

Strategic Posture of Azerbaijan in the Fracturing World

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The military parade, held on 8 November 2025 in Baku on the fifth anniversary of Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 War of Liberation of Karabakh, was a vivid manifestation of the consolidation of national power. Not only did the event showcase impressive defense technological capabilities on and over the parade ground, but it also strengthened Azerbaijan's strategic alignment, given the presence of guest leaders from influential foreign countries.

Armenia's full-scale military invasion of Azerbaijan that began in the late 1980s and the subsequent occupation of a significant share of national territory overshadowed the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, projecting insecurity, hindering domestic development, and consuming efforts, treasure, and blood. Certainly, the liberation of the occupied territories emerged as the ultimate national goal and remained so for nearly three decades. Eventually, in 2020-2023, Azerbaijan accomplished this mission through the application of all tools of national power (military, diplomatic, and economic).

However, the accomplishment of that paramount mission does not mean that the state can rest on its laurels. The system of threats, risks, and challenges to national security evolves continuously and rapidly in all parts of its spectrum, ranging from geopolitics to technology. The global system has entered a profound and turbulent transformation. The featured changes include (but are not limited to) the relative decline of traditional powers and the rise of new ones, shifts in international alignments, multipolarization, mounting strategic competition, hastening alliance building, durable conflicts, erosion of international law, and the growing impact of novel technologies. These long-term trends will shape security dynamics worldwide in this and the next decade, at minimum.

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As the existing global order fractures and generates greater chaos and risk, Azerbaijan must adapt its strategic behavior to the emergent post-“rules-based liberal international order” toward an era of “[strategic transactionalism](#)” and the return of the utility of force. Therefore, this IDD Analytical Policy Memo endeavors to frame the strategic posture of Azerbaijan in the context of the evolving global and regional security environment and assess its potential future trajectories.

Multi-Regional Locus and the Effect of “Two Windows”

To understand Azerbaijan’s strategic posture, it is necessary to assess its regional positioning. Unlike many other states, this one maintains a unique polygonal metric. Placed in the pivotal location of core Eurasia, Azerbaijan fits at once into several partially overlapping geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural domains, as follows:

- Geopolitically: the South Caucasus and Greater Caucasus; the Caspian Sea region (a.k.a. Caspian-Central Asian region) and Greater Central Asia; the Wider Black Sea region; and the Greater Middle East.
- Geoeconomically: the Silk Road Region.
- Geoculturally: the Turkic world and the Muslim world.

In addition, Azerbaijan fits the political construct of the Global South and the steadily fading into history, yet enduring, virtual realm of the post-Soviet space.

All of the aforementioned domains may differ in nature and be disconnected geographically. However, their inherent dynamics influence Azerbaijan, directly or indirectly, through a set of shared security, political, economic, and cultural denominators.

Such a sensitive, multilayered disposition at the conjunction of several geopolitical and geocultural platforms objectively makes Azerbaijan an imperative cross-regional actor and concurrently opens two “windows”—one of opportunity and one of vulnerability. Its pivotal location in core Eurasia, at the fulcrum of connectivity routes and projects, offers lucrative economic and developmental opportunities. At the same time, it projects persistent challenges of different sorts and scales. It is worth highlighting four major aspects in this regard.

First, at the current stage and at least in the midterm perspective, the security environment in the extended outer perimeter of Azerbaijan deteriorates due to the enduring confrontations of two major neighboring powers—Russia and Iran—with extra-regional powers (Ukraine and the West in the former case, and Israel and the U.S. in the latter one). The resulting trends are the militarization of the contiguous regions and a “migration” of hostilities to very close proximity to Azerbaijan’s immediate edge, such as the Caspian Sea. Additionally, these conflicts are producing negative domestic impacts on the aforementioned neighbors, which, in turn, are making them both economically fragile and politically unstable.

Second, the resurgent trend of alliance-building also contributes to militarization and polarization in the regions contiguous to Azerbaijan. Worth watching in this regard is the robust Moscow-Tehran-Pyongyang strategic triangle and the strengthening of strategic cooperation between Armenia, India, France, Greece, and some other states. These *ad hoc* constructs have not been formalized so far, although they have already been operationalized and made effective.

Third, although the [peace process](#) between Baku and Yerevan is underway towards its definite point, Azerbaijan must stay vigilant and steady in order to prevent Armenia's potential relapse into revisionism due to particularities of its domestic dynamic.

Fourth, the impact of radical ideologies derived from distorted and politicized interpretations of Islam remains a persistent challenge that is able to transcend geographic spans and national borders via the "domino effect" produced by information technologies. Therefore, it is essential for Baku to heighten its monitoring of the potential resurgence of offshoots of the mutated transnational terrorist-extremist networks (the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Russian North Caucasus.

All of the aforementioned risk-and-threat facets are present in conditions marked by the lack of a clear, overarching security architecture in the regions surrounding Azerbaijan and the emerging power vacuum in some parts of those areas.

