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## Azerbaijan, Iran Move to Boost Ties Amid Changes in Caucasus

BAKU (Dispatches) – Iran and Azerbaijan have expressed their opposition to any foreign intervention in South Caucasus, saying it would only escalate tensions in the region.

"We do not accept any interference of foreign forces in the region and regional issues should be resolved by the countries of the region," Iran's Parliament speaker Muhammad Bagher Ghalibaf told her Azerbaijani counterpart Sahiba Gafarova here Thursday.

Ghalibaf suggested that regional issues should be resolved within the "3+3" Regional Cooperation Platform comprising the Caucasian nations of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan plus Russia, Turkey, and Iran in order to promote peace and stability.

The Iranian parliament speaker has traveled to Baku for his first visit to Azerbaijan to attend the 15th plenary session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA).

He said new conditions have emerged in the region, citing the Karabakh war in 2020 which resulted in the return of all territories held by Armenian troops since the 1990s to Azerbaijan.

"In difficult days like the Karabakh war, the people and the Leader of the Islamic Republic supported the liberation of the Azerbaijani territories; today the relations must be strong and develop further," Ghalibaf said.

He touched on the tripartite communication between Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia through the North-South Corridor, one of the world's biggest international transportation projects.

"The North-South route and transit to Europe and the Far East can be developed with the cooperation of the two countries," Ghalibaf said, adding it could open new capacities for all three countries.

The 7,200-km network includes maritime routes, railways, and land routes, and is meant for transportation from India and the Persian Gulf littoral states to Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Ghalibaf said, "The will of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to expand relations between the two countries in all fields, especially rail and road transportation and energy transit."

Both countries should speed up the implementation of rail and road projects, he added.

Earlier this month, Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said authorities from Azerbaijan, Russia, and Iran would meet to discuss the progress of the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway line, part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

An agreement on the implemen-

tation of the project is expected to be signed by March, the ambassador said.

Ghalibaf said joint projects between Iran and Azerbaijan have gathered momentum after a period of slump which saw Azerbaijan evacuate most of its embassy staff in Tehran in the wake of an attack on the building in 2023.

"The will to expand relations should not be impacted by people who are not interested in this development. Also, by developing defense relations, we can develop the security of the region," he added.

Ghalibaf said the embassy and the joint friendship group and visits by their traders should be activated.

"We should strive to develop border and road relations, create border markets, facilitate the movement of people and increase flights between Tehran and Baku. These things will develop the level of trade between the two countries."

Gafarova said she agreed that new conditions have emerged in South Caucasus, where multi-lateral and bilateral relations are now important.

"The policy of Azerbaijan is that regional issues should be resolved by the countries of the region," she said, adding Azerbaijan supports resolving the regional issues within the 3+3 platform.

Armenia's joint military drills with the United States have elicited dismay in the region. The drills, including "Eagle Partner" war games held last July, reflect Yerevan's efforts to forge closer ties with the U.S. and other Western allies amid souring relations with old ally Russia.

"The entry of extra-regional actors into the region leads to tension and we are against the presence of third countries in our region," Gafarova said.

"We should not allow third countries to disrupt the process of economic and humanitarian development," she said, adding without peace and stability, development is not possible.

