

Azerbaijan's growing footprint in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract

Following Azerbaijan's military victory in the Second Karabakh War, the country has emerged as a post-conflict state seeking to reorient its foreign policy towards economic development and sustainability. Azerbaijan's policy of active non-alignment enables Baku to pursue an independent foreign policy across its broader neighbourhood, from the Middle East to the Eastern Mediterranean, while advancing initiatives aimed at strengthening regional connectivity, enhancing regional security, and facilitating the energy transition. With the signing of the formal alliance treaty known as the Shusha Declaration, alongside Azerbaijan's growing involvement in the Syrian and Israeli gas markets, Baku is now positioned to emerge as a significant actor in the Eastern Mediterranean. Given Azerbaijan's strategic geographical position, which provides a secure transit corridor bypassing Russian- and Iranian-controlled territories, European Union member states are well positioned to benefit from expanded trade and deeper economic cooperation with Baku.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus has long suffered from post-imperialist ethnic conflicts shaped by Russian-backed breakaway regions in Georgia and the Armenian occupation of Karabakh from 1992 to 2020. However, Azerbaijan's liberation of its formerly occupied territories in the Second Karabakh War (2020) and anti-terror operation (2023) have broken the deadlock of one of the most complex and contested political debates in contemporary history.¹ They not only fundamentally reshaped Azerbaijan's strategic outlook but also prioritised Baku's foreign policy initiatives to facilitate a new role for the South Caucasian nation as a middle-power. Having completely resolved the territorial dimension of a conflict that had dominated the national discourse of the country since its independence for

¹ Steven J. Klein, "Achieving Full Resolution to the Karabakh Conflict," *Baku Dialogues* 4, no. 4 (Summer 2021), accessed July 10, 2026, <https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/achieving-full-resolution-to-the-karabakh-conflict-04-07-2021>

nearly three decades, Azerbaijan is now seeking to transition from the focus on the restoration of its territories towards a foreign policy centred on economic development, regional connectivity via the Middle Corridor, and sustainable growth. This strategic recalibration is a reflection of Baku's changing security environment beyond the South Caucasus, while broadening and restructuring its foreign policy in Euroasia, in careful mediation in the great power competition as a consequence of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and Europe's search for alternative energy and transport partnerships.²

Historically, Azerbaijan's foreign policy doctrine is based on pragmatism, with active non-alignment elements, allowing Baku to maintain constructive ties with regional and global actors. It also means the country successfully avoids being dragged into political blogs and manages its strategic autonomy independently.³ Rather than aligning itself fully with a single political union, Azerbaijan has cultivated and diversified its portfolio with different geopolitical actors such as the European Union (EU), Türkiye, Israel, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), as well as the Central Asian states. In addition to these countries, Azerbaijan also upholds stable and constructive relations with its partners in the Middle East, with renewed relations in the Gulf, particularly with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while simultaneously managing complex relations with its two adversaries, Russia and Iran.⁴ This multilateral approach to a variety of geopolitical powers enables Azerbaijan to maximise its diplomatic flexibility and outreach. Nevertheless, it is no longer a secret that Azerbaijan is increasingly becoming an indispensable regional actor across a broad strategic space extending from the Caspian Basin to the Eastern Mediterranean.

The formality of Baku's growing footprint in the Eastern Mediterranean is consolidated by the signing of the Shusha Declaration (2021), which formalised the strategic alliance between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. This document aims to expand bilateral cooperation in mutual defence, security, energy, transport and other essential affairs. Many Western scholars argued that Azerbaijan became a de facto NATO member after the declaration was inked, as the document clearly has a clause similar to NATO's Article 5 on collective defence.⁵

It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan's active engagement in the region did not halt with this agreement alone. After the collapse of the Assad Regime, Baku has developed an interest in energy projects and reconstruction in Syria and has newly expanded cooperation with the Jewish state beyond the defence sector. For a country that closed the chapter of war,

² Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan Is Now a Major Contributor to Europe's Energy Security," *Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)*, March 16, 2024, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/azerbaijan-is-now-a-major-contributor-to-europes-energy-security-1412>

³ Farid Shukurlu and Joseph Shumunov, "Azerbaijan's Active Non-Alignment: How Baku Is Pivoting to Greater Power," *Baku Dialogues* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2025): 62-81, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/azerbajians-active-non-alignment-09-12-2025>

⁴ Farid Shukurlu, "The Wolf among Jackals: Azerbaijan's Battle against Russia and Iran," *The Liberum*, July 5, 2025, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://theliberum.com/the-wolf-among-jackals-azerbajians-battle-against-russia-and-iran/>.