Constructing Robust International Alignments

After regaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan sought mutually reinforcing interactions with willing foreign allies and partners that promised strategic advantages in achieving its national goals and objectives, related foremost to the liberation of its occupied lands. At the current stage, this mission of constructing partnerships remains relevant, providing the evolving and challenging security dynamic described in the previous section.

Azerbaijan's objectives related to its international alignments should cover the following functional areas: *deterring* (military and hybrid security threats, including those from the revisionist states); *counterbalancing* (alternative politico-military groupings); *protecting* (functionality of the shared geoeconomic megaprojects); and *containing* (proliferation of extremist ideologies and actors) in the country's immediate and extended neighborhoods.

In this regard, the most promising avenue for advancement is the maturing cooperation within the framework of the Organization of the Turkic States (OTS). Beyond other integration projects, this inter-state organization starts steadily developing its embryonic politico-military architecture. Its foundations essentially rest on the long-existing Türkiye-Azerbaijan strategic alignment that proved its effectiveness during the

2020 Second Karabakh War and received its boost with the advent of the [2021 Shusha Declaration](#) of strategic cooperation between the two states. The Baku-Ankara kernel strategic partnership is a model for wider defense and security collaboration within the OTS configuration, which is increasingly engaging four Central Asian states. The OTS's 2025 [summit in Gabala](#) opened the door to joint military exercises and to collective security measures among member states in the cyber domain. It appears that defense technological standardization and the tight cooperation of intelligence and security services have also been placed on the agenda.

It is premature to forecast the transformation of the OTS into a fully-fledged defense alliance for several reasons. Enough to say that the organization encompasses the members of such antagonistic entities as NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at the same time. Nonetheless, the nascent security coordination within the OTS is already facing suspicion from other actors, foremost [Russia](#) and Iran, and to a lesser extent China. Such reactions should make the OTS member states' integration actions more calibrated in speed and scope, so as to avoid unnecessary security dilemmas that would affect regional security.

Beyond the OTS, another potential avenue of strategic assurance for Azerbaijan is its collaboration with Türkiye and Pakistan in the trilateral format. In addition to their security guarantees, Azerbaijan could benefit from both partners' renowned expertise in particular fields of defense (such as unmanned technologies in the case of Türkiye and missile technologies in the case of Pakistan). Ankara offers a full package of defense technology, knowledge, training, tactical solutions, and doctrinal interoperability. The fact of Türkiye's membership in NATO provides additional multipliers for the transfer of NATO-grade standards and procedures (while Azerbaijan also directly cooperates with the Alliance in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program). Furthermore, trilateral cooperation can facilitate the outspreading Azerbaijan's defense and security relations with countries that fall into Türkiye and Pakistan's (non-Western) strategic ecosystem, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Syria, some Western Balkan states, and others.

Azerbaijan could leverage its growing strategic ties with Ankara and Islamabad to develop modern defense capabilities, including, among other elements, a high-profile pool of deep-strike assets (e.g., missiles and unmanned aerial systems), sensors, and AI-enabled command-and-control networks. Other priorities should include a robust cyber-defense system and the national defense technological-industrial base.

Azerbaijan should also consider the possibility of raising limited but effective deployable expeditionary capabilities for potential participation in multinational stabilization missions (such as peace support and humanitarian operations) in regions related to advancing its national interests (in the spirit of its initial experience in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s-2010s). All these endeavors will be expensive, but enhancing national security is worth the burden.

Geo-Logistics: Azerbaijan in the Context of the “Game of Corridors”

The control over global logistical routes, waterways, and nodes is emerging as a central issue in the unfolding strategic competition among centers of power. By the trick of geography, Azerbaijan's locality precisely fits one of the critical spots of this competition. Several already existing, emerging, or projected vital transnational transportation and energy corridors originate from or pass through its territory and waters, constituting a web that includes:

- *The Trans-Caspian International Transit Route* (TITR), also known as the “Middle Corridor,” a mega-project that links Asia to Europe and embeds the [Trump Road for Peace and Prosperity](#) (TRIPP).
- *The International North-South Transportation Corridor* (INSTC), a longitudinal venture that threads together Russia, Iran, India, and both the Central Asian and GCC states.
- *The Southern Gas Corridor* (SGC), which encompasses the Trans-Anatolian (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic (TAP) pipelines, delivers Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe and enhances the energy security of the EU and its member states.
- *The Trans-Caspian Pipeline* (TCP), a contemplated project related to the exploration and exploitation of Caspian offshore gas.
- *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline* (BTC), one of the first Caspian energy-related enterprises, whose relevance grows again with the redirection of a share of the Kazakh oil export to its terminals.
- *The Black Sea and Trans-Caspian Green Energy Corridors*, a two-part proposed joint Azerbaijan-EU-Georgia-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan undertaking to export electricity from renewable sources (solar, wind, and tidal) to Europe.
- *The Digital Silk Road* (DSR), a communications project that would connect several regions with cyber cables laid across the Caspian seabed.

In addition to its full engagement in the aforementioned strategic infrastructural endeavors, Azerbaijan could potentially associate itself, in one form or another, with the [India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor](#) (IMEC), which is correlated to the U.S.-engineered Abraham Accords, and the U.S.-led [Pax Silica initiative](#) on the development of secure and sustainable supply chains of critical minerals.

The heavy concentration of such strategic routes underscores Azerbaijan's growing strategic value, which in turn could transform a fully engaged Azerbaijan into Eurasia's “solar plexus.” Just a single glance at a map of Eurasia makes a clear impression of Russia and Iran together “cutting” the continent in two from the Indian Ocean to the Arctic shores. In these settings, Azerbaijan emerges as a “valve” that enables circumvention of that major chokepoint.

There are three relevant aspects stemming from the foregoing.

First, crucial economic stakes in the projects of a trans-regional magnitude compel Azerbaijan to be concerned, and, if needed, to be practically involved in contributing to stability in its extended neighborhood. The key areas in this regard are Georgia (Azerbaijan's western "gateway"), Central Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Gulf, the Balkans, and the Russian North Caucasus.

Second, the vital interests of various extra-regional actors (the U.S., the EU, China, India, Japan, South Korea, the GCC states, Israel, and others) in these projects increase Azerbaijan's international prominence and incentives to cooperate with it, including in defense and security. Assurances from stakeholders reinforce the country's strategic posture.

Third, Azerbaijan emerges not only as a security consumer but also as a security provider. A particular example is an input into the EU's energy security, which helped overcome the initial 2022 shock of the war in Ukraine, establish a reliable supply chain, and diversify the continent's energy sources.

Taken together, Azerbaijan's deep and multifaceted incorporation into the Eurasian geoeconomic landscape brings strategic benefits to the country, strengthens its international capitalization, and objectively enhances its security amid existing and emerging challenges.

Azerbaijan as a Landlocked Maritime Nation

The Caspian Sea is a national treasure and a key strategic asset for Azerbaijan, whose history, culture, economy, and security are inherently related to this water basin. The greatest share of its national wealth proceeds from the exploitation of offshore and onshore energy resources. The infrastructural web of logistical and energy corridors, referred to in the previous section, stretches out across the Caspian waters and coast. The national capital, government institutions, most economic activities and industrial facilities, and over half of the population remain concentrated within a 10-kilometer radius from the coastline.

All of the above make a prioritized focus on maritime security Azerbaijan's strategic imperative. The lessons learned from the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East illustrate clearly that the maritime domain (due to its natural characteristics) is the most vulnerable to the potential hostile power projection, especially when released in a hybrid manner. *After liberating the occupied parts of its national territory and formalizing the resulting peace treaty with Armenia, Azerbaijan's paramount task is to ensure and enhance security in the Caspian maritime domain.*

One of Baku's top priorities should be establishing a sophisticated, technology-enabled maritime domain awareness system covering surface, underwater, aerial, and coastal

subdomains, based on a versatile network of early-warning seabed sensors, radars, unmanned aerial systems, and uncrewed surface vehicles.

An equally important priority is the acquisition of surface naval platforms to provide an effective protection (and defense) of offshore and onshore critical infrastructure related to geoeconomic projects, which has strategic significance for national interests revealed in the previous section.

Synopsis

- In the past 35 years after the restoration of its national independence, Azerbaijan performed a spectacular ascending trajectory, having overcome early troubles, restoring its full territorial integrity and sovereignty, accelerating development, and firmly entrenching itself as a “keystone state” that enjoys international respect and credibility.
- Against that background, a sensitive multi-locus positioning of the country entails a system of intricate risks and threats that require continuous monitoring, foresight, prevention, and, in some extreme cases, preemption.
- To address the challenge effectively, Azerbaijan must maintain an efficient, sophisticated defense and security system with matching capabilities and should accept the associated burden.
- Elaborating its strategic posture, Azerbaijan should grasp that its increased significance on a Eurasian scale, international weight, and outreach of power have their natural limits. Therefore, international defense and security alignments with kin, friendly, or willing states emerges as an indispensable instrument in Azerbaijan’s national security toolbox.
- With that, international pooling should be designed to minimize impact on third parties; Azerbaijan must avoid its integration into a framework of strategic competition and “new great games” on either side, and find a measured balance between national sovereignty and commitments stemming from external alignments.
- Ideally, Azerbaijan’s strategic posture should be codified in a new National Security Strategy (NSS). Such and related documents would identify the nature and sources of existing and emerging security risks, threats, and challenges; define key national interests, priorities, goals, and objectives; and outline ways and instruments of national power applicable for their implementation.

Geography is destiny, shaping geopolitical opportunities and flexibility. The Republic of Azerbaijan stands where it sits. In the emerging new era of uncertainty and fragility, it is obliged to explore its unique path to maintain rational strategic autonomy, an independent policy based on a primacy of the national interests, a sufficient defense organization, technological edge, and balanced international alignments. These interrelated mechanisms should serve the ultimate goal of sustaining security, peace, and prosperity for present and future generations.