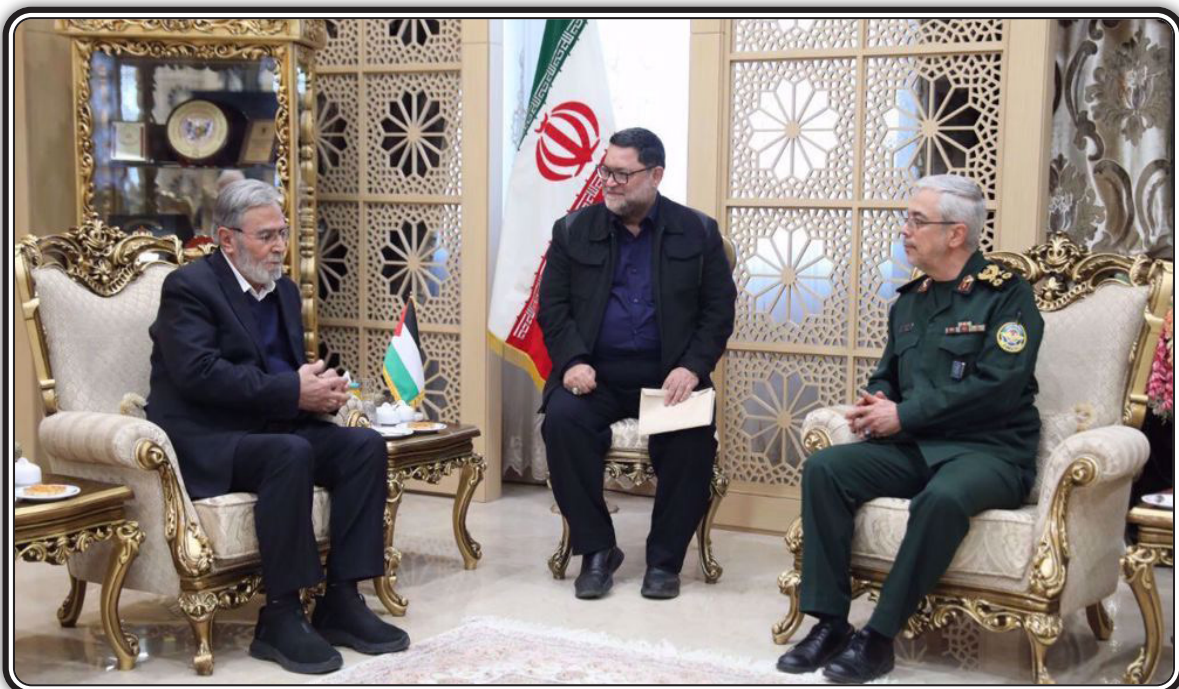
Gafarova said the peoples of Azerbaijan and Iran share common historical, religious, and cultural values, which form the foundation of today's relations and provide a profound basis for further expansion of relations.

She said she was confident that Ghalibaf's first visit to Azerbaijan would contribute to fostering the relations between the two countries.

"We wish to strengthen international cooperation in bilateral relations... I believe in the current situation neighboring countries like Iran and Azerbaijan should have closer ties and deeper connections."

Tehran, he said, pursues a

## Nakhala: Palestine, Lebanon Victories Owed to Iran



Iran's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Muhammad Bagheri (R) meets with Islamic Jihad chief Ziyad al-Nakhalah in Tehran, Feb. 20, 2025.

TEHRAN -- The head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad says victories in Palestine and Lebanon are owed to Iran's support and effective role, describing the Islamic Republic as the house of the Axis of Resistance.

Ziyad al-Nakhalah met Iran's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Muhammad Bagheri in Tehran on Thursday, where he touched on the Islamic Republic's retaliatory operations against the Israeli regime.

Dubbed Operation True Promise I and Operation True Promise II, the strikes were a strategic and influential development in the spirit of regional nations, Nakhala said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is the home of resistance," he added.

Nakhalah also praised the effective and constructive role played by the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance group in supporting the Palestinian resistance against the genocidal Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip.

"Palestinian resistance fighters

fought shoulder to shoulder with Hezbollah comrades against the Zionist regime, and many of them were martyred and injured in the process," he said.

"This is a sign of the unity of the resistance front and a source of pride for the Palestinian nation."

This military and political synergy among the resistance groups forced the Zionist enemy to retreat and accept the conditions of the resistance front for a ceasefire in the Gaza war, Nakhala said.

Earlier Thursday, the Palestinian resistance handed over the bodies of four Israeli captives, killed in the regime's strikes on Gaza to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Nakhala said they are now preparing for the second stage of the ceasefire "to swap officers and soldiers of the Zionist regime, so that all our prisoners could be released at once" and a complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza is realized.

For his part, Bagheri stated that support for the oppressed Palestinian nation constitutes the identity of Iran's Islamic establishment.

He said Imam Khomeini, the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, institutionalized this principle in the Constitution and all branches of the Iranian government.

"Despite all problems, including war, sanctions, and foreign pressures, the Islamic Republic of Iran has never stopped supporting Palestine and the resistance over the past years. This is and will remain unflinching," Bagheri said.

Bagheri noted that the developments of the past year and a half, irrespective of all Israeli crimes, the large number of fatalities and pressure on the oppressed Palestinian nation, have turned Palestine into the number one issue of the world.

