



## Interview with Armenia's Minister of Defense

**OE Watch Commentary:** Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's appointment of David Tonoyan as Defense Minister in May of this year was not necessarily seen as rebuke of the defense policies under the previous administration, but as the accompanying excerpted article highlights, the new defense minister is facing the same issues as his predecessor in addition to an increased threat of a conflict with Azerbaijan. The article features an interview with Defense Minister Tonoyan and he notes how Azerbaijan's armed forces are becoming more active "not only on the line with Artsakh (Nagorny Karabakh), but also on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly in the direction of Nakhichevan." The activity refers to claims by the government of Azerbaijan that it took control of several areas near the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan, which had previously been neutral territory. There have been no reports of any additional Azerbaijani activity toward Nagorny Karabakh, but many in Armenia are concerned with what they see as the Azerbaijani government aggressively testing the new administration.

The article includes Tonoyan's response to the question of what lessons the Armenian armed forces learned from the April 2016 clash with Azerbaijan, specifically that the Ministry of Defense "made necessary changes in areas such as the operational deployment of units and the provisioning of weapons and equipment." Azerbaijani forces gained a small amount of territory as a result of the clash over two years ago and while it is not mentioned in the article, it very likely impacted the changes discussed. Lastly, the interviewer brings up the possibility of the Armenian government acquiring Russian Su-30SM fighters. While this would be a significant leap in capabilities considering Armenia's current inventory includes only Su-25s (in close air support roles), Tonoyan's answer of "looking at several models of aircraft with different modifications and configurations" and having plans "to not have just fighter aircraft, but multifunctional air units" does not mention any Russian, or other aircraft, that would fulfill this role. Officials in Armenia claim to be looking for acquisition options outside of Russian weapons and equipment, but it remains to be seen where the Armenian government is heading on this. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

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**Source:** Arshaluis Mgdesyan, “Армения готовится к войне с Азербайджаном — интервью с министром обороны (Armenia is preparing for war with Azerbaijan – an interview with the minister of defense),” *EurAsia Daily*, 22 July 2018. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2018/07/22/armeniya-gotovitsya-k-voyne-s-azerbaydzhanom-intervyu-s-ministrom-oborony>

*EurAsia Daily correspondent interviewed Defense Minister David Tonoyan about the issues and tasks of the defense industry of Armenia, the plans to develop fighter aircraft and the growing tension in the Karabakh conflict zone on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.*

*(Mgdesyan): Mr. Tonoyan, as Minister of Defense of Armenia, what do you see as the main tasks that require a quick resolution in ensuring the country's security?*

*(Tonoyan): ...Taking into account the openly militaristic rhetoric of the enemy (Azerbaijan) and continuous statements about the possibility of resolving the conflict through the use of force, the Armenian Armed Forces must provide a sobering impact on the enemy and assist the army of Artsakh (Nagorny Karabakh) in curbing the aggression of the opposing side...By the way, you can become familiar with the priorities of the armed forces and, generally, Armenia's defense circles in my vision of developing defense systems as part of a government program. It was recently published...*

*(Mgdesyan): Reports of the massing of Azerbaijani soldiers on the front line in the Karabakh conflict zone have recently become more frequent. Is this true? How big is the threat of the resumption of large-scale military operations with Azerbaijan?*

*(Tonoyan): Reports of the activation and groups of Azerbaijani units are correct, and similar action is being seen not only on the line with Artsakh, but also on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly in the direction of Nakhichevan...*

*(Mgdesyan): A lot has been discussed about the need for changes in ensuring the defense of Armenia and Karabakh after the April 2016 clash. What findings were made from the “four-day war” and what has Armenia changed in strategy since then?*

*(Tonoyan): ...Conclusions were drawn on a number of issues at the operational and tactical levels. As a result, we made necessary changes in areas such as the operational deployment of units and the provisioning of weapons and equipment...I should note that despite its importance, the “April War” should not be at the center of attention of our military thought...we are preparing for probably military actions and not just taking into consideration the experience of the past...*

*(Mgdesyan): Russian media recently reported on the possible acquisition of Russian Su-30SM fighters by Armenia. Are negotiations with Russia taking place on this? Is Armenia developing fighter aircraft (capabilities)?*

*(Tonoyan): ...at the moment we are planning to develop an air component of the armed forces. We are looking at several models of aircraft with different modifications and configurations for acquisition...It is important that we planning to not have just fighter aircraft, but multifunctional air units...*