

Iran-Armenia's resilient relations



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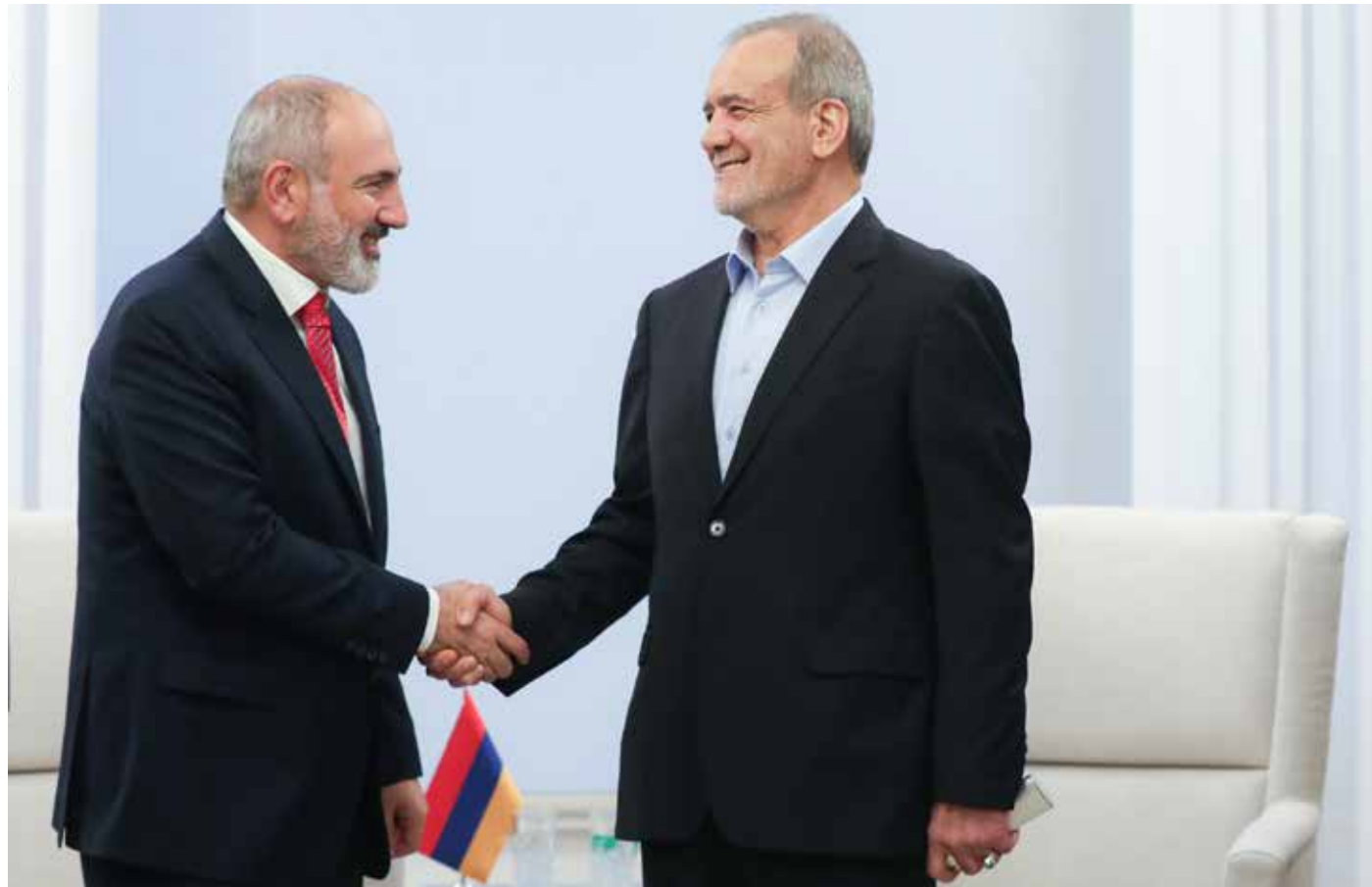
OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The relationship between Iran and Armenia has long stood out as exceptionally close, with top-level exchanges frequently taking place between officials from both sides. Both countries play pivotal roles in each other's foreign policy agendas. Armenia holds strategic significance for Iran — and vice versa — in light of recent geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus.

Following Armenia's defeat in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, its vulnerability increased, giving way to new regional dynamics. External players began to wade into the crisis, further fueling tensions over the Karabakh issue.

Under the Russia-brokered cease-fire agreement, there was an understanding that ethnic Armenians in Karabakh would remain connected to Armenia via the Lachin Corridor, while Azerbaijan would gain transit access through the territory to Nakhchivan, using existing Soviet-era roads and railways. However, Azerbaijan later began pushing for wider control over the corridor, with ambitions that extended far beyond what was initially agreed. Armenia, citing international law, resisted any arrangement that would entail ceding sovereignty over its land. The resulting standoff ignited a fresh round of friction in the Caucasus, drawing in Iran. During the late president Ebrahim Raisi's visit to the Khoda-Afarin Dam — located near the proposed corridor — Iran reiterated its stance: revive the Aras Corridor instead. This route, closed since the onset of hostilities in 1988, would run through Iranian territory to connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan, bypassing Armenian soil.

Iran, at the same time, is opposed to the idea of creating what is known as the Zangezur Corridor unless it operates under full Armenian sovereignty, with Armenian officials maintaining control over entry and exit points and receiving transit fees, in line with international norms. Despite all the challenges, Iran is working to maintain friendly



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) shakes hands with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 24, 2024.
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ties with both its neighbors. As for Armenia, Tehran and Yerevan have been stepping up cooperation, not just diplomatically but also economically. With high-level visits and continuous dialogue, both sides are exploring infrastructure investment opportunities, including joint efforts on road and railway construction. Iran has also been inviting investors to participate in Armenian projects, signaling a broader strategy to cement its role in Armenia's development.

Such initiatives are overseen by the Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee, which is tasked with ensuring that agreements are followed through on schedule. As a result of these efforts, Armenia's trade relations through Iran with other Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries have seen marked improvement.

Iran, in turn, views Armenia as a gateway for accessing European markets, especially amid ongoing sanctions.

Iran's observer status in the EAEU has also paved the way for stronger commercial ties, offering new economic breathing room in otherwise constrained circumstances. These developments have contributed to a

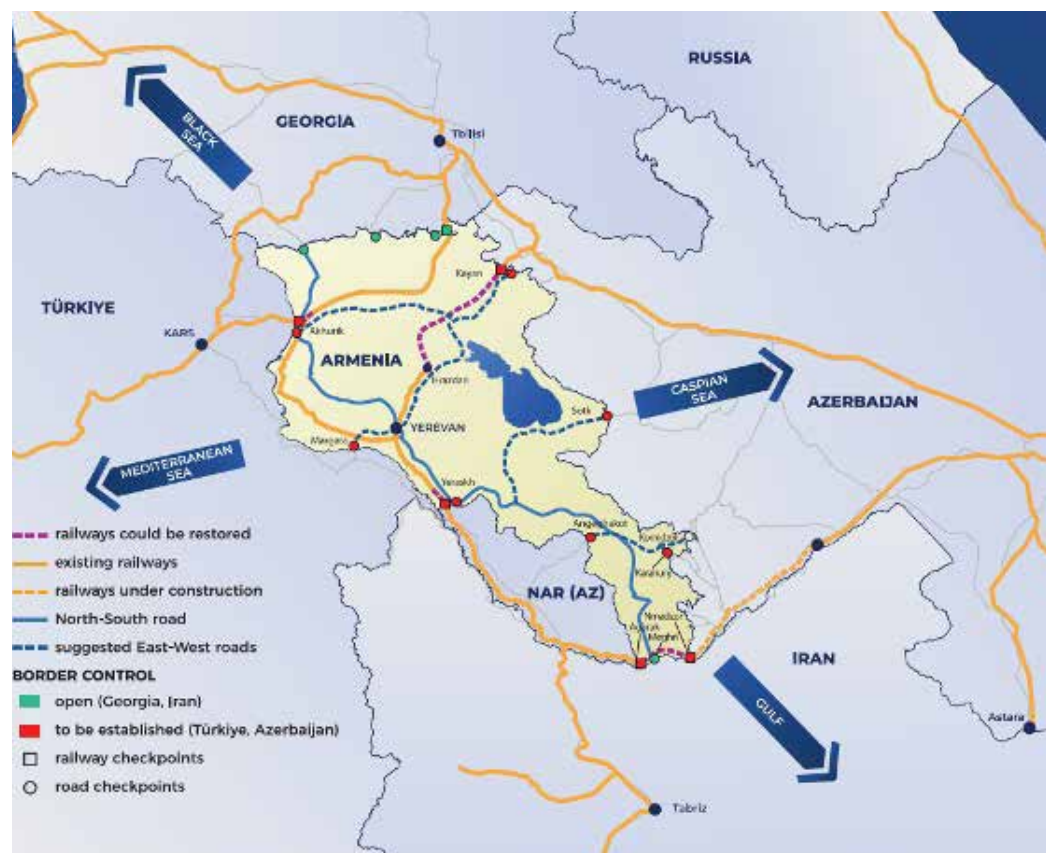
modest but meaningful economic upswing, allowing both nations to reap mutual benefits.

