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Azerbaijan and Russia: Towards a Renewed Alliance, for a New Era

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Abstract

This article examines the recent shifts in Azerbaijan's balancing of relations between Russia and the West. It argues that the Azerbaijani elite have been undergoing a shift from placing more emphasis on its relations with the West, towards an emerging strategic accord with Moscow. There are both micro- and macro-geopolitical developments driving this process. On a micro-level, the Azeri elite has gradually come to distrust the West's intention to and capability of supporting them in their core security and state development aims. From a macro-perspective, shifts in geopolitical alliances around Azerbaijan are acting to attract Baku towards Moscow, and away from Brussels and Washington.

Since Heydar Aliyev, the father of the incumbent president Ilham Aliyev, became the country's president in 1993, Azerbaijan has been known for its staunch pursuit of a so-called "balanced" policy in its relations with the outside world, particularly Russia and the West. Whereas in the past this policy tended to be "balanced" more in favour of the West as far as Azerbaijan's *strategic* interests were concerned, Baku's political disposition has shifted decidedly towards Russia in recent years.

The changing nature of Azerbaijani–Russian relations became obvious to outside observers during the first European Games, held in Baku in June 2015—the first high-profile sporting event hosted by Azerbaijan. Whereas nearly all European leaders openly ignored the event, citing Azerbaijan's poor record on human rights and freedom of the press, Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the opening ceremony. Russia's behaviour during Azerbaijan's counter-offensive against Armenian forces on 2–5 April 2016 was likewise taken by many as clear evidence of the growing Azerbaijan–Russia alliance and its increasingly strategic nature. Russia refused to provide military assistance to Armenia and declined to condemn Azerbaijan's actions, stoking speculations that those actions must have been agreed upon with Moscow in advance. As anti-Russian sentiments in Armenia grew as a result of these developments, Baku's relationship with Moscow intensified still further. Indeed, these relations grew so strong that an Azerbaijani MP, Ali Huseynli, who chairs the Azerbaijani parliamentary committee on legal affairs and state-building and leads the Azerbaijani–Russian inter-parliamentary cooperation group, suggested in August 2018 that Baku could join the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Discussion about Azerbaijan joining the Russia-led military bloc would have been unimaginable even a year earlier.

Some analysts have tended to disregard the emerging Russia–Azerbaijan alliance, deeming it "merely

a temporary marriage of convenience aimed at maximizing both countries' geopolitical influence," or seeing it as deriving solely from a shared model of (authoritarian) governance. Yet relations between these two unlikely partners rest on a far more solid and deeper foundation than might be apparent from a quick glance, and the growing partnership between Azerbaijan and Russia is likely to soon develop into a strategic alliance.

Indeed, Azerbaijan's foreign policy in the initial years of independence was motivated almost exclusively by the fear of Russian revisionism and the quest to liberate the occupied territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenian forces. The so-called "contract of the century" that Azerbaijan signed with an international consortium in September 1994 to develop and produce oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli fields in the Caspian Sea, its aggressive pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration, and the westward orientation of the chosen pipeline routes for its oil and gas have all been derivative of the country's quest to retain independence, restore its territorial integrity, and thus avoid repeating the fate of its first experience of modern statehood in 1918–20, when Azerbaijan ultimately lost its independence to Soviet Russia and some of its territories (part of Zangezur) to Armenia. Consequently, like Armenia and Iran, Russia in the 1990s was excluded from all major regional projects initiated by or around Azerbaijan; any moves Baku made *vis-à-vis* Russia at the time were instrumental in nature, intended to either appease a potentially revisionist northern neighbour or—in an attempt to extract greater concessions from its Western partners (both in Europe and the United States) or counteract their criticism of the country's less-than-democratic mode of governance—demonstrate that Baku did have an alternative geopolitical route to pursue.

Over the past decade, several developments on the micro- and macro-levels have worked to gradually alter

this established regional dynamic and alignment pattern, bringing Azerbaijan back into the Russian fold.