⁵ Rusif Huseynov, "NATO Umbrella for Azerbaijan?," *Topchubashov Center*, June 15, 2021, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://top-center.org/en/expert-opinion/3158/nato-umbrella-for-azerbaijan>.

Azerbaijan's short-term perspective is to become a "Middle Power", being able to assert influence beyond its parent region of the South Caucasus. All these recent developments prove a contemporary foreign policy objective of integrating Azerbaijan into emerging regional economic and energy networks.⁶

As Europe rediscovers its vulnerabilities amid the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, Azerbaijan naturally emerges to replace hostile energy suppliers like Russia and Qatar, which have long weaponised energy as a means for political concessions or gains. Situated at the intersection of Europe and Central Asia, the natural position of Azerbaijan serves as a critical transit hub on the Middle Corridor, connecting the Caspian Region with European markets through transport and energy corridors that bypass both Russian and Iranian territories.⁷ This trajectory does not cover these two corridors, and the aerospace, ensuring the safe passage of civilian planes. Thus, the efforts of the EU to diversify its energy supply from Azerbaijan come at a crucial time, given that, unlike Qatar's costly LNG exports that are harder to transport and store during the uncertainties in the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, but Azerbaijan's oil and gas supplies to the EU do not account for overpriced imports for Brussels and non-EU member states like Serbia and North Macedonia.⁸

An Emerging Geostrategic Actor in the Eastern Mediterranean

Azerbaijan-Greece Relations after 2020

Even though there were disagreements between Baku and Athens over the Greek support for the Republic of Armenia (and Armenian separatists) during the Karabakh conflict, all these quarrels periodically ceased to be on the agenda after Azerbaijan's military and diplomatic victories in 2020 and 2023. Most recent developments on strengthening this partnership and opening new channels of dialogue are gradually focused on economic cooperation. While it may be true that the Greek position on Armenia was perceived as sidelining Baku within the EU, this no longer seems to be the norm, as both parties are starting to recognise the strategic importance of maintaining constructive bilateral relations amid regional conflicts. Hence, pragmatism is largely driven by vital issues such as energy security, regional connectivity, and growing political dialogue.⁹

⁶ Mehmet Fatih Oztarsu and Rovshan Ibrahimov, "No Longer Small? Azerbaijan's Pursuit of Middle Power Status," *Third World Quarterly* (published online November 18, 2025): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2025.2582694>.

⁷ Friedrich Conradi, "The Much-Touted Middle Corridor Transport Route Could Prove a Dead End," *Carnegie Politika*, April 29, 2026, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/04/middle-corridor-transport-prospect>

⁸ Marwa Rashad and Emily Chow, "Helium Prices Soar as Qatar LNG Halt Exposes Fragile Supply Chain," *Reuters*, March 12, 2026, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/helium-prices-soar-qatar-lng-halt-exposes-fragile-supply-chain-2026-03-12/>.

⁹ Elena Kosolapova, "Azerbaijan and Greece: Connected by Centuries-long Bond," *Azeri Observer*, August 16, 2022, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://azeriobserver.az/azerbaijan-and-greece-connected-by-centuries-long-bond/>

Looking back at the past few years, high-level diplomatic engagement has also surged, with high expectations to swiftly improve bilateral ties. For instance, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister (FM) Jeyhun Bayramov and his Greek counterpart, George Gerapetritis, have engaged in diplomatic discourse on the margins of several international forums to reaffirm both sides' mutual commitment to strengthening political dialogue, economic cooperation, regional security, and connectivity.¹⁰ Another significant milestone came around the COP29 summit in Baku, where President Ilham Aliyev met the Greek Prime Minister (PM) Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The two heads of state discoursed about expanding cooperation in energy, trade and tourism with an emphasis on regional connectivity routes. Their meetings proceeded to be a traditional norm during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City in September 2025, where the two leaders met on the sidelines to reaffirm their commitment to explicate bilateral cooperation.¹¹ When President Aliyev received the credentials of the Greek Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Maria K. Papakonstantinou, he reiterated his meetings with senior Greek officials and their significance in bolstering bilateral relations.¹²

Regardless of diplomatic efforts to build closer ties, the main factor in making Azerbaijan-Greece ties reliable and stable is energy security. Azerbaijan has undoubtedly consolidated its footprint as Greece's most reliable external energy supplier through the Southern Gas Corridor (TANAP pipeline), particularly via the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which transports natural gas from the Shah Deniz field to Greece and onward to Italy. After the commencement of TAP, the project has drastically transformed Greece's energy diversification strategy and practically placed the country in the league of regional transit hubs.

Increased hostilities in Eastern Europe and the Middle East affect the energy markets, particularly for a country like Greece whose geopolitical position requires it to be energy-dependent. This is why the strategic importance of Baku has considerably multiplied while Europe is trying to reduce its energy dependence on Russian oil and gas. During the course of 2024, Baku facilitated the delivery of nearly 5.6 billion cubic metres (bcm) of blue fuel to the Hellenic Republic via the TAP infrastructure, a volume that represents approximately one-

¹⁰ "Jeyhun Bayramov Briefs Greek Counterpart about Current Situation in Region in Post-Conflict Period," *AZERTAC*, September 24, 2024, accessed July 10, 2026, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/jeyhun_bayramov_briefs_greek_counterpart_about_current_situation_in_region_in_post_conflict_period-3196946

¹¹ "Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' Meetings on the Sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York," *Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic*, September 23, 2025, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://www.primeminister.gr/en/2025/09/23/36979>

¹² "Ilham Aliyev Met with Prime Minister of Greece at UN Headquarters in New York," *Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, September 23, 2025, accessed July 10, 2026, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/71439>

fifth of the nation's total yearly gas requirements.¹³ Azerbaijan is already viewed as Europe's most reliable energy provider during the Ukraine War, but Baku's willingness to supply Greece with gas also signals the country's position to work with Athens despite old political grievances.

Moreover, oil cooperation constitutes another important dimension of the bilateral relationship. While direct Azerbaijani crude oil exports to Greece totalled 702,000 tonnes in 2025, Azerbaijan's role extends beyond that of a supplier. As a key transit country for Kazakh crude oil destined for Greece, the combined volume of Azerbaijani and transit Kazakh oil accounts for approximately 35 per cent of Greece's total crude oil imports, underscoring Baku's strategic importance to Greece's energy security.¹⁴

The strategic rationale underpinning this partnership has been aptly summarised by Murad Muradov, Co-Founder and Deputy Director of the Topchubashov Centre:

"Due to its geographical position and strategic approach to foreign policy, Azerbaijan has mastered the art of sustaining multi-vectoral friendships instead of taking sides in international blocs. This stance has made Baku a sought-after partner for many countries and a good fit to mediate between countries at odds. Türkiye and Greece are another illustrative case. Despite its strategic alliance with Ankara underpinned by ethnocultural and civilisational rhetoric, Baku has turned Athens into an important political and economic partner in the Eastern Mediterranean, as Greece has become one of the major importers of Azerbaijani natural gas. Nevertheless, Athens on some occasions took a pro-Armenian stance, which held back the development of the two countries' relations."¹⁵

Beyond energy cooperation, the bilateral relations have started to expand into areas such as trade, investment, transportation, and tourism. The latest development in this regard was observed in July 2026, when the head of the State Tourism Agency of Azerbaijan, Fuad Naghiyev and the Greek Ambassador

¹³ Azerbaijan Has Supplied Greece with 5.6 bcm of Natural Gas So Far, Says Minister," *AZERTAC*, April 3, 2026, accessed July 10, 2026, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/azerbaijan_has_supplied_greece_with_56_bcm_of_natural_gas_so_far_says_minister-4105319

¹⁴ "Crude Petroleum in Greece," *Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/crude-petroleum/reporter/grc>

¹⁵ Murad Muradov, Co-Founder and Deputy Director, Topchubashov Centre, interview by Farid Shukurlu, July 12, 2026.

to Azerbaijan discussed enhancing cooperation in promoting tourism, sharing expertise, and boosting exchanges at the people level.¹⁶ The two sides also talked about increasing the flow of tourists and devising joint activities to enhance tourism cooperation, following previous talks held by President Ilham Aliyev and PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis on direct air connectivity between Baku and Athens.

The Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Syria Triangle: Energy Diplomacy and Regional Order

The fall of Assad's dictatorial regime in 2024 created an opportunity to restore diplomatic ties and facilitate a new approach towards Damascus. Bashar al-Assad had long acted as Iran and Russia's proxy to support the Armenian separatists in Karabakh, stomping on Baku's red line.¹⁷ Therefore, bilateral relations had remained largely dormant throughout the Syrian civil war, but the victory of interim President Ahmad al-Shaara in the civil war that ended Assad's reign paved the way for reapproachment between Azerbaijan and Syria. Türkiye's role in helping Syrian rebels oust the former dictator is part of the country's vision to also incorporate Azerbaijan into its regional goals. While Azerbaijan is poised to be pleased with its strategic partnership with Türkiye in the Levant over Syria, it does not cover other countries to function as a balancing act with Azerbaijan's other regional allies like Israel and the UAE.

Building upon the legal and strategic framework under the Shusha Declaration inked in 2021, Azerbaijan has prioritised its coordinated security cooperation, energy diplomacy and post-conflict reconstruction with Türkiye. The security pillar of the formalisation of the Azerbaijan-Türkiye alliance is often reflected in military exercises, which have increasingly focused on interoperability, counter-terrorism and rapid deployment capabilities.¹⁸ These drills reinforce the legitimacy of the Shusha Declaration as the two allies demonstrate their ability to project stability and readiness against any threats. It is also important to note that the Azerbaijani military officers, troops, and special forces were educated to NATO standards by the Turkish Armed Forces both before and after the Second Karabakh War.¹⁹

The ultimate gain of the fall of the Assad regime was how Azerbaijan recalibrated its foreign policy towards Syria. Now, Azerbaijan is instrumentally engaging in exporting energy to the country and playing a constructive role in rebuilding Syria. The two countries have already

¹⁶ "Azerbaijan's Tourism Potential Presented in Greece," *AZERTAC*, July 16, 2026, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://special.azertag.az/en/xeber/4321329>

¹⁷ Vali Kaleji, "Syrian Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Ukraine: An Unbalanced, Russia-Centered Approach," *Middle East Institute*, August 23, 2022, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://mei.edu/publications/syrian-foreign-policy-caucasus-and-ukraine-unbalanced-russia-centered-approach>

¹⁸ Pedro Gómez, "Turkey and Azerbaijan to Carry Out Joint Military Exercises," *Hispanatolia*, June 11, 2026, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://hispanatolia.com/en/turkey-and-azerbaijan-to-carry-out-joint-military-exercises/>

¹⁹ Javid Valiyev, "Azerbaijan-Türkiye Military Cooperation: One Nation, One Army," *Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)*, December 23, 2022, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/en/post/azerbaijan-turkiye-military-cooperation-one-nation-one-army-1093>

signed an agreement on an energy deal that foresees Azerbaijan exporting gas to Syria via Türkiye, funded by Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Starting on August 2, 2024, Azerbaijan fulfilled this obligation with gas deliveries to the country.²⁰ Speaking at the 2026 Shusha Global Media Forum, President Ilham Aliyev argued that the Syrian route also creates opportunities to expand Azerbaijani gas exports to neighbouring regional markets, underscoring Baku's ambition to transform its energy diplomacy beyond Europe. As of today, Baku's footprint in its gas exports is visible in 16 countries, including 10 EU member states, with exports totalling 25 bcm annually. However, according to President Aliyev, Azerbaijan is likely to pursue more agreements as it demonstrates its growing role as a transregional energy supplier.²¹

Following the restoration of diplomatic ties, the bilateral engagement has swiftly shifted toward the economic sphere. Beyond the projected \$5-\$10 billion allocation earmarked for Syrian revitalisation initiatives—spanning energy infrastructure, transport corridors, humanitarian de-mining, and industrial rehabilitation—Baku is actively fortifying its humanitarian footprint through the development of educational institutions.²² This multi-faceted approach effectively synthesises soft power with strategic economic interests. Such initiatives underscore Baku's perception of a post-Assad Syria as a pivotal partner in facilitating Azerbaijan's broader integration with the Arab world, while simultaneously serving as an emerging market that bridges the South Caucasus with the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle Eastern region.

The Azerbaijan-Israel Alliance Beyond Bilateralism

The evolution of this “special” relationship entered a new stage after the Second Karabakh War. These two countries went from a predominantly defence-based partnership to a broader strategic alliance encompassing energy security, regional diplomacy and geopolitical coordination. However, it does not mean defence cooperation ceased to be an essential pillar of Azerbaijan's security infrastructure; quite the opposite, as Baku continues to purchase new military tech from Israel, as demonstrated at the latest Victory Day Parade (November 8, 2025), where Israel's newest 5th-generation “Sea Breaker” missile systems were exhibited.²³

²⁰ "Export of Azerbaijani Gas to Syria via Türkiye Has Commenced," *SOCAR Türkiye*, August 2, 2026, accessed August 2, 2026, <https://socar.com.tr/press-release/export-of-azerbaijani-gas-to-syria-via-turkiye-has-commenced>

²¹ "President of Azerbaijan: We Supply Gas to Syria, and We Can Expand to Neighboring Countries as Well," *AZERTAC*, July 16, 2026, accessed July 17, 2026, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_of_azerbaijan_we_supply_gas_to_syria_and_we_can_expand_to_neighboring_countries_as_well-4315141

²² Fuad Shahbazov, "Azerbaijan's Emerging Role in Post-Assad Syria," *Stimson Center*, May 22, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/azerbaijans-emerging-role-in-post-assad-syria/>.

²³ Samir Veliyev, "Military Parade in Baku and Weapons of Deterrence: Showing Off Modernised Arsenal," *Caliber.Az*, November 9, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://caliber.az/en/post/military-parade-in-baku-and-weapons-of-deterrence>

The unprecedented collaboration between Baku and Jerusalem expanded to cover new areas of fruitful relations. For example, a major milestone was reported in 2025, when SOCAR acquired a 10 per cent stake in Israel's second-largest gas field, Tamar, adding more Azerbaijani influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁴ On top of that, SOCAR joined a consortium alongside Israel's NewMed Energy and BP after securing exploration rights for Cluster I in Israel's Exclusive Economic Zone. This was Azerbaijan's very first investment in the upstream energy sector, which means the state-owned company will now operate with full freedom to discover new energy sources in Israeli waters, diversifying Azerbaijan's energy politics in the gas sector.²⁵ In 2025, Israel attracted more than 542 million USD from Azerbaijan, topping the chart among other countries where Azerbaijani investment was observed.²⁶ It is also anticipated that the Azerbaijan Investment Holding (AIH) will now acquire a 30 per cent stake in Israel's IDE water desalination company.²⁷ From a historical standpoint, it was usually the Israelis who were in charge of helping Azerbaijan obtain fresh water and running Azerbaijan's Mingachevir and Ceyranbatan reservoirs.

As a growing middle power, Azerbaijan's diplomacy was and is tested in maintaining viable relations with Israel while simultaneously orchestrating a political communication channel between Jerusalem and Ankara as well as Damascus. Baku enjoys very warm relations with all three countries involved in regional security and has close ties to both the Erdogan and Netanyahu governments. Baku hosted and facilitated several rounds of high-level meetings aimed at preserving communication following the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations during the Gaza conflict. This mediation reflects Azerbaijan's growing reputation as a pragmatic regional actor capable of maintaining dialogue among competing partners. President Aliyev was also personally behind the reapproachment between Türkiye and Israel, leading to President Isaac Herzog's state visit to Ankara in 2022, a few months before the Gaza War broke out.²⁸ It may open the door for future reconciliation attempts at restoring diplomatic ties between Ankara and Jerusalem, but until then, the coordination is mostly

²⁴ Jacob Wirschafter, "Israel and Azerbaijan Sign Declaration of Cooperation on Artificial Intelligence as Ties Deepen," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-898544>

²⁵ "International Energy Giants SOCAR (Azerbaijan), bp (United Kingdom), and NewMed Energy (Israel) Receive Licenses to Explore for Natural Gas in Israeli Waters," *Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, State of Israel*, March 17, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/news-170325>.

²⁶ Rahim Tariverdiyev, "Azerbaijani Investments in Israel Exceed Half a Billion Dollars Due to Tamar Gas Project," *APA News*, September 17, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://en.apa.az/finance/azerbaijani-investments-in-israel-exceed-half-a-billion-dollars-due-to-tamar-gas-project-477948>.

²⁷ "Azerbaijan Investment Holding Plans a \$270 Million Investment in Israel," *Startup.az*, January 13, 2026, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.startup.az/en/news-content/azerbaijan-investment-holding-plans-a-270-million-investment-in-israel.-2556>

²⁸ Lazar Berman, "Azerbaijan President Says Doing Everything to Facilitate Israel-Turkey Rapprochement," *The Times of Israel*, April 9, 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/azerbaijan-president-says-doing-everything-to-facilitate-israel-turkey-rapprochement/

concentrated on preventing both sides from massive disagreements over Syria through the red line mechanism.²⁹

The mediation of Azerbaijan in meddling in the Turkish-Israeli escalation is a remarkable success for the country. It has generated some diplomatic profits for Azerbaijan's own national interests. During renewed debates in Israel regarding official recognition of the "Armenian genocide", Azerbaijani diplomatic engagement reportedly contributed to freezing legislative momentum, preserving Israel's long-standing policy of strategic ambiguity on the issue. This demonstrated the political capital Azerbaijan has accumulated in Jerusalem through decades of consistent political engagement.³⁰

As Joseph Epstein, Director of the Washington-based Turan Research Center, observes, "The Azerbaijan-Israel relationship is what reliability looks like: two nations that have been there for each other in the hardest moments, from defence technology when Baku was isolated to energy security during Israel's recent war." He further argues that because the relationship rests not only on shared strategic concerns regarding Iran but also on genuine cultural ties and a commitment to multiculturalism, it has become "a model that should inspire Israel's relations across the Muslim world." Together, these developments illustrate that post-2020 Azerbaijan-Israel relations have matured into one of the most resilient and strategically consequential partnerships in Eurasia.³¹

Conclusion

Having resolved the Karabakh question, Azerbaijan has systematically transformed itself from a regional security actor into a middle power capable of expanding its footprint across the Eastern Mediterranean.³² Through pragmatic diplomacy, energy exports and regional connectivity, Baku has strengthened its strategic partnerships with Greece, Türkiye, Syria and Israel. Owing to its strategic geographical position, Greece has re-emerged as an important energy partner through the Southern Gas Corridor, despite previously playing only a limited role in Azerbaijan's foreign economic relations. Considering, Azerbaijan is a major player in Greece's neighborhood with visible experience in energy and infrastructure projects in North Macedonia, Albania

²⁹ Farid Shukurlu and Joseph Shumunov, "Azerbaijan's Active Non-Alignment: How Baku Is Pivoting to Greater Power," *Baku Dialogues* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2025), accessed July 17, 2026, <https://bakudialogues.idd.az/articles/azerbajjans-active-non-alignment-09-12-2025>

³⁰ Liza Rozovsky, "Pressured by Azerbaijan, Netanyahu Blocks Vote on Armenian Genocide, Source Says," *Haaretz*, July 19, 2026, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-politics/2026-07-19/ty-article/.premium/pressured-by-azerbaijan-netanyahu-blocks-vote-on-armenian-genocide-source-says/0000019f-7969-d17e-a1ff-ff6d3bef0000>.

³¹ Joseph Epstein, Director, Turan Research Center, interview by Farid Shukurlu, July 19, 2026.

³² Dr. Esmira Jafarova, "Is Azerbaijan a Middle Power?" *Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)*, May 2020, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/Is%20Azerbaijan.pdf>

and Serbia, it is probable that such high-intensity engagement will be apparent in Greece too.³³ The Shusha Declaration formalised a comprehensive strategic alliance between Baku and Ankara, which has since been reinforced through deepening defence cooperation. This partnership was tested when Iran launched attacks against American (NATO) bases in Türkiye and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan.³⁴ In response, both countries reaffirmed their solidarity and declared their readiness to take all necessary measures to safeguard each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This commitment is further reflected in the regular joint military exercises conducted by the armed forces of the two brotherly states. Turkish-made drones and missile systems have been integrated into Azerbaijan's military capabilities, with Azerbaijani fighter aircraft routinely participating in joint exercises alongside their Turkish counterparts. The latest development in this defence partnership is the joint production of the "Sivrisinek" or "Mosquito" (BAYKAR Technology) drone.³⁵ At the same time, Türkiye's growing role in post-Assad Syria has cultivated new opportunities for Azerbaijan to participate in energy projects, reconstruction efforts and broader economic engagement, further extending Baku's strategic influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Azerbaijan-Israel relations have also benefited significantly from Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War. Following the United Arab Emirates' accession to the Abraham Accords, Baku no longer felt compelled to keep its relationship with Jerusalem low profile.³⁶ At the same time, Iran's military exercises along the Azerbaijani border, including drills simulating the crossing of the Aras River, pushed bilateral tensions to a new level and strengthened Azerbaijan's strategic rationale for deepening cooperation with Israel. These developments culminated in the opening of Azerbaijan's embassy in Tel Aviv in 2023, inaugurated by Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov and former Israeli FM Eli Cohen.³⁷ Since the outbreak of the Gaza War, Azerbaijan has consistently affirmed Israel's right to self-defence while simultaneously

³³ Aybaniz Ismayilova, *Azerbaijan's Growing Influence in the Balkans*, Analytical Policy Brief (Baku: Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University, January 30, 2024), accessed July 20, 2026, https://idd.az/media/2024/01/30/idd_policy_brief_-_ismayilova_30_january.pdf?v=1.1.

³⁴ "No: 40, 5 March 2026, Regarding the UAV Attacks Targeting the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, March 5, 2026, accessed July 20, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-40_-azerbaycan-in-nahcivan-ozerk-cumhuriyeti-ni-hedef-alan-ih-saldirilari-hk.en.mfa.

³⁵ Elmira Amiraslanova, *Defense Diversification as Statecraft: Azerbaijan's Defense Industry and the Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy*, Analytical Policy Brief (Baku: Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University, June 23, 2026), accessed July 20, 2026, https://idd.az/media/2026/06/23/idd_policy_paper_elmira_amiraslanova_2.pdf?v=1.1.

³⁶ Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Opening Azerbaijani Embassy in Israel: The Right Way to Strengthen Ties," *INSS Insight*, no. 1665, *Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, November 30, 2022, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/israel-azerbaijan/>.

³⁷ "Azerbaijan Opens Embassy in Tel Aviv," *Caucasus Watch*, March 30, 2023, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/azerbaijan-opens-embassy-in-tel-aviv.html>.

supporting Palestinian civilians through humanitarian assistance, allocating two aid packages worth US\$2 million each.³⁸

The growing momentum of the Azerbaijan-Israel partnership was most clearly proven during Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's 2026 visit to Baku, where both sides agreed to expand cooperation in artificial intelligence, innovation, energy, regional security and economic affairs. During the visit, Sa'ar publicly described Azerbaijan as one of Israel's closest allies, underscoring Israel's commitment to the security and stability of the South Caucasian state.³⁹ Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on artificial intelligence, PM Benjamin Netanyahu renewed his invitation for President Ilham Aliyev to pay an official visit to Jerusalem, which is expected to take place after the conclusion of the Gaza War⁴⁰ Collectively, these developments indicate that Azerbaijan has evolved into a reliable strategic partner and an indispensable bridge linking Europe, the South Caucasus and the Middle East through security cooperation, technological innovation, diplomacy and energy.

³⁸ "Azerbaijan Provides Humanitarian Aid to Palestinian Refugees," *AZERTAC*, July 1, 2020, accessed July 20, 2026, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/azerbaijan_provides_humanitarian_aid_to_palestinian_refugees-1526113.

³⁹ Aybaniz Ismayilova, "Azerbaijan-Israel Relations Represent Middle Power Consolidation," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 23, no. 55, *The Jamestown Foundation*, March 26, 2026, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://jamestown.org/azerbaijan-israel-relations-represent-middle-power-consolidation/>.

⁴⁰ "In the Presence of Prime Minister Netanyahu, Israel and Azerbaijan Sign MOU on Artificial Intelligence," *Prime Minister's Office of Israel*, February 4, 2026, accessed July 20, 2026, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/news-azerbaijan-03022026>.