"This has proven to the whole world that the Palestinian people's struggle is legitimate, the Zionist regime

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## Security Chief: New Resistance to Emerge in Syria

TEHRAN -- Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Akbar Ahmadian says a new resistance will emerge in Syria as Israeli forces take advantage of the post-government collapse chaos to seize more Syrian land.

"Day by day, we will witness that the people of Syria will liberate their country," Ahmadian said during the Great Prophet 19 military drills in Kerman on Friday.

He said the enemy seeks to induce that "if it achieves even a small suc-

cess in a war, it is victorious and the resistance has failed."

He said the Zionist regime has failed to achieve any victory during its 15 months of war in Gaza and suffered huge losses, adding, "Israel is now occupying defenseless Syria and this is not a victory."

"From the occupation of Syria today, a new resistance will emerge in this land," he said.

Pointing to the spread of resistance across the world, he said awakened consciences around the world

joined the resistance front when the ruthless Israeli regime was committing crimes against the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip.

Ahmadian said resistance is not confined to a single war or era, adding the enemy is exhausted by the enduring culture of resistance that cannot be eradicated.

"The enemy has become desperate with the culture of resistance," he said, adding "the resistance has proven that it is not finite, but rather, it is born anew."

## Senior Diplomat: Zionist Regime, U.S. Aware of Iran's Real Power

TEHRAN -- Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi says the United States and the Israeli regime will have to pay a heavy price if make any mistake against Iran.

"The threats from the U.S. and the Zionist regime are nothing new, but they are aware of Iran's real power," Takht Ravanchi said in an interview with Iraq's Al-Ahed news website.

He reaffirmed Iran's commitment to the general framework set out by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei for negotiations with the U.S.

Tehran, he said, pursues a

"very clear" policy and strategy that ban development of nuclear weapons, adding that the Leader has forbidden the production of such arms.

Takht Ravanchi, however, said talks are underway between Iran and the three European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal – formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Both sides are willing to advance these negotiations, and there is a framework for these talks that we act based on it to reach an agreement," he explained.

Takht Ravanchi also said Iran carefully monitors the development in Syria and hopes that security will be established in the country,

He added that no country should interfere in Syria's internal affairs.

He dismissed any difference of ideas inside Iran when it comes to the developments in Syria. "Whenever a new Syrian government is formed, we will respect the Syrian people's decision and engage with it accordingly."

On Saturday, Iranian Foreign Minister's special envoy for Syria Muhammad Reza Raouf Sheibani confirmed that Tehran is indirectly

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The Holy Qur'an

So when the sacred months have passed away, then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

The Holy Qur'an (9:5)

### PRAYER TIMINGS

Noon (Zohr)	12:18
Evening (Maghreb)	18:11
Dawn (Fajr) "Tomorrow"	06:43
Sunrise "Tomorrow"	05:20

## With Modern Military Equipment, Iran Ready to Confront Formidable Challenges, Says Salami

TEHRAN -- The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran's advanced weapons and skilled armed forces enable the country to confront any attacks by enemies.

"Recently in operations like True Promise we have showcased the strong resolve of the Iranian people and the significant popular support for the Islamic Republic," Major General Hussein Salami said on the sidelines of IRGC drills in Iran's south.

In response to a series of high-profile assassinations, Iran launched Operation True Promise II on October 1, targeting key Israeli military and intelligence installations with its missiles. Operation True Promise I was Iran's first ever direct military strike against Israel, conducted on April 13, 2024.

Salami said, "With advanced and modern hardware, we are well-prepared to confront formidable challenges."

"Our weapons and military equipment are fully aligned with global advancements and combined with our highly skilled and dedicated forces, they become even more effective."

Last October, Israeli warplanes used the space available to the U.S. military in Iraq to fire long-range air-to-air missiles at military installations in Iran in flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter.

Iran has vowed a third retaliatory operation and on Tuesday, head of the IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said it will definitely be carried out by Iran at a time of its choosing.

"This operation will be carried out by God's permission, but we will not waste this opportunity we have, and just as Operation True Promise 1 and 2 were carried out, Operation True Promise 3 will definitely be carried out," he said.