
Armenia Is The Bridge Linking Moscow And Tehran

RIA Novosti - 24/10/2007

MOSCOW. (Levon Melik-Shakhnazaryan for RIA Novosti) - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to Armenia will add nothing new to the geopolitical alignment in the region.

It will merely restate the obvious. The strategic partnership between Armenia and Iran is an established fact, and this visit is unlikely to be seen as anything of a landmark.

Nor will it affect relations between Armenia and the United States. Armenia is effectively under a blockade, and America knows this. One of the indirect agents of the blockade is Georgia - America's closest ally in the region.

More direct participants are other U.S. partners - Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In this context, friendly relations between Iran and Armenia are only natural. Whether one likes it or not, Armenia will be friendly with neighbors with which circumstances, history and common cultural background force it to be friends.

Until recently the U.S. has displayed some understanding of this fact.

True, Anthony Godfrey, the U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Armenia, has occasionally expressed dissatisfaction with expanding Armenian-Iranian relations and growing economic ties between Armenia and Iran, although the U.S. is well aware of Armenia's plight, and it would be most unethical to demand that it go into self-imposed isolation.

Armenia therefore looks for understanding not only from America, but also from any other country that has sour relations with Iran.

In this sense, an aggravation of American-Iranian relations and, as a result, a possible toughening of the U.S. position would be most unwelcome.

It is to be hoped that there will be no further deterioration of relations between Tehran and Washington, and even if there is, the U.S. has no right and is unlikely to demand anything "extra" from Armenia in its relationship with Iran.

It would be a different thing if hostilities were to break out - Armenia's border with Iran would automatically be sealed. That could lead to serious consequences for the Armenian economy.

As regards Baku's likely response to the visit, Azerbaijan is in the habit of reacting negatively to any progress in Armenia's relations with any country, let alone Iran.

Azerbaijan has been an active participant in many regional projects with a manifest anti-Iranian and anti-Russian bias. They include communications projects, oil pipelines, gas pipelines, and Caspian oil production.

In other words even today Azerbaijan continues to pursue Elchibey's policies of tearing up all possible friendly bonds with a country that has a multi-millennium civilization and culture.

Azerbaijan is seeking to integrate into Europe via the Turkic world. Such a policy cannot appeal to Iran and runs contrary to Iran's political and geopolitical ambitions.

Therefore, the envy with which Baku eyes Armenia's friendly and allied relations with Iran, is both understandable and incomprehensible.

It is incomprehensible because Azerbaijan itself has done a great deal to antagonize Iran.

In turn, Armenia's relations with Iran are a fine example of the fact that Christianity and Islam can co-exist peacefully, and that the religious factor in inter-ethnic and inter-state relations needn't play a decisive role.

In any case, the Iranian side will continue to stick to its long considered position on the Karabakh issue. Iran, like China, is happy to wait, and as far as possible safeguard its borders against potential inter-ethnic or inter-state clashes.

This centuries-tested policy is unlikely to be subject to change for short-term considerations.

Iran has always had ethnic, cultural and purely strategic interests in the Southern Caucasus. When the Turkic peoples destroyed Caucasian Albania, Armenia was Iran's only remaining ally in the region. An absolute loss of the Southern Caucasus would be a tragedy both for Iran and for Russia.

Equally, the preservation of the Southern Caucasus as a friendly region is very important for both Tehran and Moscow.

Both countries have historical interests and traditional contacts with the peoples of the region. But today only Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh continue the tradition of Caucasian friendship with Iran and Russia.

And while Iran acts as the corridor giving Armenia "access to the wider world", Armenia serves as the bridge linking Tehran and Moscow. This is a worthy role, and Armenia plays it without fault.

A Moscow-Yerevan-Tehran axis appears to be crystallizing.

It looks as though Iran projects Russia's geopolitical ambitions in this region and vice versa.

Both Iran and Russia are being ostracized from European politics, and in these conditions they have no other option but to seek closer contact with each other and align a geopolitical, energy and economic axis capable of helping them to withstand pressure from Europe.

Although the East-West division is nowadays somewhat artificial, classical Oriental countries carry on the ancient traditions of wise and considered inter-state policy. India, China and Iran, for that matter, are all countries with which alliance could only benefit Russia.

Levon Melik-Shakhnazaryan is a politologist.

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti
