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AZERBAIJAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE KARABAKH WAR II

The main aim of this article is to study trends in the development of Azerbaijani-Israeli relations within the framework of the national security of the two countries. Relations between Azerbaijan and Israel reflect the high level of friendship and cooperation, which both Azerbaijan and Israel have always set as an example to the whole world. The warm relations that began with the State of Israel from the first year of independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan are of great strategic importance in terms of the independence of Azerbaijan, military development, restoration and defense of its sovereign territories, since today they concern a number of states in the region, including Iran and Armenia. It cannot be denied that the political and military-political support of the State of Israel was one of the factors that had a decisive influence on the victory of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War. After this war, even if relations between the two states continue to expand.

The basic methodology and research methods, as well as a number of research methods aimed at forecasting, are described and explained. The study used a range of data collection methods to obtain and synthesize scientific information. For this purpose, informative data on the topic, official agreements concluded between the two states, statements by government officials, and the results of scientific research were used.

The main scientific novelty of the study lies in the analysis of trends in the development of Azerbaijani-Israeli relations in recent years, the significance of these relations for the security of Azerbaijan against the backdrop of the Second Karabakh War.

Research result. Military-political support for Israel is one of the decisive factors in the Second Karabakh War. Factors such as the entry into service of the Azerbaijani army with the most modern weapons made in Israel, as well as the modernization of weapons received by Azerbaijan from Russia, became one of the decisive factors for Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war. After the war, Baku, despite all the pressure from Iran, acted in the direction of its national interests and did not take a single step back from relations with Israel; on the contrary, it demonstrated interest in developing relations with Tel Aviv by opening its embassy in this country.

Key words: Azerbaijan-Israel relations, friendly and cooperative relations, Second Karabakh War, 44-day war, Azerbaijan-Israel military relations.

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АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНО-ІЗРАЇЛЬСЬКІ ВІДНОСИНИ ДО І ПІСЛЯ ДРУГОЇ КАРАБАХСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

Основною метою цієї статті є вивчення тенденцій розвитку азербайджано-ізраїльських відносин у рамках національної безпеки двох країн. Відносини між Азербайджаном та Ізраїлем відображають високий рівень відносин дружби та співробітництва, які як Азербайджан, так і Ізраїль завжди ставили за приклад усьому світу. Теплі відносини, які розпочалися з Державою Ізраїль з першого року незалежності Азербайджанської Республіки, мають велике стратегічне значення з погляду незалежності Азербайджану, військового розвитку, відновлення та захисту його суверенних територій, оскільки сьогодні вони стосуються низки держав регіону, включаючи Іран та Вірменію. Не можна заперечувати, що політична та військово-політична підтримка держави Ізраїль була одним із факторів, які справили вирішальний вплив на перемогу Азербайджану у Другій Карабахській війні. Після цієї війни, навіть якщо відносини між двома державами триває, ще більше розшириться.

Описано та пояснено основну методологію та методи дослідження, а також низку методів дослідження, спрямованих на прогнозування. У ході дослідження використовувалась низка методів збору даних для отримання та узагальнення наукової інформації. Для цього були використані інформативні дані на тему, офіційні угоди, укладені між двома державами, заяви державних діячів, результати наукових досліджень.

Основна наукова новизна дослідження полягає в аналізі тенденцій розвитку азербайджано-ізраїльських відносин останніми роками, значення цих відносин для безпеки Азербайджану на тлі Другої Карабахської війни.

Результат дослідження. Військово-політична підтримка Ізраїлю є одним із вирішальних факторів Другої Карабахської війни. Такі чинники, як надходження на озброєння азербайджанської армії найсучаснішої зброї виробництва Ізраїлю, а також модернізація озброєння, отриманого Азербайджаном від Росії, стали одними з вирішальних чинників перемоги Азербайджану у 44-денній війні. Після війни Баку, незважаючи на весь тиск Ірану, діяв у напрямі своїх національних інтересів і не зробив жодного кроку назад від відносин із Ізраїлем, навпаки, продемонстрував зацікавленість у розвитку відносин із Тель-Авівом, відкривши свої посольство в цій країні.

