change of power, although Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova's comment "Russia is always with you" could be interpreted in a more menacing way.

However, Kremlin propaganda outlets did begin to prepare the ground for unfavourable outcomes. The Centre for Globalisation Research (Global Research), which features exclusively anti-Western and pro-Kremlin views and conspiracy theories, immediately tried to cast doubt on the protests as genuinely grassroots:

Global Research @CRG_CRM

What's Washington Really Doing in **Armenia**? Color Revolution against Moscow?
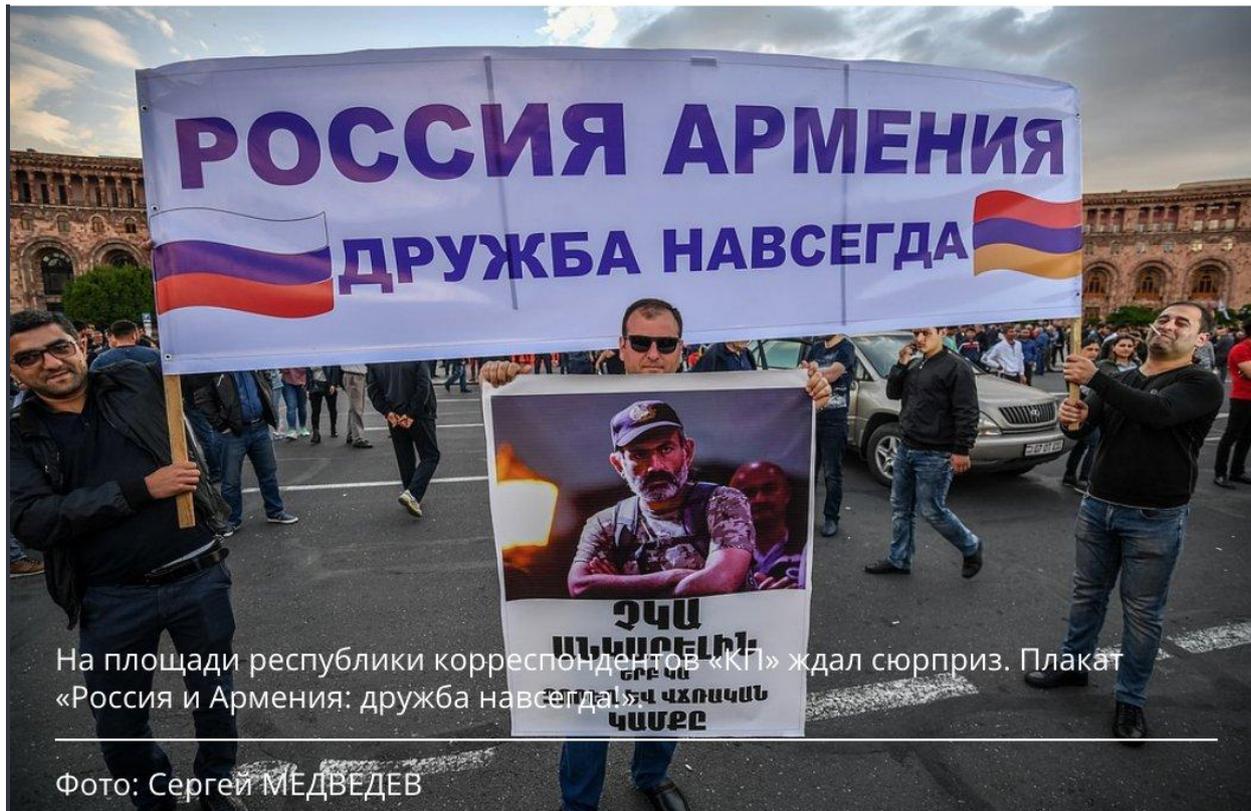http://ow.ly/hByl30jPmjE
https://twitter.com/CRG_CRM/status/992373414005526529

While Irish journalist turned Kremlin propagandist Bryan MacDonald used the situation to cast aspersions on the Western 'MSM'

Bryan MacDonald @27khv

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Unlike Ukraine & Georgia in the past, Armenia's peaceful revolution hasn't received very much attention in western media. This opposition banner may help explain why: it says "Russia (&) Armenia: friends forever."

We pointed out that this was a disingenuous comparison and untrue, and included images of the large numbers of Western media reports.

Integrity Initiative @InitIntegrity

Kremlin propagandist at work: 1) The ruling party hasn't violently attacked peaceful protesters and appears to be heeding their demands 2) It's had plenty of Western media coverage
https://twitter.com/InitIntegrity/status/991334836131516416

We also highlighted how the Kremlin deployed its nasty side through lower level propaganda operators

Integrity Initiative @InitIntegrity

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The **Kremlin** has started a drip-drip of conspiracy theories and thuggish nastiness over Armenia, just keeping it on low boil, to be ramped up if things don't go its way. Propagandist Leontyev basically says if Armenia wants to turn West, get lost, we saved you, no one needs you
https://twitter.com/InitIntegrity/status/993055389968162816

Integrity Initiative @InitIntegrity

Link to Leontyev here
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1001320650032783&id=540425062789013 …, plus other examples
https://twitter.com/InitIntegrity/status/993062077572018176

Finally, a shaggy dog story...

'Chalo the Protest Dog' caught people's imagination within the movement and abroad. Pashinyan began his protest with a 200km march across the country to the capital, and the dog joined him and stayed with him for the whole route. It's a captivating, well-told story that made it easier for foreign viewers to empathise. The BBC picked it up, as did RFERL, which has an Armenian service

https://www.rferl.org/a/armenias-protest-pooch/29209162.html

Armenia Social Media Summary

By Greg Rowett

There are risks involved with open support for the Armenians – both to their movement and to us. Any high-profile support, even merely vocal support, can be seized upon by Kremlin shills and used as evidence that the revolution is being supported by subversive western evidence. Thus, we must be extremely cautious and thoughtful in our actions. Open support might be welcomed by some but may drive others away from the revolution - both in Armenia and in the West. This especially true for British elements, with the UK being perceived as generally hostile to Russia in all things.

This does not preclude action though: there is much support we can provide to the Armenians behind the scenes, pointing them towards material and information that supports their points, connecting them to experts and providing analysis of the online environment, both in Russia, Armenia, the region and the West. This information can be utilised by the Armenians to address and counter the main shill arguments, neutering the shill network. We can also educate them on the main Russian tactics and strategies online, and how to best resist them in general.

(Summary) – Consider the risk of open western support, but do not allow that to deter us. Provide support and education on how to counter Russian shill/bot one possible form of aid.

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