

Some Want to 'Wipe Iran, Armenia Off Map'



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INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Armenia and Iran, bound together by threads of civilization and history, find themselves facing fresh challenges in the evolving regional landscape. Effectively tackling these challenges demands concerted collaboration. Our interview with Professor Vardan Voskanyan, the head of the Chair of Iranian Studies at Yerevan State University's Faculty of Oriental Studies, sheds light on these pressing concerns, exploring strategies to address them and envisaging the potential horizons for the advancement of Armenian-Iranian relations.

IRAN DAILY: Armenian-Iranian relations have stood the test of time, and a new chapter unfolded after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) war. What current challenges confront both parties and where do their interests align?

VOSKANYAN: The relations between Armenia and Iran go back to thousands of years ago. It should be noted that these relations fit into the concept of "one civilization, two nations," "one civilization, two states," and "one civilization, two religions," forging a distinctive bond. The Armenian-Iranian border stands as one of the oldest worldwide, emblematic of friendship, brotherhood, and peace, particularly following the dissolution of the Soviet

Union. Nonetheless, the aftermath of the 2020 Azerbaijani aggression has introduced fresh challenges for both Armenia and Iran. Foremost among these is Turkey's expanding footprint in the South Caucasus, marked by political, military, and economic entanglements with Azerbaijan. This Turkish influence presents formidable obstacles for both the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, Turkey's involvement within the bounds of Azerbaijan has introduced supplementary challenges across various domains. It is evident that the present-day Erdogan administration pursues a policy aimed at establishing the "Great Turan," a two-phase initiative

involving, first, the establishment of a presence in the territory of Azerbaijan, then, the increase of Turkish influence in the Turkic republics of Central Asia beyond the Caspian Sea. In this sense, the so-called "Turanian Corridor" has become one of the components of this plan. The Turkish presence not only has the context of promoting the Turkish expansionist policy but also significantly refers to Turkey's membership in NATO. Therefore, these Pan-Turan aspirations also have a NATO component at their core. Consequently, these Pan-Turan aspirations evoke apprehension in both Armenia and Iran. Another important circumstance should be taken into account. It is obvious that although Baku and Ankara are

now actually afraid to speak about Atrpatakan (northwestern provinces of Iran), in their long-term plans there is a clear policy aimed at making this ancient Iranian territory a part of their expansionist plans as well. Equally noteworthy is the notion of "Azerbaijani expansionism" encompassing aggressive policies and military actions aimed at compromising Armenia's territorial integrity, alongside the comprehensive annexation of the Republic of Artsakh. In addition to these challenges, it is pertinent to highlight that Baku often does not hide the support and assistance it provides to various terrorist entities inside Iran with the objective of destabilizing Iran's internal security. This backing

extends to terrorist entities in Atrpatakan and other regions. In this regard should be mentioned the 2022 terrorist attack on the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz with its links tracing back to Baku. Consequently, the current landscape has necessitated a recalibration of Armenian-Iranian relations. Beyond their historical camaraderie, this recalibration primarily centers on the shared threats that have the potential to undermine the security of both nations.

In particular, what are the areas that Yerevan and Tehran should give priority to deepening?

As I previously mentioned, security should serve as the fore-

most axis around which they should shape a qualitatively new phase of Armenian-Iranian relations. Naturally, these relations should encompass military-political and security facets. In my perspective, the establishment of a collaborative Armenian-Iranian military force holds great potential for effectiveness. This joint force could take the form of a synchronized and coordinated unit, comprising elements from both the Iranian and Armenian militaries. Secondly, it is extremely important for the military-political com-

ponent of Armenian-Iranian relations to have an anti-terrorist character as well. It is noteworthy that during the 2020 Azerbaijani aggression in Artsakh, terrorist elements were introduced to our region, with Ankara's involvement being transparent. Hence, the military-political sphere of Armenian-Iranian relations should encompass the planning and execution of concerted anti-terrorist operations. These operations can be carried out under the supervision and guidance of a jointly established anti-ter-



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An old man looks at the rubbles of a house destroyed by the Azerbaijani military during the 2022 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.
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