Ключові слова: Азербайджано-ізраїльські відносини, дружні та співробітницькі відносини, по-друга Карабахська війна, 44-денна війна, Азербайджансько-ізраїльські військові відносини.

Introduction. After Azerbaijan declared its independence in 1991, it was recognized by Israel after Turkiye. A year later, diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. Thus, Israel established a more official relationship with another muslim country after Turkiye and Egypt. Israel has tried to show Arab societies that Israel can establish diplomatic and even strategic relations with muslim countries. Thus, Israel is no longer an “excluded” country. Moreover, the diplomatic bond established with Azerbaijan also means that Israel has gained an ally as its border neighbor to Iran, its enemy in the region. However, while developing relations with Israel, Azerbaijan tried to keep this situation in the background as much as possible because it did not want to fall into the position of Enver Sadat-era Egypt. For example, Azerbaijan has not opened an embassy in Israel. For many years, Azerbaijan has had contact with Israel through unofficial channels, through the Israeli offices of Azerbaijan Airlines. However, in July 2021, the Azerbaijan Trade and Tourism Representative Office in Tel Aviv went further and opened the Tel Aviv Embassy on March 29, 2023.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the principles on which relations between Israel and Azerbaijan are built and to what extent political relations between the parties have been developed through economic cooperation and military technology transfer. The study also reveals how the two countries' strategic partnership development is perceived and interpreted by Iran and Armenia.

Azerbaijan-Israel Relations before the Karabakh War II. Azerbaijan, which declared its independence on October 18, 1991, was recognized by Israel as the second country after Turkiye on December 25, 1991, and on April 7, 1992, it started diplomatic relations with this country. In 1992, the Azerbaijan Israel Friendship Association organized a meeting in Haifa and openly asked Israel to support them in the fight against Armenia. This non-governmental organization has also organized festivals related to the Jewish faith and actively participated in the process. Azerbaijani bureaucrats started visiting Israel in September 1992, regular flights between the two countries

were provided, and an environment was created for the contact of the citizens of the two countries (Aras, 1998). While the Israeli embassy was opened in Baku in 1993, Azerbaijan did not rush to open a representative office in this country. If we look at the official visits made since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, in 1997 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went to Baku as part of his visit to Asian countries and met with the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev at the international airport. With this meeting, which lasted several hours, Netanyahu became the first Israeli prime minister to visit Azerbaijan. The Israeli Prime Minister's defense of the idea of the Israel-Turkiye-Azerbaijan triad to develop cooperation against Iran with an organization in this meeting led to Iran's reaction. Over the years, Israel and Azerbaijan have developed economic relations, and Azerbaijan's implementation of liberal economic policies has led Israeli companies such as Modcom System, Elta Systems, Bezeq, Maccabee Brewery, Soltam and Tadrian Transport to move to this country (Musaev, 2016). Between 1999 and 2014, the presence of twenty-eight contacts between the two countries, in which diplomatic representatives came together, shows the critical importance both of them attach to these relations. In 2005, Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov went to Israel, and in 2007, Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Strategic Relations Minister Avigdor Lieberman came to Baku, and thus the parties began to express their desire to develop relations (Murinson, 2014: 16). Moreover, in 2007, Israel even organized a ceremony in the Knesset regarding the country's Republic Day celebrations in order to show its value to Azerbaijan. Israel described Azerbaijan as a “key strategic country and economic partner” (Makili-Aliyev, 2013: 8).

While Azerbaijan is trying to maintain its relations with Iran and Russia at a certain level, it also aims to exclude these two countries from their resources in the Caspian Sea and to balance them by developing relations with countries such as Israel and Turkiye (Bhattacharjee, 2017). On the other hand, Israel and Azerbaijan started to cooperate in the field of intelligence in this process. With the support of Israel's

intelligence, Azerbaijan was able to prevent a terrorist attack involving Hezbollah in 2008. The two countries began to act together in the fight against terrorism and border security, and thus it enabled Israel to conduct intelligence activities regarding radical Islamist organizations. In addition to these developments, the visit of Israeli President Shimon Peres to Baku in 2009 paved the way for the strengthening of relations. During this visit, Israel Aerospace Industries announced that a drone factory will be established in Azerbaijan. Therefore, the visit was of critical and historical importance (Musaev, 2016). President Peres during this visit: "Many things unite us. Azerbaijan is a place where Jews can live in tolerance and respect without hatred of Muslims and Christians. That's why Azerbaijan is a special country that I can trust" and showed how important the fact of trust between the parties is (Murinson, 2014: 16). However, all these statements and events disturbed the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and he strongly opposed this cooperation. In 2010, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman visited Baku and continued their visits in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (IRNA, 2021).

Israeli military companies have started training Azerbaijani special forces, building special security systems for Baku airport and modernizing the Azerbaijani army (Avdaliani, 2020).

In May 2012, Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov made an official visit to Israel and met with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Peres, thus, for the first time in history, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan went to Israel. Another critical development in 2012 is the sale of weapons including drones, anti-aircraft defense systems and missiles to Azerbaijan by Israel Aerospace Industries in the amount of 1.6 billion dollars. Thus, Azerbaijan attracted the attention of the countries of the region by making approximately 43% of its arms expenditures with Israel this year. Azerbaijan is a profitable commercial partner for Israel because Israel sells military ammunition, but on the other hand, it receives 40% of the oil it consumes from Azerbaijan (Liphshiz, 2021). Therefore, this exchange is profitable for both countries. Looking at the volume of foreign trade between Azerbaijan and Israel, the import was 61.59 million dollars, and the export was 1.728.21 million dollars (Mazziotti, Sauerborn, Scianna, 2013). These developments have shown that Azerbaijan and Israel have common security concerns. The two countries, which felt surrounded, tried to create a solution to this problem by improving their relations with each other, and Israel thought that thanks to Azerbaijan, it would be able to eliminate the problem of making a long

flight in case of a possible attack on Iran (Mazziotti, Sauerborn, Scianna, 2013: 8).

In September 2014, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon paid an official visit to Azerbaijan, and after this meeting, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz published articles analyzing the extent of the relationship between the two countries. In some of these articles, Azerbaijan is depicted as a "real partner" and Israel's discomfort with the rapprochement between Armenia and Iran is emphasized (Lindenstrauss, 2015).

The date of another critical meeting between the parties belongs to the year 2016. On December 13, Prime Minister Netanyahu paid an official visit to Baku. At the same time this year, Economy Minister Sahin Mustafayev met with Israeli Ambassador to Azerbaijan Dan Stav. During the talks, it was emphasized that 37 Israeli companies offer services in the country, but there is a willingness to develop cooperation between the parties in the non-oil sectors (economy.gov.az/en/article/israil, 2016). The two countries continued to develop their commercial activities in the following years.

The close relations between Israel and Azerbaijan are of close interest not only to Iran, but also to Armenia. While the Karabakh war was going on, the leader of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, Arayik Harutyunyan, made a harsh and exaggerated statement saying: "Israel is responsible for the genocide in Karabakh". Although the Israeli officials said that they do not know how this country evaluates the weapons sold to Azerbaijan, the Karabakh Armenians made serious accusations against Israel (Liphshiz, 2020). Armenia did not find the support it hoped for from Israel. The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Anna Naghdalyan, also made a statement and stated that the choices made by Israel are unacceptable and announced that Ambassador Smbatyan, who has been working in Israel since March 31, 2018, was recalled on October 1, 2020 for consultations (Shalom Newspaper, 2020). On November 3, 2020, the Prime Minister of Armenia Pashinyan made a statement and said that Israel is a party to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and Israeli UAVs are being used in the war against Nagorno-Karabakh. "Israel is arming Azerbaijan, which is trying to commit genocide in Karabakh", he said. Prime Minister Pashinyan even declared that his country did not accept Israel's offer of humanitarian aid.

Israel's support to Azerbaijan during the Karabakh War II. Two elements have an active influence on the development of political relations between Azerbaijan and Israel: Azerbaijani Jews who immigrated to Israel after the end of the Cold War and the Jewish community in Azerbaijan. There are

approximately 45,000 Azerbaijani Jews in Israel, and they reside mainly in the city of Akko (jewishportland.org/marcs-remarks/from-azerbaijan-with-love, 2016). Even though they migrated to Israel, these communities do not deny their Azerbaijani identity. For example, during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020, Azerbaijani Jews who are citizens of Israel made a demonstration in Petah Tikva and commemorated the people of Azerbaijan who lost their lives in the conflict. The slogans used in the demonstrations were also a proof of this community's love for Azerbaijan.

Among the expressions voiced out loud; "Karabakh is ours, it will be ours!" sentence is included. Not only Israel and Azerbaijan, but also the Turkish flag were included in the demonstrations. Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was defended and Armenia's demand to end the occupation was expressed. Considering that there are about one hundred thousand Azerbaijani Jews in many regions of Israel, the importance of them still protecting their identity is clear. Apart from that, the Jews in Azerbaijan took an active part in the conflict in Karabakh by serving in the army. Milih Yevdayev, the Leader of the Religious Community of Baku Mountain Jews, is another important name to be followed at this point. Yevdayev writes works on the Karabakh problem and multiculturalism and has given interviews to various magazines.

The two countries have also cooperated in the field of defense industry in the last ten years, and this situation benefited Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh War that took place in 2020 and lasted for forty-four days. In this war, Azerbaijan used Israeli-made LORA (Long Range Attack) missiles and EXTRA (Extended Range Artillery) missiles. Armenia supplied Russian-made Iskander missiles. In recent years, Azerbaijan allocated its income from oil and natural gas to defense expenditures and thus was able to modernize its army. Israel became the key country that transferred technology to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan also gave place to drones and unmanned aerial vehicles in this war. It was stated that Azerbaijan, which bought the Turkish-made TB2, also uses Israeli-made unmanned aerial vehicles and kamikaze drones, known as Harop, Orbiter and SkyStriker UAVs, which it allegedly bought in June 2020 (Shaikh, 2020). This situation disturbed not only Armenia, but also Iran. The people of Azerbaijan showed their gratitude to the state of Israel by taking the flags of Turkiye as well as Israel in the celebration demonstrations held after the liberation of the region. Azerbaijan's victory in the war caused the international community to compare the military capabilities of this country with a population of approximately 10 million and Armenia with a population of 3 million.

According to the article titled "Arms Transfer to Conflict Zones: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh" published on the website of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Armenia accounted for 4.9% of its military expenditures from GDP in 2020, while this figure corresponds to 5.4% in Azerbaijan. In 2011–2020, the second country to which Azerbaijan supplies weapons is Israel, the third country is Belarus, and the fourth country is Turkiye (Tuna, 2021).

Compared to Armenia, Azerbaijan has paid more attention to the issue of armament in the last ten years. During this period, Israel covered 27% of Azerbaijan's arms imports. Between 2016 and 2020, Azerbaijan made 69% of its arms imports from Israel, because the actual delivery took place in these years. In 2015, Israel provided Azerbaijan with an attack system – HAROP cruise missiles, and these weapons were used in the shortages of 2016 and 2020. Also, Israel provided Azerbaijan with Hermes-900 reconnaissance drone.

It is obvious that these armaments have an effect on Azerbaijan winning the fight in 2020. On the other hand, it was claimed that Israel gave Azerbaijan the Barak-8 missile defense system and thus Azerbaijan shot down an Armenian Iskander missile in 2020 (Wezeman, Kuimova, Smith, 2021). All these developments actually show that Azerbaijan is gaining importance as a potential buyer in the Israeli arms industry. Israel is trying to balance its dependence on oil with the arms industry. Israel was already the eighth largest arms exporter in the world between 2016 and 2020, and the country's arms exports accounted for 3% of global arms sales (economy.gov.az/en/article/azerbaycan-i-srail, 2021). Therefore, in 2020, Azerbaijan-Israel relations progressed under the shadow of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Bilateral Relations After the Karabakh War II.

After the Second Karabakh War, the relations between the two countries continued to develop. On April 30, 2021, the Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel Gabi Eshkanazi via video conference. The topic of the meeting is the economic cooperation between the two countries. It was mentioned that the activities of 90 Israeli companies present in Azerbaijan were successful, and it was mentioned that the joint commission activities of Israel-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and Industry have important projects. The karmic commission established between the two countries held its second meeting. Minister Jabbarov also emphasized that Israel is the main trade partner of Azerbaijan. The two countries have decided to develop cooperation in the fields of energy, agri-

culture, digitalization, food security and investment (economy.gov.az/en/article/azerbaycan-i-srail, 2021). On June 9, 2021, Bakan Jabbarov met with Michael Lotem, Director of the Economic Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Asia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel. Minister Jabbarov touched upon the high-level image of economic cooperation between the parties and thanked Israel for its support in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. The important role played by Israel-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the development of economic relations between the parties was also mentioned in the meetings. George Dick, Israel's Ambassador to Azerbaijan after Dan Stav, also participated in the meeting. Israeli companies are interested in the restoration of the liberated areas of Karabakh, and this topic was also discussed in the talks (economy.gov.az/en/article/azerbaycan-i-srail, 2021).

The most important development on the Israel-Azerbaijan route in 2021 is undoubtedly the opening of Azerbaijan Trade and Tourism Representations in Tel Aviv on July 29. Minister Mikayil Jabbarov personally participated in the opening ceremony of these representations. Even on this occasion, a meeting was organized with the participation of Israeli businessmen. At the same time, Minister Jabbarov made a speech and thanked the Israeli companies that supported the restoration and development of the Nagorno-Karabakh region freed from occupation [19]. During this visit, Minister Jabbarov had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Finance of Israel, Avigdor Lieberman. This meeting with Lieberman, one of the prominent figures of Israel's Azerbaijan lobby, is important because it took place at a time when Israeli companies wanted to increase their investments in Azerbaijan. Other contacts established by Minister Jabbarov were with the following bureaucratic personnel: Israeli Minister of Construction Ze'ev Yelkin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid and Minister of Regional Cooperation Issawi Frej (Tuna, 2021).

The biggest indicator of the continued development of Azerbaijan-Israel relations after the 44-day war is that the Republic of Azerbaijan opened its Embassy in Israel. On March 29, the opening ceremony of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the State of Israel was held with the participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel Eli Cohen. The event was also attended by Israel's Minister of Intelligence Gila Gamliel, head of the Azerbaijani-Israeli interparliamentary relations

working group Anatoliy Rafailov, chairman of the International Relations and Interparliamentary Relations Committee of the Milli Majlis Samad Seyidov, numerous MPs, chairman of the Knesset Security and Foreign Policy Committee Yuli Edelstein, Israel in the Israeli Knesset – Vladimir Beliak, head of the Azerbaijan inter-parliamentary friendship group, members of the Knesset, Yisrael Beytenu party chairman Avigdor Lieberman, members of the Jewish community of Azerbaijan, social and political figures of Israel, former speaker of the Knesset Dalia Itzik, deputy mayor of Jerusalem, etc. (<https://qafqazinfo.az/news/detail>, 2021). This event is a significant event for both countries. Because the relations, which are already at a high level, have risen to the highest level diplomatically. Although Iran tried to use it as a means of pressure on Azerbaijan, such an event is important in terms of showing that Baku will no longer submit to the threats of other states in its foreign relations and protection of its national interests.

Result. Despite the critical support of Israel as well as Turkiye in the Karabakh War that lasted for forty-four days, President Ilham Aliyev put Turkiye in the forefront. However, Israel is a strategic partner for Azerbaijan. As Azerbaijan used Israeli-made military ammunition, Iran began to threaten Azerbaijan and even accused Israel of spying through this country.

Since Armenia saw that Israel could not break the support of Azerbaijan in the last Karabakh War, it abandoned the strategy of normalizing relations with this country and accused Israel of committing genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh. For a while, Iran tried to break this camp by improving relations with Israel in Azerbaijan and Armenia, but they did not succeed.

Israel's military-political support is one of the decisive factors of the Karabakh War II. Factors such as the provision of the most modern weapons produced by Israel to the inventory of the Azerbaijani army, and the modernization of the weapons that Azerbaijan received from Russia, were one of the decisive factors in Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war. The fact that Azerbaijan has a great military power has worried the regional states, especially Iran, and their threat to Azerbaijan has increased. Despite this, Baku has not stepped back from relations with Israel, on the contrary, it has shown that it is even more interested in the development of relations with Tel Aviv by opening its embassy in this country.

Today, Azerbaijan-Israel relations play a big role in restoring its sovereign rights in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

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