Beyond trade and transit, Iran and Armenia share deep historical ties. Iran enjoys a respected position within Armenia, and there are no significant anti-Iranian forces at play there. One striking example of this bond is the Friendship Bridge built by Iran across the Aras River, providing Armenia with a lifeline to the south when it was under blockade from both the east and west. During a visit to Armenia, I was at a formal gathering in which the then-speaker of Armenia's National Assembly said, "This Friendship Bridge saved Armenia from poverty and despair. At a time of dire crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran came to our aid. We consider ourselves indebted to Iran."

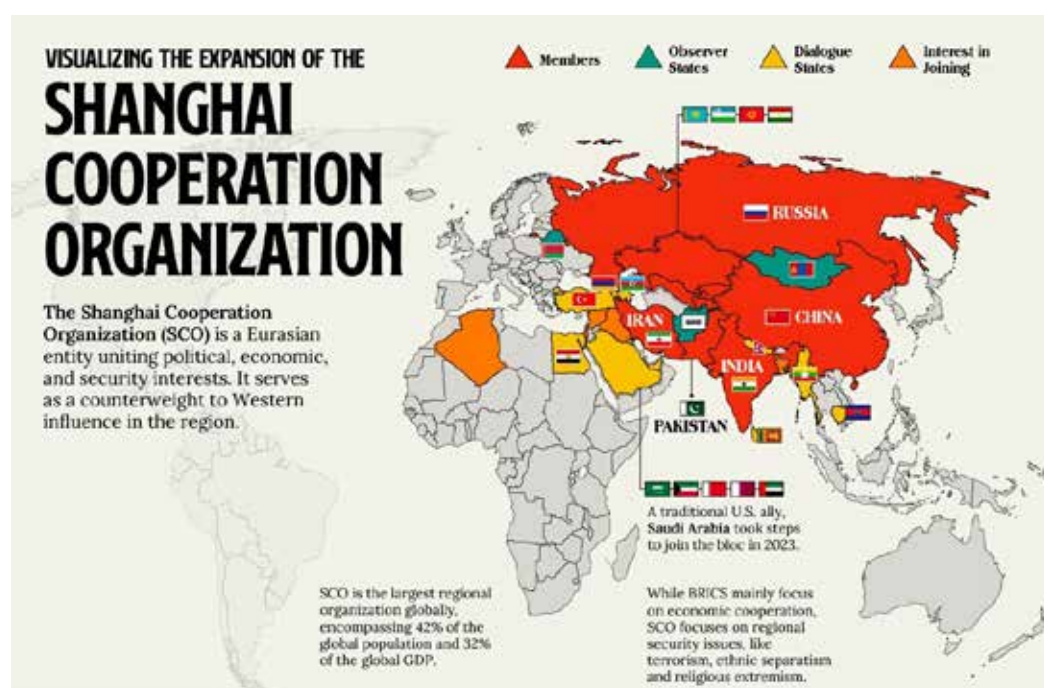
In sum, Iran and Armenia have managed to carve out a resilient partnership in a volatile region — one that balances diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and firm resistance against unilateral encroachment. The unfolding events in the Caucasus could test this relationship, but the foundations remain solid.

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Iran's strategic location golden opportunity for SCO: Secretary-general

INTERVIEW

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded in 2001 with the aim of stepping up regional cooperation in security, economic, and political spheres. Iran has been in the loop as an observer since 2005. Its application for full membership was put forward in 2008 but ran into international sanctions and political considerations, which held up the process for years. With some obstacles out of the way and with the backing of member states — especially China and Russia — Iran was granted full membership at the Dushanbe summit in September 2021, and the official accession process wrapped up in July 2023. Full membership has opened the door to new opportunities for Iran to broaden its horizons in economic, trade, and security cooperation with SCO countries, including China, Russia, India, and Central Asian states. This membership enables Iran to play a more active role in regional projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and draw on the organization's capacities to fend off Western sanctions. Nevertheless, challenges such as political differences among members and the need for greater coordination stand in the way of Iran making the most of these opportunities. The current goal of the SCO is the "free flow of goods, capital, and services". Nurlan Yermekbayev, secretary-general of the SCO, shed light on possible and ongoing areas of cooperation on the sidelines of the Tehran Dialogue Forum in an interview with IRNA. The full text of the interview follows: