

Impacts of Zionist regime-Azerbaijan Relations on Iran's National Security

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Abstract

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, fearing Russia's presence and expansionism, constantly pursued an anti-Russian policy in the region. Along with other worries at home and abroad (like the Karabakh conflict), this concern drove Azerbaijan towards cooperation and alliances with the Zionist regime and the United States. Recently, this relationship has emerged in varied domains, including the military and intelligence. Alternatively, as the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), the southern neighbor of Azerbaijan, enjoys close relations with the state, either geographically or culturally- societally, any move by Azerbaijan could bear destructive consequences for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, this article deals with "the effective factors in the development of Azerbaijan-Israel relations and their consequences for the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security" as a question and seeks to multidimensionally study the roots and consequences of the mentioned theme as to the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security with a realistic approach in the frame of alliance and security balance theory and description.

Keywords: Cooperation, Alliance, Zionist Regime, Azerbaijan and Iran.

Introduction

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some newly independent Caucasian republics attempted to launch bilateral relations with major and powerful states. Azerbaijan, a prominent state in the region, has the greatest Caucasian economy with stabilized energy reserves of 7 billion barrels of petroleum. Given the bitter experience of sovereignty and independence violations in past, Baku considers the West and its allies the best option to meet its economic and security aims. Intermittently, the development of Azerbaijan-Israel relations has been defined as a means to attain Zionist lobby support in the USA, the expansion of ties with Washington, and consequently, the meeting of Baku's weaponry and economic requirements (Bassist, 2022).

On the other hand, the Zionist regime, aiming to hinder IRI's influence in the region, seeks to develop ties with Azerbaijan. As it relates to politics, culture, and economy, Azerbaijan is Iran's sphere of influence. Given the Tehran- Tel Aviv strategic animosity, the Israeli presence and influence in the neighboring countries could threaten Iran's interests and national security; hence, Israel's political, military-intelligence, and economic presence in Azerbaijan poses a considerable threat to Iran's national security in politico-military, economic, and security domains. The article bears significance as the mentioned theme is one of the security afflictions of Iran's strategic environment, and it appropriately estimates the security threats posed by the Zionist regime in Azerbaijan. In line with political, economic, and defensive-military pacts between the two, it delivers the results to the military academies, researchers in security, and those interested in political-security issues. Furthermore, doing this study could help with the revision of the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security, diplomacy, and macro plans, and it could lead to the adoption of appropriate strategies towards Azerbaijan and national security protection. Likewise, this article seeks to delve into the security, military, intelligence, and economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel and the consequences for the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security with the concerned facts. To that end, it exploits Alliance Theory in the frame of realism and the balance of power theory and explains the cooperation between Azerbaijan and the Zionist regime, along with the consequences for Iranian national security.

1. The Concept of Strategic Alliance

International relations theorists have provided many definitions for

the concept of strategic alliance. In one definition, the alliance includes the relations of two or more states based on the alliance agreement for the purpose of joint cooperation and integration of military, political, and economic forces and facing a common threat. This type of inclusion, while determining the military feature, includes non-aggression agreements, defense treaties, unilateral guarantees, and collective security treaties. In another definition, it means the coalition of states and the coordination of their actions to achieve their goals. This group of definitions includes any type of international cooperation of states, including the military alliances, diplomatic alliances, peace and cooperation missions, federations and confederations, and unions. Others, while emphasizing the military nature of the alliance, believe that the alliance inherently deals with a strategic issue, leading to common or conflicting interests. Stephen Walt defines alliances as formal or informal security cooperation arrangements between two or more independent states, and Morgenthau considers alliances a special form of international cooperation with a written and formal agreement between two or more states for a certain period with the aim of advancing their interests; particularly, they arise in line with national security.

George Liska acknowledges the definitions, but places particular emphasis on the establishment of an alliance as a response to the potential threat presented by another state (Liska, 2017). According to Waltz, the alliance includes formal and informal agreements. Although states tend to cooperate, signing an agreement does not suffice, so the presence or absence of a formal agreement often fails to reflect the reality of commitment between the parties (Waltz, 1987: 12-13). According to Schueller, an alliance is a reaction to threats or opportunities and a means to gain profit and prevent loss. Distinguishing the concept of security-friendly and greedy states, Schueller believes that some states act apart from the sphere of security creation and countering threats and cooperate with powerful revisionist states or towards the establishment of a coalition with revisionist governments (Schueller, 2013, p. 16).

Anyway, strategic relations are directly related to the perception of national interests and the prioritization of actors, which is configured as focused on national interests. First off, as long as common security concerns exist, the positive aspect of strategic relations, i.e., seeking cooperation in different forms, is considered the main goal of the relations; however, with the change of priorities, the competition of actors becomes more shaped than

strategic relations, and their interests are affected by this competition. In general, strategic relationships between political units are defined by characteristics such as:

- 1- The existence of strategic interests and goals in common areas;
- 2- Enemies, competitors, or common threats;
- 3- Understanding the international system and the acting rules;
- 4- The political will of leaders;
- 5- Positive historical experiences of joint communication;
- 6- The institutionalization of relations in various fields (Siraj and Bakare, 2022, p. 100).

In the following, by examining some important components in the relations between the Zionist regime and the Republic of Azerbaijan, we will explain their goals and strategies in various fields of cooperation:

2. Zionist Regime's Goals and Strategies in Azerbaijan

The Zionist regime's strategy in the development of ties with Azerbaijan could be defined within the framework of macro-policies adopted by the regime. Simplistically speaking, the policy could be found in the words of Ben Guryon, the first Israeli prime minister. He held that the foreign policy adopted by the Zionist regime relies on the far non-Arab states; as Israel is surrounded by the antagonistic Arab states, it could not develop ties with neighbors. Consequently, to get rid of the siege in the 1950s, Israel established an alliance with non-Arab Muslim states in the region, such as Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia, and it developed ties with them to make up a non-Arab Middle East. Following this, the goals of Israel were realized, and solidarity and coherence disappeared between the Muslim states in the region; however, this alliance came to failure in 1979 with the rise of the Islamic revolution in Iran. It was in the frame of this alliance that the regime of Shah supplied oil to Israel; however, it was stopped in the post-Soviet disintegration, and Israel turned to common-wealth states, particularly Azerbaijan, a suitable substitute for Iran; therefore, Israel expanded her clout in the region and exploited varied means to reach her aims. Likewise, given Azerbaijan's proximity to Iran, Israel took a strategic look at her expansion of clout in the region with a meticulous clandestine plan. As regards Azerbaijan's geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic status, this country is multifacetedly of considerable importance for Israel in the following ways:

- 1- Exploiting the Azerbaijani Jewish community as a society through which it could penetrate political, economic, and cultural entities with the Israeli efforts in the past three years,

the Zionist regime managed to organize the Azeri Jewish immigrating to Israel in the Israel-Azerbaijan International Association and operationally provide for a series of acts and plans in Azerbaijan. According to the census, more than two-thirds of immigrants to Israel were from the Soviet satellite states, of whom a considerable number were from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. In effect, Israel launched an alliance and formal political relations with Azerbaijan as the first state in the region to play an active role in the region;

- 2- Magnifying Iran and Islamism as a threat, exploiting bilateral and multilateral threats, and resorting to politico-propaganda tactics;
- 3- Exercising cultural clout in Shiite Azerbaijan, operating cultural tools and methods, including the Israeli Film Festival in Baku as well as book fairs for children and adults on various occasions (Ismailzade, 2020);
- 4- Developing political clout in Caucasian states; exploiting domestic disputes in the former republics of the Soviet Union, such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and Georgian home disputes with Abkhazian secessionists, etc.;
- 5- Employing political and economic experts of the societies by giving direct or indirect financial aid to some Azerbaijani parties and journalists. These gazettes are tasked with affecting and fascinating Azerbaijani public opinion and officials (Ranjbar, 2013, p. 19).
- 6- Utilizing US agents and those in other friendly countries to strengthen its position in Azerbaijan The regime, besides the tools that it exploits directly, uses US capabilities and facilities.
- 7- Deployment in Iran's north borders is a paramount goal pursued by this regime in her relations with Azerbaijan. (Jalalpoor, 2019, p. 10)
- 8- Despite the rise of international pressure and the effort to ramp up US pressures on Iran for nuclear issues, Tel Aviv seeks to establish clandestine and stable relations with some countries that rest outside of US interests, i.e., the Israeli relation is not only restricted to Azerbaijan but also includes other countries in which US interests require that they not be disclosed (Mammadov, 2022, p. 515)

3. Geopolitical Balance of the Zionist Regime's Foreign Policy with Azerbaijan

The foreign policy of the Zionist regime is constantly affected by

her geopolitical status, conflict with Arabs, and the problem of her existence and legitimacy being recognized by Muslim and Arab states. Israel is a small regime with a population of 7 million, of whom 1.5 million are Muslims (Niakouiee and Karimipour, 2018, p. 19). Since its onset, it has posed many problems for neighbors. Not being recognized by neighbors, along with numerous wars with them, is a clear sign of serious conflict between them. In such conditions, to politico-diplomatic isolation has been a model pursued by its leaders since the onset; accordingly, the regional coalition has been on the agenda of Israeli politicians. The periphery doctrine underpins the foreign policy and security that have been planned by Bin Guryon and other Israeli officials to get out of isolation and siege by Arab states (Jalalpoor, 2019, p. 10).

Based on this doctrine, the Zionist regime should establish strong friendly relations at high echelons with non-Arab states that are geographically close to it in such a way as to create a balance of power against Arab states. This plan first encompassed states like Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia. The development of the periphery doctrine was structured in a manner that relied on strong connections with non-Arab Muslim states in West Asia. In pre-revolution, Iran and Turkey were at the same time contained in this policy. However, the rise of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the triumph of the Islamists in Turkey (i.e., the Justice and Development Party), severely challenged peripheral alliance doctrine. In such conditions, from the view of Tel Aviv, Ankara is a non-friend state of the best status, and Tehran is a terrible threat (Faghani, 1999, p. 41). Consequently, Israel searched for new allies to progress the Alliance of the Periphery Doctrine. Due to related conditions and problems, Azerbaijan is one of the actors that could be considered by the Zionist regime officials in this respect. At the same time, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Israel, having understood the conditions of Azerbaijan, sought to establish the Alliance of the Periphery Doctrine with the country (Tavasoli Roknabadi, 2010, p. 42). Since independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has adopted a foreign policy based on geopolitical balance. The geopolitical balance is to establish a balance between antagonistic political and geographic powers. This policy aims at four essential goals, including: taking back Nagorno Karabakh through diplomacy, and military balance; not provoking Russia; adopting good neighboring policies with neighbors (except Armenia); and creepy convergence with the West, particularly Turkey and Israel, in the past two decades. This policy has well proven her not-

provoking Russia strategy. Baku considers Russian sensitivity, and it has adopted a peaceful, cautious position in this respect and prefers not to act clumsily like Georgia until the time of annexation to the West. This diplomacy has impeded Russia from adopting any invasive strategy towards Azerbaijan. For this reason, Baku took a silence position during the limited Georgia-Russia war, as no event had happened (Ismailzade, 2020). In an interview with the Financial Times, Azerbaijani foreign minister stated, “We seek to have amicable relations with all to meet our national interests”. This strategy requires the distinction of subjects with respect to the concerned parties, which means keeping relations while having disputes. For example, Baku emphasizes relations with Iran, but it severely treats the members of the Azerbaijan Islamic Party and Taleshies for espionage in favor of Iran. After the fall of the Soviet Union and given the events in the region, Azerbaijan took proximity to the West as a long-term strategy; intermittently, Israel could be an expediting variable. One of the aims of this strategy is to bring hope to the West's aid in taking back Nagoro Karabakh from Armenia with diplomacy. Azerbaijan is one of the six former Soviet republics that has signed a cooperative agreement with the West, under which it has committed politico-economic reforms. The European Union has recognized Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the south neighbor of Azerbaijan- i.e., Iran- should not be taken for granted. The two countries have a common border of 618 km. along with a common border in the Caspian Sea and other cultural commonalties. Azerbaijan is the 2nd Shiite country after Iran (in respect of population), and like Iran, it is an ECO member. Baku therefore may not overlook Iran given her geopolitical requirements, as Iran has to take Azerbaijan into consideration in her estimates. Nonetheless, Baku pursues relations with Iran in respect of the West's sensitivities, one of which is good ties with the Zionist regime (Ismailzade, 2020). To meet its geopolitical requirements and restrictions, Azerbaijan took the following:

- 1- Bilateral cooperation with numerous countries;
- 2- Cooperation with numerous international organizations, including those concerned with Islam, the West, and the East;
- 3- Close cooperation with Turkey (Turkey is the major strategic partner of Baku in that they symbolize a nation in the form of two governments. The clear example is Turkey's military contribution to Baku and blocking common borders with Armenia in the Karabakh War).

Accordingly, Azerbaijan has adopted a pragmatic foreign policy

in tandem with the global powers and its national interests (Niakouiee & Karimipour, 2018, p. 37).

4. Azerbaijan's Goals in the Development of Ties With the Zionist Regime

Azerbaijan's strategy in close relation to the Zionist regime refers to her dire needs. Since independence, this country has been suffering from a political-economic weakness it seeks to get rid of. Azeri officials pursue the following goals in close relation to Israel:

- 1- Forging ties with the United States and other European countries through Israel;
- 2- Exploiting Israel's investment in Azerbaijan, restoring the war ruins, and fighting poverty and unemployment (Ebrahimi & Osuli, 2023, p. 27).
- 3- Exercising the Jewish lobby against Armenia in the US Congress to impede Act 907, approved in April 1992 under Armenian pressure on Azerbaijan in the US Congress, for the violation of human rights in war with Armenia;
- 4- Countering Islamism and terrorism;
- 5- Applying modern technology, restoring industries, and training techno-medical staff;
- 6- The Zionist regime's participation in securing Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and probably Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines;
- 7- Strengthening Azerbaijan's military with the Zionist regime's capabilities. This regime is the second buyer of Azerbaijan's petroleum; instead, it exports military equipment to Azerbaijan. (Jalalpoor, 2019, p. 10)

4. Israel-Azerbaijan Cooperation: Dimensions and Facts

4-1. Military Cooperation

Since independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has been occasionally embroiled in conflict with Armenia. In the conflicts, Armenia managed to occupy the mountainous Karabakh and its seven surrounding areas, along with the recognition of international societies. Admittedly, the most serious challenge for Baku in terms of security is the Armenian aggression on Azerbaijan. Indeed, the occupation of 16% of its territory by Armenian forces, resulting from this act of aggression, continues to afflict and impact Azerbaijan to this day. Likewise, 586,000 of Azeris settling in Azerbaijan wandered around due to the aggression. While the Security Council has condemned the Karabakh occupation with four

resolutions, including 822, 538, 874, and 884, and has called for the Armenian evacuation from the occupied lands, the Minsk group, composed of Russia, France, and the USA, has so far taken no measure for the liberation of the occupied lands (Ahmadi & Piran, 2017: 62). Conditionally, to establish balance in front of Russia's political pressures on the one hand and the liberation of the occupied lands from Armenia on the other hand, Azerbaijan has adopted a stronger alliance with Turkey, the West, and its ally, Israel (Omidi & Kheiri, 2018, p. 15). Having ties with Israel is an important issue for Baku because this regime, together with Turkey, supports Azerbaijan over the mountainous Karabakh conflict. From the viewpoint of Azerbaijani officials, cooperation with Israel is subject to multiple considerations as follows: 1- Advancing intelligence cooperation with Israel and obtaining modern military technology; 2- modernizing Azerbaijan's military; 3- exercising the Jewish and Zionist lobby in the USA to fight the Armenian one that acts against Azerbaijan. During a trip to the USA in 1997, Heydar Aliyev called for a visit to Jewish organizations; 4- exercising the Zionist and Jewish lobby to develop relations with the USA and the West and obtaining further support from the United States. In effect, training, and modernizing Azerbaijan's army is a paramount part of military-security cooperation between Baku and Tel Aviv. Shortly after the Azerbaijan-Armenia war, Israel embroiled the military training of Azerbaijani forces. They gradually modernized the Azerbaijani army with military equipment such as modern tanks and weapons of infantry. In 1992-1994, which is reminiscent of the Armenia-Azerbaijan war, Israel secured military support for Azerbaijan with Stinger missiles and other weapons.

In the war, the Jewish population of Azerbaijan fought alongside the Shiite Azeris. In 1997, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, took an informal trip to Azerbaijan, in which he did some negotiations with Heydar Aliev on mutual relations and the threats posed by Iran. Following, the military relations between the two entered a new stage in that some experts deemed it the launch of an alliance between the two states. After the death of Heydar Aliyev, the policy was pursued by Ilham Aliyev. In 2009, Shimon Peres, the new Israeli prime minister, arrived in Baku, and in a visit with Ilham Aliyev, the parties emphasized the development of ties in the political, economic, and security spheres. In February 2012, a contract valued at \$1.6 billion was signed as part of a military cooperation agreement between Baku and Tel Aviv in which

Azerbaijan received modern weaponry from Tel Aviv. Based on the contract, the Zionist military industries delivered modern anti-tank, air, and air-defense systems and anti-infantry equipment to Azerbaijan's army (Omidi & Kheiri, 2018: 29). Likewise, Israel helps Azerbaijan in the production of air drones. In 2012, the weaponry trade between the two was estimated at \$4 billion. Israel also plays a dramatic role in equipping Azerbaijan's navy. The sale of 12 warships to protect Azerbaijani shores in the Caspian Sea in 2014 was a significant step in the Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation in the marine domain. In 2016, the Israeli papers reported on the delivery of a series of air drones to Baku by Tel Aviv that played a key part in the April 2014 battle against Armenia and the success of Azerbaijani forces, which led to Armenian protests in Tel Aviv. By the same token, Baku recognized herself as the second-largest market for Israeli military products.

The Second Armenia-Azerbaijan War, which took place over 44 days in fall 2020, shed light on the actual military alignments involving the states of the South Caucasus region. Azerbaijan's military proficiency during the war revealed the results of the long-term strategic cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan and, indeed, the strategic nature of defense cooperation between the Two actors. The cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan in the military sphere extends beyond arms sales. Rather, Israeli security and military cooperation have played a significant role in the building of Azerbaijan's military capabilities and the establishment in Azerbaijan of a home-grown defense industry. Israeli specialists have also engaged in the training of Azerbaijani military experts on the operation of various armaments, the development of organizational methods, and the formulation of military doctrine. In the 2020 war, Azerbaijan demonstrated an innovative use of Israeli arms and the integration of Turkish and Israeli Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), as well as a novel use of UAVs, which included carrying out multiple tasks and their integration with other armaments on the battlefield (Shaffer, 2022).

In terms of military cooperation, Israel is ranked second among the states supplying military equipment to the Republic of Azerbaijan, with a share of about 27%. Of course, about 69% of this 27% share has been created since 2016. The point worth noting in relation to the motivations for buying this country from Israel was the arms race and balance orientation against Armenia, not the expansionist goals against Iran. For example, when Russia provided Iskander missiles with a range of more than 300 km to Armenia in

2016, the Republic of Azerbaijan bought Laura missiles with a range of 430 km from Israel in 2018 in an arms race and to balance against Armenia (SIPRI, 2022). Therefore, there is a direct relationship and positive dependence between the increase in confrontation, however incomplete, and peace in the region and the tendency of the Republic of Azerbaijan towards Israel to provide strategic weapons for balance.

4-2. Intelligence-Security Cooperation

Intelligence-security cooperation is of critical significance in Azerbaijan-Israel relations. In October 2001, a visit was made between Heydar Aliyev and the then Zionist ambassador to Azerbaijan, in which the parties emphasized their same position on terrorist groups; they also discussed intelligence analysis, satellite information, and training intelligence-security services as the bases of cooperation between the parties (Asadi Kia, 2013, p. 72). One of Israel's priorities in security cooperation with Azerbaijan is to fight against Iran's intelligence network in the newly independent Caucasian states.

In 2007, Azerbaijani officials claimed the arrest of 15 people, accused of espionage over Israel and the West's activities against Iran (Islami, 2010, p. 31). In contrast, Iran announced, "Azerbaijan has harbored Israel's agents and spies in her territory, the ones who crossed Iran's border and assassinated the nuclear scientists" (Motafaker, 2012: 26).

The main goal of Israel's military-intelligence cooperation with Baku is to observe and, lastly, blast Iran's nuclear and missile programs. After the rise of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, both governments cut off and looked at each other as enemies; accordingly, relations between the two were exacerbated over Iran's nuclear and missile program (Ismailzade, 2020). The former Israeli president believed that Israel was not threatened by any country except Iran. He announced Iran as the biggest threat to Israel's existence and security. Consequentially, Israel strongly followed the operation to destroy or at least stop Iran's nuclear and missile program, which was formerly conducted over Iraq and Syria. Undoubtedly, Iran essentially differs from the mentioned countries in respect of its response to Israel's measures and distance. Iran's nuclear facility is far from Israel, and this encourages Israel to adopt the periphery doctrine.

Information sources warn of electronic eavesdrop stations of the Zionist regime along the shores of the Caspian Sea and Iran's

borders. Indeed, the Israeli company *Baxel* administers the cellphone operator, which is a vital communication system in Azerbaijan. This control by Israel enables the regime to carry out its espionage activities in Azerbaijan effectively (Omidi & Kheiri, 2018, p. 53). In 2021, the US magazine *Foreign Policy* reported on Azerbaijan's permit to Israel for access to its airfields. This claim, if right, is an essential step in terms of the likely attack by Israel on the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear facilities. However, both Azeri and Israeli officials have denied this matter. Therefore, Israel will likely use the bases in Azerbaijan to attack Iranian nuclear facility if the conflict with Iran is exacerbated. (Ebrahimi & Osuli, 2023, p. 27) Nonetheless, there is no substantiated evidence that Azerbaijan has given Israel such a permit.

4-3. Economic Cooperation

The level of Azerbaijan-Israel cooperation is considerable. The Baku-Tel Aviv trade in 2015 was valued at \$5 billion, which was more than the one between France and Israel (Omidi & Kheiri, 2018, p. 35). Azerbaijan's dire need for modern technology, economic progress, and foreign investment, as well as the lack of facilities in the Caucasian region, has convinced the Azerbaijani officials to cultivate relations with Israel and enhance their economy. The huge reserves of energy in Azerbaijan's shores, which are about 7 billion crude oil barrels and 35 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, have turned the country into a considerable actor in the market for energy. (Ebrahimi & Osuli, 2023, p. 27) The Zionist regime has made many diplomatic efforts for investment in Azerbaijan's oil and gas fields, where the lion share of the Tel Aviv-Baku trade belongs to energy. After Italy, Australia is the second importer of oil from Azerbaijan in such a way that it imported 40% of its oil from Baku in 2015. In 1997, the Israeli prime minister described the supply of oil through Azerbaijan as in line with the interests of Israel. In such conditions, Zionist companies play an active part in Azerbaijan's energy industry. For example, the Madek Company, which supplies modern technology in the oil and gas industries, possesses active branches in Azerbaijan. Having a 40% share in the oil and gas sector, it exports 90% of Azerbaijan's exports are composed of gas and oil. Ideological animosity with Israel and her uncertainty of energy supply by Persian Gulf states have called the attention of Israeli intelligence officials to the Caspian Sea oil and gas reserves for investment and energy

import in the long term, and this inclination toward economic relations in the long term is one of the reasons behind the regime's strategic alliance with Azerbaijan (Omidi & Kheiri, 2022, p. 38).

5. Azerbaijan-Israel Relations and Consequences for Iran's National Security

Azerbaijan-Israel relationship has negatively affected the Baku-Tehran relationship. However, if, under the theory of Barry Buzan, security and threat are classified into five spheres, including the military, policy, economy, society, and environment, the threats derived from Baku-Tel Aviv ties will affect national security in two military and political sectors. This regime seeks to enhance her position in front of Iran using modern radar systems, and eavesdrop stations near Iran's borders, and espionage, prepare herself for a strike on Iran, and ramp up Iran's vulnerability (Ahmadi & Piran, 2017: 62). For this reason, Iranian officials have many times expressed their concern over Israel-Azerbaijan relations and have accused Baku of cooperation with Israeli spies and terrorists. In Iran's media, many debates have been discussed over Israel's espionage against Iran through Azerbaijan. In September 2014, Iran targeted the Israeli air drone over Natanz, announcing the origin to be Nakhichevan (Kazemi, 2018, p. 76).

In 2018, *Foreign Policy* reported on Baku's permit to the Zionist regime to use Azerbaijan's airfields for bombing Iran in case of embroilment between Tehran and Tel Aviv; however, the Azerbaijani officials denied the claim. In the view of the Zionist officials, the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program is not only considered a danger by the regime but also the whole of West Asia. Thus, before the measures by the Security Council, all types of methods should have been used to blast or stop the program because Iran is the first and foremost enemy of Israel. Israel's national security strategy is based on impeding West Asian states from becoming nuclear. Therefore, Israel deems Iran the first and foremost threat against her national security and existence; she fears nuclear Iran, and she has even warned that if there is no measure taken by the Security Council to prevent Iran from being nuclear, she will strike Iran's nuclear facilities on her own (Ismailzade, 2020). Moreover, Tel Aviv's military-security presence in Azerbaijan, given her strategic animosity towards Iran, could enter military space into exacerbation in the region, which, while creating a political-security divergence between Azerbaijan and Iran, poses a serious challenge for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On the other hand, Israel may provide for NATO and the USA's presence in the south Caucasus (Niakouiee and Karimipour, 2018, p. 41). All these issues pose a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In Israeli national security, economic clout precedes political clout. Shimon Peres' statements on Tel Aviv's power being based on science and technology and not the army indicate the significance of the economy in the view of Israeli officials; hence, the regime pursues an increase in its economic power while weakening the economies of other states, particularly that of Iran. Military balance requires a strong economy. Tel Aviv's widespread lobbying to impose further sanctions by the West on Iran is substantial evidence for this claim. In such a condition, Israel's prime strategy in the development of economic-diplomatic ties with Central Asia and the Caucasus is to hinder Iran's clout and participation in economic projects, particularly those concerned with oil and gas. Tel Aviv-Baku political-economic cooperation weakens the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Azerbaijan. Israel's economic presence in various sectors of Azerbaijan's economy, while providing for other cooperation, severely reduces cooperation with Iran on water, leads to Iran's economic disadvantage, and reduces Iran's political clout in the region (Asadi Kia, 2013: 41). On the other hand, securing the Zionist regime's energy could strengthen her security and reduce her vulnerability in front of enemies like Iran. (Ebrahimi & Osuli, 2023, p. 27)

Another goal of this regime in Azerbaijan is to fight Iran's influence and hinder a regional order in favor of Iran in the Caucasus. To that end, Israel constantly introduces the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat to the national security and domestic stability of the regional states and propagates the danger of Islamic fundamentalism's development. Iranophobia is the other goal pursued by Israel (Ranjbar, 2013, p. 59). Statements like "Azerbaijani-Israeli interest in each other is rooted in their fear of Iran", and "their existence is threatened by Iran", are examples of Israel's attempt at Iranophobia. Israel propagates that Iran supports terrorism and Islamist movements in the world; hence, Iran's influence has to be hindered in any way. The establishment of varied cultural centers in Azerbaijan by the Zionist regime for the Jews and the development of cultural ties with countries in the region are examples of Israel's preventive measures against Iran. Israel's activity in Azerbaijan's cultural sector through the Jewish community and influence in the media and press should be taken into consideration; in effect, the Jews are hugely active in

Azerbaijan's cultural centers (Kazemi, 2018, p. 32). This position provides for the propagation of Iranophobia in the region, particularly in Azerbaijan. Consequently, when the West and its regional allies, such as Israel, seek to accuse Iran of supporting Islamic fundamentalism and other terrorist groups and then create a negative mindset in relation to Iran among experts and public opinion in the Caucasus and particularly in Azerbaijan, the issue should not be overlooked.

Another scenario that is discussed in terms of Israel's development of ties with Azerbaijan and its consequences for the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security is Israel's probable attack on Iran from Azerbaijan. In research by Sam Gardiner, the retired Swedish air force colonel, for a think-tank of the Defense Ministry, the feasible scenarios were analyzed. Gardiner believes that with the permit given by Azerbaijan, the fuel problem for Israeli fighters is eliminated. If the fighters take off from Azerbaijan, they could take much less fuel and instead be loaded with more missiles, which increases the success of a strike. Conversely, as Azerbaijan knows that Iran is her neighbor with long frontiers and economic dependencies, as far as security, she has to be careful. Given Iran's foreign policy towards Israel, and as regards Iran-Azerbaijan divergence in home and foreign policy as well as Iran's factual rows with the West and particularly the USA and many Muslim states in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, in practice, an unwritten contract between the states and Iran has been made in the software and hardware domains. Occasionally, Azerbaijan, concerned about the spread of political Islam and Iran's potential influence, may collaborate with Israel to counter Iran, based on shared objectives. This cooperation is particularly notable as both countries are aware of the support they receive from the USA.. Accordingly, Israel will apply all her means and equipment in the world, in the region, and in the countries neighboring Iran to fight against the clout of Iran; however, how far Azerbaijan cooperates with this regime remains a question.

Conclusion

The Soviet disintegration provided a good opportunity for the Zionist regime to exploit the security vacuum in the region and deploy her forces near Iran's borders. Azerbaijan is a particular target for Israel. Due to the shape of the Iran-Azerbaijan border, underdevelopment, and demographic features, the Zionist regime is encouraged more for sabotage and espionage measures as well as

for anti-government moves in Iran. The West and the USA's support of Israel in the Caucasus and particularly in Azerbaijan is for the control of Russia and access to energy reserves in the Caspian Sea, as well as for pressure on Iran. This issue has caused Iran to be confronted with a coalition of states across her northern borders, the consequences of which raise the costs for Iran in politics, security, military, and economy; on the other hand, it affects Iran's relations with other states in the region and challenges Iran's access to a collective security order in the presence of regional actors. Nonetheless, Iran could exploit the existing potentials in the region, including historical, cultural, and religious commonalities, and reinforce public diplomacy to finally turn threat into opportunity; meanwhile, the increase of economic, political, and cultural exchanges and further attempts to deliver practical solutions to settle regional disputes, particularly those in Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia, will encourage regional convergence and bring about success for the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security and interests.

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