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Why the U.S. Should Embrace Israel-Azerbaijan Alignment

Stephen Blank

This essay argues that Azerbaijan's joining the Abraham Accords and formalizing its entente with Israel and the U.S. is eminently in the interests of all three states, particularly in the context of the Middle East, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. In the wake of the 12-day Israel-Iran war and the American strikes on Iran's nuclear program, as well as the U.S. proposal to oversee and perhaps even guarantee arrangements regarding the Zangezur Corridor to foster peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, this argument makes even more sense, given that Washington has expressed a clear interest in having peace and a lasting presence in the Caucasus.

These events highlight the American presence in both the Middle East and the Caucasus and its de facto alliance with

Israel. Given the growing intimacy of Azerbaijan-Israeli ties and U.S. interest in pacifying the South Caucasus, this move by Washington and Baku to formalize ties among these three states would be all the more logical now. Indeed, President Ilham Aliyev has publicly welcomed this American initiative. This idea of extending the Abraham Accords to Azerbaijan apparently originated in Israel. Still, there is no sign that Azerbaijan opposes this notion. Moreover, as shown below, this tandem acts—and can act even further—in critical areas to further interests congruent with those of the United States. Since this partnership, long a fixture in world affairs, both reflects and can extend trends in world affairs that are beneficial not only to Israel and Azerbaijan but also to the U.S. Washington should encourage Baku to take this step.

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Although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had to postpone his scheduled visit to Baku in May 2025, his postponement letter cited the deepening bond between the two states, which can be seen in increasing economic cooperation, expanded tourism to and from both countries, Israel's construction of Azerbaijan's satellites, and two daily flights by Azerbaijani airlines between the two countries. While this partnership, if not a formal alliance, is primarily founded on a shared fear of Iran's aggressive intentions against both states, this tandem has now strengthened the economic dimension of the relationship. It is thereby forging a broader and deeper foundation that transcends shared anxieties. This can also be seen in Israel's technology and defense trade with Azerbaijan, where Baku employed Israeli weapons in its campaigns in Karabakh and is buying Israeli radar and aerial detection systems.

However, at the same time, this alignment also exemplifies a larger trend towards trans-regional partnerships between Middle Eastern and South

Caucasus states. A similar trend is observed in Central Asia, where Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed in 2024 that his country establish a strategic partnership with Qatar. Similarly, those Gulf states that are already working with Israel are becoming more entangled with Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus. Consequently, the Azerbaijan-Israel partnership is no anomaly, but rather an illustration of a discernible trend in world politics that Washington should embrace.

Furthermore, beyond or in conjunction with this trend toward trans-regional partnerships, the concurrent rise of "keystone states" or "middle powers" that can defend their interests and even expand their local version of the aforementioned trend toward forming effective partnerships with other neighboring states to project their influence and power abroad is also taking place. Azerbaijan and Israel are such states that can function as regional anchors of local or regional security (especially with American support) and, so argued Michael Doran in the Winter 2021-2022 edition of *Baku Dialogues*, as partners

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with the U.S. in extending its and their influence in the Middle East, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Indeed, this is already occurring in Central Asia, as evidenced by Azerbaijan's growing role as a complete player in regional forums and various informal arrangements. This trend aligns with the interests of Central Asian governments, who have been drawing Azerbaijan into their fold for some time now, demonstrating their acceptance of the country as an equal regional actor. Azerbaijan's participation in Central Asia also creates opportunities for Washington which, if it can overcome existing bureaucratic and political obstacles, could come to see Central Asia as a region connected to the South Caucasus and certainly to Azerbaijan, which clearly hopes to play a greater role in regional affairs, as S. Frederick Starr, Svante Cornell, Damjan Krnjević Mišković, and others have argued for quite some time now (this is illustrated by their promotion of terms like "Greater Central Asia," "Trans-Caspian region," and the "Silk Road region"). But it also accords with Baku's desires to be seen, as per Aliyev's opening address at COP29, as

a country where East and West, North and South meet, and this is not just a matter

of geography. We can build political, cultural, energy, trade, and transportation bridges between different international actors. The mega projects initiated by Azerbaijan have already transformed the energy and transportation maps of Eurasia, leading to the establishment of fruitful multinational cooperation formats.

Azerbaijan is thus collaborating with states like China and Kazakhstan to construct a cargo terminal at the Port of Baku for the transportation of Central Asian and Chinese cargo. Similarly, Tajikistan is considering joining the green electricity corridor being set up from Azerbaijan through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Further examples of the growing connectivity between Azerbaijan and Central Asia are discussed below.

New Vistas, Deeper Alignment

Therefore, despite conventional Western thinking about Israel and Azerbaijan that restricts them to their respective geographical zones (i.e., the Middle East and the South Caucasus), their 30-year partnership and coinciding international trends reflect greater regional trends that

have opened new vistas for them and potential partners, especially the United States. As this partnership deepens, its development also offers Washington substantive and durable economic, political, and possibly military gains in the Middle East and the Silk Road region.

The Azerbaijan-Israel strategic partnership presents Washington with a significant opportunity to promote peace in both the Middle East and the South Caucasus, aligning with long-standing U.S. interests and policies. Azerbaijan and Israel are fundamentally status quo states: their primary aim in both regions is to maintain peace and expand opportunities for economic growth and regional integration. This point has become especially salient as Armenia and Azerbaijan are moving towards signing a comprehensive peace agreement, the text of which has already been finalized.

This shared desire for an end to wars and terrorist attacks can now possibly be realized in the wake of Azerbaijan having consolidated its Second Karabakh War victory and

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the shared U.S.-Israeli victory over Iran. Those events could promote a new status quo in both regions, particularly in light of the need for a continued American presence in both regions. This linkage between Baku-Jerusalem

and Washington's fundamental interests provides a significant argument for formalizing the Abraham Accords with Azerbaijan and other major Arab players as members.

Other trends in the Middle East, such as the ceasefire in Lebanon and the revelations that the parties are discussing Syria's adherence to the Abraham Accords (despite Israeli encroachments on Syria to limit the possibility of it becoming a terrorist base), can foster negotiated resolutions of these issues, as well as those related to the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Russo-Iranian-Chinese efforts to forge their own trans-regional revisionist arrangements threaten both Israel and Azerbaijan, as well as other regional actors in the South Caucasus and the Middle East. The deepening Russo-Chinese alliance, which

poses a threat to both Europe and Asia, represents another trans-regional alliance system, underscoring their revisionist ambitions.

Likewise, the Russo-Iranian alignment, formalized in their January 2025 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, represents a deeply revisionist entente (if not alliance) that targets Azerbaijan and Israel. This bilateral document openly displays the scope of the potential threats that their entente could produce in both the Middle East and the South Caucasus. It reaffirms the parties' mutual commitment to enhancing regional security in the former Soviet space and the Middle East. It also proclaims enhanced defense cooperation, suggesting more mutual arms and technology transfers. Thus, military-technical cooperation is expressly included here as a mutual commitment. Given Iran's missile and drone transfers to Russia and oft-expressed interest in advanced fighters like the Su-35 and air defenses, this could also include support for exchanges of nuclear, missile, and space technology. Indeed, right after the aforementioned document was signed, Iranian reports claimed that Iran had received the Su-35.

The agreement further states that both sides will expand

intelligence cooperation and anti-terrorist cooperation. Although this cooperation is not defined, it could become a platform for cooperation with Iranian efforts to subvert Azerbaijan on the alleged grounds of terrorism there as well as support for Iranian proxies in the Middle East, since Russia has in the past provided extensive support to Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. The document also openly advocates excluding American and European influence in the Middle East and the Caspian basin, i.e., it implicitly proposes Russian hegemony over Central Asia and the South Caucasus. In economics, it emphasizes creating a North-South transport corridor from Iran and presumably beyond to Russia, which would block independent Central Asian trade and transport routes while limiting Azerbaijan's connections to both Central Asia and Europe.

These plans for a North-South trade route from India through the Indian Ocean to Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia would limit Azerbaijan's direct access to the European market and reroute it through Asia. This is to be contrasted with the rival Middle Corridor project, which runs from China to Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and Azerbaijan, and then onto Georgia and the Black Sea,

bypassing Russia and linking to the parallel pipelines carrying oil and gas to Europe. Be that as it may, the Russia-Iran defense alliance nonetheless represents a de facto treaty for increased subversion, terrorism against both Israel and Arab governments, war in Ukraine, weapons, and possibly nuclear technology trade between the parties.

Neither Baku nor Jerusalem can have any doubts concerning Russian support for Iran against them. The recent incident in Yekaterinburg, which involved Russian police killing two ethnic-Azerbaijanis and injuring several more during a raid, coupled with the December 2024 downing of an Azerbaijan Airlines plane with no subsequent Russian apology, demonstrates Russia's continuing inability to accept Azerbaijan and its people as genuinely sovereign. Eritrea, which is also closely tied to Iran, unlawfully detained three Azerbaijani ships that were sailing in international waters while en route from Suez to Abu Dhabi from November 2024 to March 2025. Worse yet, despite the destruction of its nuclear program wreaked by Israel and the U.S. and the advent of negotiations with European

governments, Iran apparently intends (if it has not already started) to rebuild its nuclear program. Lastly, it now appears that Russia will be able to retain its Syrian bases that are the logistical lynchpin for all its power projection activities abroad, including support for Iranian terrorist proxies.

In contrast, the Azerbaijani-Israeli alignment exemplifies the benefits of trans-regional structures of cooperation. In earlier works, I have argued that this partnership exemplifies the larger trend towards trans-regional organizations of states for mutual cooperation. This trend is particularly notable in trans-regional partnerships between Middle Eastern and South Caucasian states, as Emil Avdaliani has argued. A similar trend is evident in Central Asia; for instance, Kazakhstan and Qatar have become full strategic partners. However, while Russia and China are eagerly organizing such groupings to promote their interests, partnerships like the Israeli-Azerbaijani one offer states in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East alternatives to Sino-Russian-led trans-regional organizations and arrangements.

The Azerbaijani-Israeli alignment exemplifies the benefits of trans-regional structures of cooperation.

The organizations established by Russia and China—namely, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)—were initially focused on mutual economic benefit. Yet both Moscow and Beijing have “hijacked” these organizations for political purposes, generally anti-American ones. While a debate exists over the benefits of EAEU membership, the establishment of a unified trade market that attempts to replicate the former unified Soviet one has apparently not yielded significant outcomes, as smaller economies remain excessively tied to Russia and suffer from the vicissitudes of that economy, e.g., sanctions.

These West-imposed sanctions put members in a difficult position, sandwiching them between their association with Russia and the larger global economy, which appears to be causing economic and political tensions among them. Likewise, smaller members of the EAEU (e.g., Kazakhstan) are increasingly unhappy with it. Evidently, Russia is politicizing it for its own geopolitical gains at the expense of its members, and also because the economic benefits for a country like Kazakhstan seem to be outweighed by visible economic costs (e.g., the severe devaluation of the Kazakh currency).

Therefore, a different form of trans-regional association—one that allows Central Asian states to trade freely with Azerbaijan and thus gain a more direct outlet to Türkiye and the European Union—is eminently desirable. In this connection, as the AIRCenter’s Vusal Guliyev has written,

The Port of Baku is a key node in the trans-Eurasian trade ecosystem, enabling Azerbaijan to influence regional transit flows. Enhanced connectivity through Baku yields economic benefits and carries substantial geopolitical weight. It provides Europe and Central Asia with greater trade flexibility, minimizing dependence on Russian infrastructure. Consequently, the Port of Baku has become a pivotal node in the evolving Eurasian supply chain, collaborating with programs such as [China’s] “One Belt One Road” initiative and new EU trade routes. Continued investments and reforms will be key to ensuring the Port of Baku’s sustained growth as a vital transit hub in the heart of Eurasia.

Indeed, Azerbaijan is currently undertaking a large-scale investment program to make this port into a genuine regional hub. And not surprisingly, China is also investing heavily in it to help realize its dreams of becoming the driver of intercontinental trade and connectivity. The construction of such infrastructure and the opportunity

for a “pro-American” Azerbaijan to become a significant hub comports with the desires of both Central Asian governments and Baku for a stronger connection with Washington, as Starr has argued in various recent publications.

In this way, Washington could compensate for the earlier policy failure in Georgia, as described below, and strengthen both its position and that of Israel as a commercial partner for Central Asia. Indeed, if Washington can extend the Abraham Accords to Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan, which appear to be interested in joining, and Middle Eastern states like Syria, the possibilities for Central Asian–Middle Eastern connectivity and trade increase by an order of magnitude, along with enhanced economic and political stability.

On the other hand, an American and/or Western failure to seize the opportunities now emerging in Central Asia and the South Caucasus leaves these areas to the tender mercies of another Russo-Chinese experiment in a suboptimal type of trans-regionalism that will take place at the expense of smaller states in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

A similar process is currently occurring within the BRICS. As

Alexander Gabuev and Oliver Steunkel put it in *Foreign Affairs* last September,

But despite its allure, the club must grapple with an internal fissure. Some of its members, chief among them China and Russia, want to position the grouping against the West and the global order crafted by the United States. The addition of Iran, an inveterate adversary of the United States, only deepens the sense that the group is now lining up on one side of a larger geopolitical battle. Other members, notably Brazil and India, do not share this ambition. Instead, they aim to utilize BRICS to democratize and encourage reform of the existing order, helping to guide the world from the fading unipolarity of the post–Cold War era to a more genuine multipolarity, in which countries can navigate between U.S.-led and Chinese-led blocs.

The Israel-Azerbaijan alignment stands in contrast to these trends, as its activities are poised to benefit not only these two states but also other potential partners from Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The Israel-Azerbaijan alignment represents both a trans-regional organization that stems from well-founded apprehensions that the interests of Iran and its proxies are strategically incompatible with their own, as well as a trans-regional formation that is deepening the partnership into new

economic domains. Neither is it an instrument of anti-American policies; rather, it is the opposite.

Therefore, the Israel-Azerbaijan alignment offers Washington numerous opportunities in the Middle East, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The U.S.-Israel alliance's value has been amply displayed in the wars Israel has fought against Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah since 7 October 2023.

This points to further opportunities available to the Trump Administration to strengthen ties with Azerbaijan and Israel across Central Asia. Those ties could further integrate the U.S. and Azerbaijan with the South Caucasus and Central Asia, where Azerbaijan is already extremely connected. For example, the Azerbaijani government has signaled that it wants to improve ties with the Trump Administration after what it sees as the duplicity and bad faith of the Biden Administration, obviously not least in expectation of cooperation on matters related to Iran.

The Middle East and Europe

Many signs of new opportunities for Washington in the Middle East are currently emerging, despite Russo-Chinese-

Iranian obstacles. For example, regarding Syria, despite numerous difficulties, opportunities for peace with Israel are emerging. Although we hear a great deal about Turco-Israeli tensions that could even lead to an armed conflict between them, developments pointing in an opposing direction are taking place, not least due to the Azerbaijani-Israeli partnership. Syria's discussions with Israel concerning the Abraham Accords could arguably not have taken place without Turkish support. Despite the bilateral tensions between them (including bellicose rhetoric on the part of the Turkish president), Türkiye's foreign minister has publicly stated Ankara's desire to avoid a confrontation with Israel. In addition, and again undoubtedly with Ankara's blessings, Syria is spurning Iran and looking to the U.S. for economic support. Indeed, Syria did nothing to interfere with Israeli aircraft flying over its territory when Israel struck Iranian targets during the 12-day war, a sure sign of its lack of support for Iran and desire to remain neutral.

As Claudia De Martino's assessment of Turkish policy from earlier this year has concluded,

Despite occasional tensions, such as Turkey's vocal criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza and close competition in the sale of advanced military equipment

on the global market, Turkey is not a clear threat to Israel. On the contrary, it has not stood in the way of the extension of the 2020 Abraham Accords (which, to this day, remain largely on paper), and it has dealt a blow to the Axis of Resistance in Syria, which has also proved highly beneficial to Israel. Therefore, thus far Ankara has not jeopardized any vital Israeli interest and, moreover, its role in rebuilding Syria could contribute to regional stability and prevent the further fragmentation of the country, which could be beneficial to broader regional security.

Azerbaijani mediation efforts have long been a regular feature of this partnership. As President Aliyev stated at ADA University in early April 2025, not only has Azerbaijan undertaken serious mediation between Israel and Türkiye during previous crises, but it is also doing so now to avert a conflict between them.

Now we are facing a *déjà vu*. We know the algorithm of our actions, and I can assure you that we are sparing no efforts in order to be helpful. At this stage, it would probably not be right to say anything more than that because, again, it is a relationship between two countries, and it is up to them to decide to what degree they want to make public any kind of process between us, if ever. Again, during the first round

of normalization, we were absolutely silent. We worked behind the scenes. So, you can imagine that we are doing the same now, and we hope that the process will lead to normalization.

Moreover, Azerbaijan and the U.S., in particular, have significant interests at stake that could benefit both Israel and Türkiye. Azerbaijani mediation could not only help stabilize the Levant but also could have an impact beyond the Middle East in Europe. This applies explicitly to energy prospects in the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Europe, since Azerbaijan's state-owned energy company, SOCAR, has acquired a 10 percent stake in Israel's Tamar Mediterranean Gas field. SOCAR will also be able to explore for gas off of Israel's coast.

This deal offers SOCAR a presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and access to the massive gas deposits found there by Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt, and potentially available to a revived Lebanon. It strengthens Azerbaijan and SOCAR's potential for exporting gas and oil to Türkiye, the Levant, and the Balkans. Since a July 2022 Memorandum of Understanding with the EU holds out the prospect of doubling Azerbaijani gas exports to the EU, the Tamar field could figure in those discussions, thereby

enhancing Azerbaijani and Israeli connections to Europe—particularly to the Balkans and Italy, which would be the natural consumers of this gas.

Given the EU's continuing demand for gas and Azerbaijan's role in providing it, as well as its potential ability to persuade its ally Türkiye to halt blocking exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, and possibly to mediate between Ankara and Jerusalem, this deal portends the benefits the Baku-Jerusalem partnership offers the European Union.

It is significantly in America's interest that Eastern Mediterranean gas reaches Middle Eastern and European markets via the Balkans, as this helps stabilize relations among Israel and its neighbors and reduces Russia's energy presence on the European continent. The first Trump Administration actively promoted an association of all local gas producers with these goals in mind. Today, Washington should try to help stabilize Lebanon and Syria as part of a broader initiative to check Iranian threats to both Israel and Lebanon by helping resolve their negotiations over a land border. That would allow them to explore the Eastern Mediterranean for gas. Since SOCAR also intends to expand production to other fields

outside Europe, stabilization here opens up new vistas for SOCAR. This, in turn, could make Azerbaijan a real partner in stabilizing the Middle East.

Finally, beyond having set back Iran's nuclear program and Israel's victory over Iran's terrorist proxies, the Trump Administration clearly hopes to extend the Abraham Agreements to Saudi Arabia. That also opens up the possibility of extending them still further to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Those accords clearly benefit the Middle East's overall regional economy. Robert Greenway, President and Executive Director of the Abraham Accords Institute, testified before the U.S. Congress on 9 May 2023 that, "In 2022, trade between Israel and its regional peace partners reached \$3.47 billion, up from \$1.905 billion in 2021 and \$593 million in 2019." Greenway further advocated that the U.S. follow up the extension of the Abraham Accords with a proposal for a regional free trade area. Specifically, he advocated that doing so would ensure regional stability, check the China-led Belt and Road Initiative, and generate thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars in new economic activity.

These are only a few examples of how this partnership can advance what needs to be understood as shared interests. However,

this alignment's potential benefits to the U.S. and the West do not stop here. The real importance of each country's presence in regions beyond its supposedly limited geographical zone lies in its partnership, exemplifying a major trend in world politics: the forging of trans-regional economic, security, and political groupings whose influence

transcends the members' particular borders. Thus, the Azerbaijan-Israel bilateral partnership could potentially expand and benefit the U.S. even as it reflects broader tendencies in world politics. Therefore, this partnership, as well as the Kazakh-Qatar one, offers Washington an opportunity to forge stable, enduring partnerships across key regions to address pressing economic, political, security, and environmental challenges.

South Caucasus and Central Asia

These opportunities for multi-dimensional trans-regional cooperation include but transcend the obvious case of a unified stance to push back against Iran that brings together the U.S.,

Israel, and Azerbaijan. While Israel gains from Azerbaijani support in energy and both states exchange intelligence, Azerbaijan benefits from Israel's arms sales—as we saw

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in the campaigns to liberate Karabakh and, presumably, to help it counter subversion attempts from abroad, including Iran. Israel also stands to benefit significantly from its connection with and to Azerbaijan, as opportunities for cooperation with the South Caucasus and Central Asia open up to Western influence, as described below.

Moreover, both Israel and Azerbaijan will also have a role to play in President Trump's regeneration of the policy of "maximum pressure" upon Iran. Israel's ability to defeat Iran's terrorist proxies and, in tandem with the U.S., Iran's missile strikes and nuclear program has already been demonstrated. But its concurrent arms sales to Azerbaijan and intelligence cooperation, along with Azerbaijan's alliance with Türkiye, represent strong factors of deterrence against both an Iranian invasion or use of terrorist proxies against Azerbaijan. Furthermore, to the extent that both Washington and Baku agree,

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bilateral intelligence sharing against Iran and Moscow, as in the presumed case of Jerusalem and Baku, can be further developed.

Similarly, the Trump Administration should extend the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) to Azerbaijan. C-SIPA is designed as an instrument for forging durable cooperation, if not partnerships, among states menaced by Iran. It provides for extensive cooperation in the fields of defense and security, trade and investment, and science and technology. It has already won support from Bahrain and the UK and could help establish a durable regional or even trans-regional security order in the Middle East.

Apart from the benefits that trade, investment, and technological cooperation can offer members, it also provides security guarantees that approach those of Article V of NATO's Washington Treaty. Specifically, as Article II of the C-SIPA text indicates,

In the event of external aggression or the threat of external aggression against one Party, the Parties shall [...] immediately meet at the most senior levels to determine additional defense needs and to develop and implement appropriate defense and deterrent responses as decided

upon by the Parties, including in the economic, military, and/or political realms. The Parties stand ready to immediately share available and appropriate information and intelligence in response to such an event.

For C-SIPA to extend to Azerbaijan, however, the notorious Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act would need to be repealed.

In the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Azerbaijan's agenda is paramount. However, there are growing opportunities for Baku, Jerusalem, and Washington to advance their respective and shared interests. First, the South Caucasus is no longer an exclusively Russian region as Türkiye, Iran, and Israel all compete for influence there (as do the EU and the U.S.). Second, Russian influence is steadily declining as Armenia seeks Western partners and Russo-Azerbaijani relations are in free-fall due to Russia's shooting down of an Azerbaijani civilian flight on 25 December 2024, and subsequent stonewalling of Baku's demands for acceptance of responsibility.

Consequently, Baku is expressing its independence from Russia more freely. Baku-based political analyst Farhad Mammadov says that "Russia's political and economic

'levers of pressure' on Azerbaijan had been reduced to practically none." Similarly, Aykhan Hajizada, Spokesman for Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry, bluntly stated that Azerbaijan had leverage over Russia: "They don't want to lose Azerbaijan as well," he said in January 2025.

These issues have not died down, as Russia continues to stonewall Azerbaijan over its responsibility for the loss of life on that flight. As a result, President Aliyev conspicuously shunned Putin's VE Day celebrations on 9 May 2025. A state-run news channel, *lnews.az*, commented that,

Aliyev's decision not to attend was a logical consequence of the recent developments in relations between Baku and Moscow, and reflects the principled and balanced position of the Azerbaijani leadership on key bilateral issues. [...] There are quite a few unresolved problems.

But Russia is pushing back. It is pressuring Georgia to abandon its leanings to the West, maintains several military bases in Armenia, and its January 2025 agreement with Iran will be used to generate continuous pressure upon Azerbaijan. More recently, Russia has reinforced its base in Armenia and may have been involved in attempting a coup against the

Pashinyan government. Moreover, its new navy base at Ochamchira in secessionist Abkhazia gives Moscow heightened leverage in the Black Sea and over Georgia. To the extent that it comes to control Georgia, it could also control Azerbaijan's and Central Asia's direct access to the West, as the pipelines to Türkiye run through Georgia, and the Black Sea provides the best maritime access for these regions to the West.

Should Russia come to dominate these countries' access to the Black Sea, it could severely retard their development and orientation towards the West. Although the Trump Administration is unlikely to intervene in Georgia on behalf of human rights, multiple important strategic considerations could spur American involvement in this matter. These issues stem from Georgia's strategic location in the South Caucasus and on the eastern shores of the Black Sea.

First, a continuing adoption of the West's hitherto passive policy towards Georgia means losing Georgia. Then its economy will be reoriented to a Russo-Chinese orientation rather than a Western one, with serious consequences for American firms. A French-led Western bid for the giant construction project at the Anaklia port on the Black Sea has already

been outbid by a Chinese-led consortium.

Moreover, this port, along with other investments in infrastructure, is crucial for bringing Azerbaijani and ultimately Central Asian energy to Europe, as well as expanding trade between the South Caucasus and Central Asian states with the Old Continent.

Neither is this energy trade the only one of importance to Europe and the West. Central Asia has considerable potential for exporting green energy and, more importantly, large quantities of rare earth minerals. To the extent that Georgia is an independent actor whose infrastructure is integrated with that of other Black Sea littoral states, Central Asian states, and Azerbaijan, it will then enjoy significantly greater opportunities for trade, investment, connectivity, and linkages with the global economy.

It stands to reason that a Russian-dominated Georgia would reorient its economy and politics towards Russia and China, denying those states many of the opportunities they seek to integrate with the global economy. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to state that Georgia's freedom is the key to and precondition for both the South Caucasus' and Central

Asia's complete emancipation from Russian imperial ambitions. Since Baku is the principal port for Central Asian trade westward and a key lynchpin for the success of the Middle Corridor, a project that facilitates free trade between Central Asia and the West will help all these states evade Russian pressure.

Beyond trade, Israel and Azerbaijan, along with other governments, are supporting their own, Central Asian, and U.S. interests. First, many Central Asian states, grasping the dangers of Russian, Chinese, and terrorist threats, have begun to prioritize military reconstruction. Kazakhstan, perhaps the leader in this regard, is already advocating for a Central Asian defense union and is simultaneously quickly moving to become the dominant Caspian naval power. Whereas Türkiye (and possibly Azerbaijan), Israel, and to some degree the U.S. are already engaged in security cooperation with Central Asia, either or both Baku and Washington can foster more meaningful Israeli security and military cooperation with willing Central Asian states, even possibly including arms sales. Such cooperation promotes diversification of Central Asia's security providers and economic ties while minimizing the threat of excessive dependence or vulnerability to Russia and/or China.

Another way in which Israel could facilitate American interests in Israel is by serving as a "backdoor" for U.S. investments through third-party Israeli companies. Since Central Asian countries do not wish to run the risk of strong Russian or Chinese opposition to a heightened American presence there, if that economic

presence is mediated through a third party, such as Israel, then it can serve to bring an indirect American presence into the region for the mutual benefit of all parties.

Finally, and perhaps most urgently, the greatest threat to Central Asia and Azerbaijan is the desertification and erosion of all its main bodies of water, from the Caspian Sea to Lake Balkhash. This escalating crisis threatens the livelihoods, health, and environment of millions of people on both sides of the Caspian and other bodies of water, such as the Aral Sea, throughout Central Asia. This crisis stems from climate change, poor water management, and a previous failure of collective action among these states.

But using the convening power of the U.S.-Central Asia C5+1 (or C6+1 that includes Azerbaijan) format that involves the U.S. and

This paper has outlined numerous instances where the Azerbaijan-Israel partnership can benefit not only these two states but the U.S. and other states from the Levant to Central Asia.

given Israel's successful and extensive efforts at desalination and water reclamation, suggests that Israel is a natural fit for large-scale cooperation with Central Asian States, either collectively or individually on this

urgent ecological-economic process that is no less in Azerbaijani and/or American interests. For example, an Israeli company that produces water from thin air signed an agreement with Uzbekistan in 2019 for just this purpose and can serve as an example for the latter's neighbors.

Conclusions

This paper has outlined numerous instances where the Azerbaijan-Israel partnership can benefit not only these two states but the U.S. and other states from the Levant to Central Asia. Unlike Russian- and Chinese-led trans-regional organizations, this partnership is driven by a shared need for security that is now expanding to

include energy and can be scaled to encompass a broader economic, environmental, and security agenda for mutual benefit. Ideally, this is the genuine purpose and redeeming feature of a trans-regional organization.