The Micro-Level: Disappointments and the Failure of the “All-Eggs-in-a-Western-Basket” Policy

Russia’s war with Georgia in August 2008, which resulted in Russia’s recognition of the independence of Georgia’s breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, served as a watershed event in the South Caucasus. The West’s inability to counter Moscow’s stance undermined the West’s credibility, jeopardising both its commitment to the security and territorial integrity of states in the region and its capacity to live up to that commitment. The 2008/10 global financial and economic crisis—and the latter’s implications for the Western economy—served to further undermine the West’s discursive power in Baku.

Beyond its overt incapacity in the face of Russian power in the region and the homegrown economic crisis, the West also began to be seen as *unwilling* to address the country’s pressing security problems. Part of this reality was that despite the westward orientation of Baku’s foreign policy, including as expressed in the orientation of its energy pipelines, Azerbaijan failed to secure explicit recognition—either by Washington or by Brussels—that Armenia was occupying part of its territory, an outcome evidenced by the voting record on United Nations General Assembly Resolution 10693 (passed on 14 March 2008), which reaffirmed the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and demanded “the immediate withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories there.” The United States voted against, as did France, while the rest of the EU states chose to abstain. In short, no Western state voted in favour of the resolution. Likewise, in January 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) voted against a resolution on the “escalation of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh and the other occupied territories of Azerbaijan,” based on a report by British former PACE member Robert Walter, which called for “the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces and other irregular armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the other occupied territories of Azerbaijan [and] the establishment of full sovereignty of Azerbaijan in these territories.” Lack of movement in this direction has significantly undermined Azerbaijan’s interest in the West and prompted it to look elsewhere.

Likewise, the West’s refusal in the 2000s to finance the construction of the Baku-sponsored Kars–Akhalkalaki–Tbilisi–Baku (KATB) railway project in what amounted, in the eyes of the Baku elite, to nothing less than an act of solidarity with—and deferral to—Yerevan, called attention to the reality that the West would not always act in Baku’s best interests, including when

Western support was most needed. Finally, the amount of effort the West—both the United States and the European Union—put into fostering a rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia in 2008–09, at the alleged expense of Azerbaijan’s stated interests and in open defiance of the latter’s position, only served to reinforce the perceptual shift in Baku’s interaction with the West.

Beyond its perceived incapacity and lack of willingness to resolve Azerbaijan’s pressing economic and security problems, the West has gradually come to be perceived as a direct threat in its own right. With Western financial and political support increasingly tied to and conditional upon instituting democratic forms of governance and with Western criticism of Azerbaijan’s performance in this respect ever more pointed, Baku has gradually come to view Western engagement as no less of a threat to its cherished sovereignty than Moscow’s perceived desire, in the first half of the 1990s, to reverse the collapse of the Soviet Union. Just as Moscow’s alleged efforts to instrumentalise its energy resources, as well as the so-called “frozen” conflicts in the broader region, have long been perceived as derivative of, and serving, Russia’s neo-imperial ambitions, the West’s use of democratic discourse in relations with its partners in the east and south has come to be regarded among the Baku elite as a control mechanism designed to facilitate Western neo-imperialist penetration—indeed, as “a dangerous geopolitical weapon” set to help the West “realise [its] principal foreign policy objectives” and “formulate [its] agenda in any given region of the world.” The wave of so-called “coloured revolutions” across the post-Soviet space and the Balkans during the early 2000s, particularly the 2003 Rose revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange revolution in Ukraine, and the West’s perceived role in fostering them, only came to add to the perception of the West as a threat. Now seen as a neo-imperial power centre in pursuit of dominance and control, the West has gradually come to be regarded as far more dangerous to regime survival than Russia, particularly in light of the West’s involvement in the recent war dynamics in the Middle East and the toppling of “unwanted” leaders in the region, including in Iraq and Libya.

Consequently, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has gradually intensified his anti-Western discourse. In a March 2015 speech on the occasion of the Novruz holiday, Ilham Aliyev clearly delineated his vision of the present world order. He argued that “the world has entered a new period” in which “global politics [...] is governed not by international law, but by hypocrisy, double standards, discrimination, racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia. These are today’s realities. Therefore, we must be prepared for it and we are prepared,” even as “some foreign circles are waging an overt campaign against Azerbaijan” to the extent of “almost declar[ing] a cold war on [the country].”

In a speech opening the October 2016 ministerial meeting dedicated to the results of socioeconomic development in the first nine months of that year—a speech that some pundits claimed was “a culmination of the comprehensive reformulation of Azerbaijan’s political strategy”—Ilham Aliyev addressed the position of those who advocate for Azerbaijan integrating more deeply into European structures:

Some people say that... we have to integrate into Europe. The question is which Europe are we supposed to integrate into? Today's Europe is in front of our eyes. The top leaders of the European Union acknowledge that Europe is experiencing a deep crisis today. Are we supposed to integrate into a crisis? Are we supposed to integrate into where they say “stop Moslems”? Are we supposed to integrate into the society of those who apply double standards to Moslem refugees? Are we supposed to integrate into the society of those who keep Moslems in cages?

This narrative has been made manifest in the policy realm: Azerbaijan turned down the offer of an association agreement with the EU, which was set to replace the partnership and cooperation agreement concluded in 1999. Azerbaijan’s refusal to join the agreement, which Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine all signed in 2017, sent a clear message about its geopolitical and civilisational choice. Described by some as “an eye-opener,” Baku’s rejection was a sign that Azerbaijan no longer identified with European values and instead sought only the material, technical benefits that “thin” cooperation with the organisation and its individual members could offer. Azerbaijan’s move, in May 2017, to block the Azerbaijani Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), along with a few other Internet TV services, including Germany-based *Meydan TV*, further reinforced Baku’s message about its rapidly evolving geopolitical orientation.

While drifting away from Western power structures, Azerbaijan, like Turkey, has been actively moving towards anti-Western, anti-globalist power constellations in the Global South (including in particular the Moslem world, the BRICS, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) in pursuit of legitimisation and survival. The West’s latest stand-off with Erdogan, in this respect, has served as the final trigger of nascent anti-Westernism among the Azerbaijani ruling elite and has intensified the perceived necessity of a potent balance. Just like a pro-Western disposition in the 1990s, anti-Westernism in the 2010s has offered a shared discursive platform to unite Azerbaijan and Turkey at this new stage of bilateral engagement. Indeed, it has salvaged Azerbaijan’s relations with Tur-

key, which had been at the point of crumbling under the weight of Erdogan’s AKP regime—both its pro-Islamic dispositions and, particularly, following Ankara’s move in 2008–09 to seek a historic rapprochement with Azerbaijan’s archenemy, Armenia, at the expense of the former. While the immediate crisis was resolved thanks to Azerbaijan’s masterful deployment of the energy card and pro-Azerbaijan sentiment in Turkey itself, a longer-term and increasingly sustainable harmonisation of relations occurred as Turkey’s relations with Washington suffered serious erosion and setback in the 2010s.

At this stage, Russia, which has seen its own broad crisis of relations with the West rapidly unfold, has risen as the single most important strategic ally for both Azerbaijan and Turkey. In fact, Turkey’s rapidly shifting geopolitical disposition away from Washington and towards Moscow in the second half of the 2010s served to create an alternative potentiality loop in which Azerbaijan’s interests, too, have become ever more securely aligned with those of Russia.

The Macro-Level: A Renewed Cycle of the Global-Level Struggle between the West and Russia/Turkey

The global aspect of the new stage of Azerbaijani–Russian relations, which can be understood as an extension of the intensified struggle between the West, on one hand, and Russia (and Turkey), on the other, has been by far the most important factor pulling Baku firmly into the Russian orbit, and will likely continue to do so for many years to come. And, whereas the micro-level dynamics described above could only provide a thin platform for cooperation, whereby Azerbaijan would turn towards Russia in *tactical* attempts to address the most immediate security challenges facing the state, the macro-level developments have nurtured conditions leading to the rise of nothing short of a strategic alliance between Baku and Moscow.

Indeed, the international system today is characterised by rising competition between the U.S.-led Western alliance, on one hand, and the rapidly evolving allied force that brings together Russia, Iran, and Turkey, on the other. With anti-Westernism as a shared platform, Russia’s relations with Iran and Turkey have grown at an unprecedented rate over the past few years. Overall, Russia’s influence in Eurasia has been growing to such an extent that some experts have warned that, unless the United States “actively re-engage[s] with the world community,” “Russian [might soon overtake] English as the language of commerce.”

In light of these developments, the latest stage of Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia cannot be understood

in isolation from the dynamics of interaction within the Russia–Turkey–Iran triangle, on one hand, and the position of this “tripartite” alliance in the international struggle for global dominance, on the other. Viewed from this perspective, Azerbaijan’s recent strategic gravitation towards Russia should be seen not only as a response to the West’s increasing democratic pressure on Baku, but also—and most critically—as a natural choice in line with the dictum “my friend’s friend is my friend, and my friend’s enemy is my enemy.”

In Azerbaijan’s geopolitical imagination over the past three decades, Turkey has always stood as the one true friend on which it could consistently rely for support and understanding (A brief standoff around Turkey’s attempted rapprochement with Armenia in 2008–09 only served to upgrade relations between Baku and Ankara to a whole new level of strategic alliance). With Turkey seen as an indisputable friend, Russia—which is rapidly evolving into a strategic partner for Turkey—comes to be viewed as a natural friend. Meanwhile, the West—Turkey’s increasingly explicit antagonist—is left outside the realm of Baku’s affordable partners.

Indeed, it might be in light of this geopolitical choice, which it was compelled to make, that Baku has recently attracted an unprecedented degree of Western criticism and pressure, including as expressed in the fact that Azerbaijan became the first target of the British government’s newly-acquired power to use a so-called Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) to seize the property and assets of foreign officials suspected of corruption and their families, a law that came into effect in early 2018. At the same time, a broader money-laundering operation of around 2.9 billion USD, allegedly handled by the Azerbaijani ruling elite over a two-year period through four shell companies registered in the United Kingdom, was made public under the catchy name of the Azerbaijani Laundromat. That is, Baku’s intensified relations with Russia were not so much a reaction to Western pressure as actually provoked that pressure. Apparently, Azerbaijan’s deepening engagement with Ankara and Moscow is now—rightly—seen by the West as indicative of Baku’s broader strategic choice of membership in a global alliance that the West considers as its main enemy today. Notably, the aforementioned pressure placed on Baku by the UK occurred in parallel with a diplomatic crisis between Russia and the West, and the UK in particular (again), over the poisoning in Britain of a Russian ex-spy: following Westminster’s accusation in March 2018 that Russia was behind the nerve agent attack on former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, around twenty nations, including the United States, moved to expel a total of more than 150 Russian diplomats.

Impediments to Deepening Cooperation

Azerbaijan’s long-unresolved conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions stands as the main impediment to the further deepening of the strategic engagement between Moscow and Baku. While Azerbaijan’s relations with Russia have been increasingly conditioned by the global-level dynamics of East–West confrontation, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a primary determinant of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy preferences over the past three decades, has kept the country anchored in a parochial vision of world affairs, including its relations with the West and Russia. Limited to the confines of its own national statehood, this vision has, for example, prompted Baku to consistently criticise Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine, viewing the conflict exclusively through the lens of its own problem with occupation and thus blinded to any wider factors surrounding the Russian intervention.

The country’s embeddedness in global structures of power and potentiality works to bring Azerbaijan and Russia, along with Turkey and Iran, closer together in a rapidly growing and increasingly secure alliance of convenience. However, as long as the Nagorno-Karabakh problem persists, popular Azeri trust of Russia, too, will be difficult to fully secure and the public perception of Russia will continue to be a net negative, while any criticism of the West will be limited to the latter’s inability or unwillingness to offer an adequate response to Russia’s (potential or actual) aggression in the region.

For nearly three decades, Russia’s policy on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been hostage to its global and regional rivalry with the United States and the Euro-Atlantic alliance more broadly. Indeed, following NATO’s eastward expansion at the expense of Russia’s near abroad, particularly as expressed in former Soviet states joining NATO’s Partnership of Peace in 1994 and the Baltic states’ accession to the Alliance in March 2004, Russia’s insecurity *vis-à-vis* its southern neighbours, including its policies towards the break-away territories in Azerbaijan and Georgia, has been less about Russian imperialism and more about a very logical response to, and resistance against, expressions of U.S. imperialism in the region, including the encirclement strategy Washington has practiced against Moscow since the end of the Cold War. In effect, the “Anaconda” strategy that the US used during the Cold War to cut the Soviet Union off from access to the “warm” seas—hence such Western-sponsored Cold War military organisations as SEATO (Organisation of the Treaty of Southeast Asia), Cento (the Central Treaty), and others—was never ended and persists to this day.

Viewed from this perspective, Western engagement with Ukraine and Georgia is an extension of the

West's centuries-long strategy to cut Russia off from the Black Sea. Not only would this deprive Russia of access to a warm sea and the ocean, but it would also block its access to the Mediterranean and hence its maritime route to the Middle East. Consequently, Russia would lose its superpower or regional power status overnight. That is why it is only in Georgia and Ukraine that "colour" revolutions have occurred, and it is only on these two occasions that Putin has used force to prevent change along the Russian borders (that is, to prevent a Western incursion). This also makes it clear why no such measure has been taken to prevent the "democratic" (read: pro-Western) turn in Armenian politics: although long considered a Russian strategic ally in the region, Armenia—with no access to the Black Sea—is not as valuable to Russian interests as the likes of Georgia and Ukraine.

In this sense, keeping regional conflicts frozen might have been the only affordable way for post-Soviet Russia to prevent further U.S. infiltration into the region. With the path towards Western integration no longer a strategic option for Azerbaijan in view of the shifting alignment patterns in the region, and with Pashinyan's Armenia actively leaning towards the West at the expense of its pro-Russian disposition, maintaining the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh should make little to no sense from a Russian standpoint, and, if anything, will only damage its position, in that it will serve as the only serious impediment to the ever-deepening alliance between Azerbaijan and Russia (as part of the broader alliance with Turkey and Iran), undermining its potential to engage with issues of a far more consequential nature and broader—global—reach.

The first clear sign of this dramatic shift in the Russian position came with the signing, in August 2018, of a new convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea—an issue that, like the regional conflicts, Russia (and Iran) had kept frozen for more than 20 years, in order to retain a level of control over the use of the sea's rich hydrocarbon resources and, *inter alia*, prevent the construction of the trans-Caspian pipeline linking Central Asian gas deposits via Azerbaijan to the European market, in the face of the West's active infiltration into the region's energy market at the expense of Russia's initial dominance in the field. Whereas the Russian effort to prevent such an agreement for two decades of the post-Cold War era was meant to ensure that states in the region did not intensify cooperation with the West at the expense of Russia, the move to sign the agreement, although it effectively only formalised what had long been practiced by the littoral states, was made, as Putin himself expressly stated, to "create conditions for bringing cooperation between [Russia itself

and the regional states] to a qualitatively new level of partnership, for the development of close cooperation on different trajectories." This is a dramatic shift in perspective, indeed. In many ways, the Caspian agreement has been a crucial milestone in the changing dynamic between Russia and Azerbaijan: even if Russia wished to facilitate a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on terms favourable to Azerbaijan, a bilateral alliance between Baku and Moscow could never mature, so long as Azerbaijan's energy export interests tied the country firmly to the Western orbit. Viewed from this perspective, the agreement cleared the way for thinking out a mechanism, whereby the longstanding post-Cold War energy rivalry between Azerbaijan and Russia could transform into a dynamically evolving partnership.

Notably, to keep the West (including NATO) out of the region, the convention still includes a clause that prevents non-Caspian countries from deploying military forces on the Caspian Sea and, although the document allows for the construction of underwater pipelines along the Caspian floor ("according to consent by the parties through whose sector the cable or pipeline should be built"), it makes this possibility conditional on environmental provisions ("ecological requirements and standards"). Russia and Iran have used the latter loophole to oppose the trans-Caspian pipeline in the past and could still use it to oppose such a pipeline in the future, but this would be of no concern to Azerbaijan, which has likewise never been interested in the trans-Caspian pipeline owing to supply competition considerations.

The latest wave of negotiations around Nagorno-Karabakh, including the meetings between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on 5 December 2018, when Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, suggested that the parties had "achieved a mutual understanding for the first time in many years," and between the two country's presidents—Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan—on 22 January 2019 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, gives hope that Russia, just as in the case of the Caspian's legal status, might have given the green light to a resolution of this longstanding conflict, thus clearing a major hurdle in the way of ever-deeper alignment with Baku.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Both Azerbaijan and Russia were very compliant with Western "rules of the game" during the first decade of the post-Soviet era. Both consequently found their interests neglected and, in the case of Russia, their trust abused, leading to disappointment and the decision to dramatically alter their discourse and, ultimately, their policies.

With Russia, the watershed moment came with Putin's 2007 speech at the Munich security conference,

where he spoke openly against a unipolar world as impossible under modern conditions and morally unacceptable. The speech was a natural outgrowth of the many years in which Russia felt that its good will had been consistently abused by the West, which openly neglected Russian interests—a period that included NATO's eastern enlargement; the NATO bombing of Serbia, Russia's key ally in Eastern Europe, in 1999 and the subsequent recognition of Kosovo's independence; and the U.S.-led military invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Putin's New Year Address to the Nation on 31 December 2018 reiterated Russia's image as a lone warrior in a hostile universe:

We face many pressing tasks in the economy, research, technology, healthcare, education and culture... We will succeed, but only if we are able to work together. We never had any help in these endeavours, and never will. For this reason, we must form a team that is united, strong and acts as a single whole.

Ilham Aliyev's aforementioned March 2016 speech, which described "some foreign circles... waging an overt campaign against Azerbaijan [to the extent of] almost declar[ing] a cold war on [the country]," echoed the Russian narrative of a hostile West.

In many ways, Azerbaijan is repeating the fate of the majority of postcolonial Moslem states, whose rule and financial prowess have been secured by Western powers, in exchange for loyalty and obedience. In the Azerbaijani case, Western support also translated into tacit security guarantees against any potential encroachment on the part of Russia or Iran, although the credibility of such guarantees was undermined following the 2008 Russia–Georgia war. The outcome of this engagement with the West has been the homogenisation of governance and elite behaviour across much of the Moslem world, a dynamic that has repeated itself in Azerbaijan: elites grow into and self-identify as key conduits of Western imperialism and influence in their countries and key

agents of Western modernity and associated consumerism (which they also live first-hand in terms of their cultural, social, and acquisition habits), relying on high-end nationalism and spectacle developmentalism as the key ideological basis to legitimate and discursively sustain their authoritarian regimes.

Dependent exclusively on Western legitimation for their political survival and effectively cut off from their own populations, these leaders—who have consistently deprived themselves, and been consciously deprived by the West, of popular legitimation—had nothing to cling to when, having acquired (geo-)political visions of their own, they sought to pursue a policy line independent of Western interests. In the face of a raging West that sought to replace them with a more amenable alternative, they could turn only to elites in other states that were facing a similar situation. With the prospect of repeating the fate of the leaders of Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt looming large, the Azerbaijani regime has gradually come to see the West as a far greater danger than Russia, against which Western support had been sought in the initial stage of independence. Indeed, it is in Russia and Turkey that the Baku elite has found a force capable of withstanding pressure from the West.

Driven by its petty need for survival, then, the Baku regime has drawn itself into the very centre of the global confrontation between the West, on one hand, and a Russia-led alliance, on the other. As international dynamics quickly pull the states of the world into bipolar alliances, with Russia, Turkey, and Iran on one side and the West and Israel on the other, Azerbaijan will soon face the toughest choice of its entire post-independence history. And, while the recent dynamics between Azerbaijan and the West will likely make this choice easier for Baku (at least as far as the West is concerned), the very fact that Azerbaijan will actually have to make a choice will certainly be a new experience, one that comes with a price to pay—and a host of opportunities to reap.

About the Author

Murad Ismayilov is currently completing his PhD in Development Studies at the University of Cambridge. He has previously held positions and fellowships at Baku State University, Aleksanteri Institute, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Michigan State, George Washington University and NATO Studies Centre, among others. His primary interests centre on the sociology and political economy of post-Soviet development, with a focus on Azerbaijan.

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