Given today's global arena, it would be a dangerous and reckless American policy failure not to capitalize on this pro-Western alignment, particularly in light of

Russian and Chinese opportunism. It would also be a cardinal strategic error to squander the opportunity presented by those Central Asian and South Caucasus states that wish to improve ties with Washington and even sign the Abraham Accords. After all, who knows when such a pro-American alignment will return, while we do know what to expect in all these regions if Washington fails to seize the day here. **BD**

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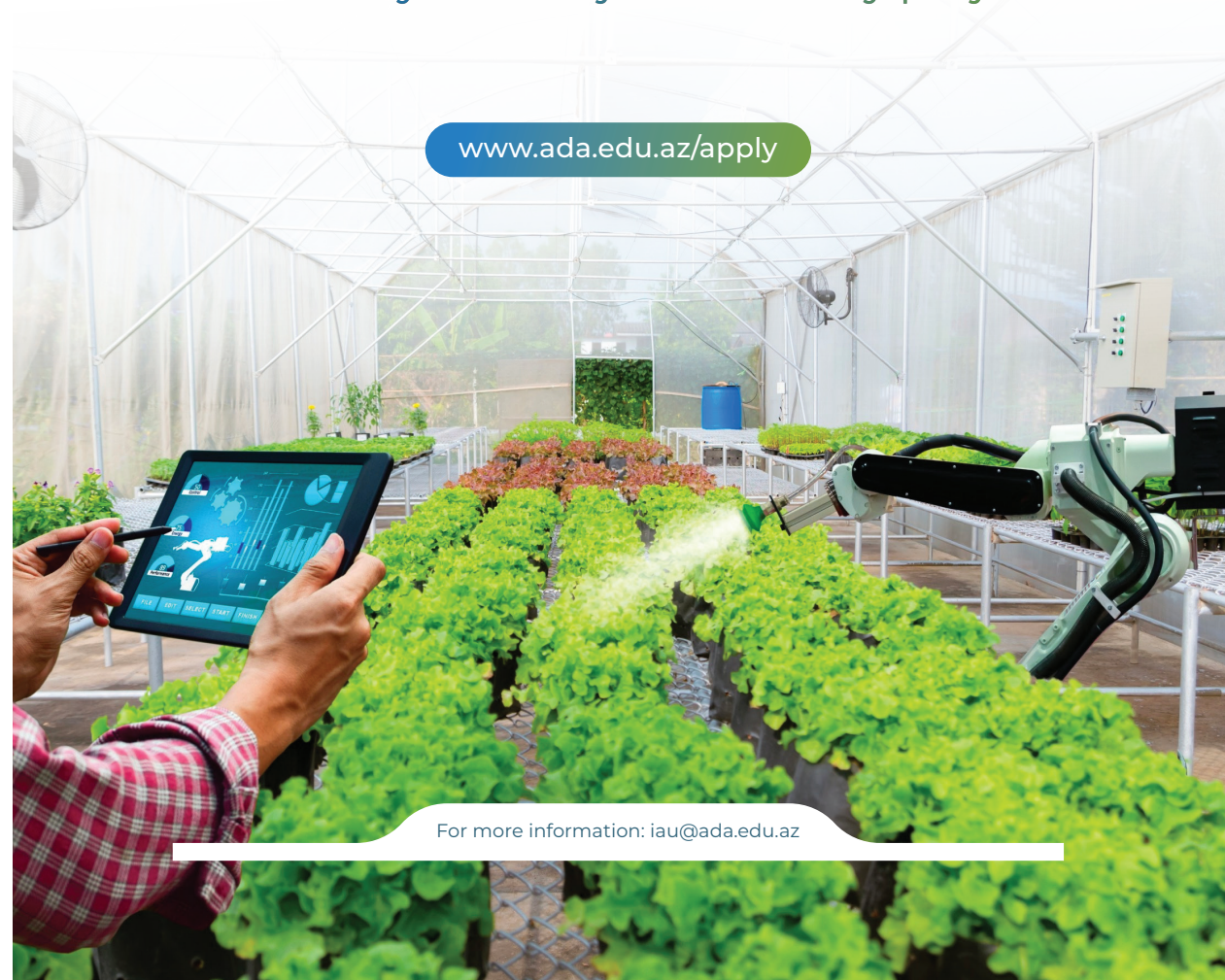


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