

The Establishment of Azerbaijan's Diplomatic Representation in Israel: Historical, Economic, and Military-Political Determinants

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Abstract. This article examines the historical, economic and military-political reasons for the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Israel in the first quarter of 2023. The opening of the official diplomatic representation of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Israel is considered by both Azerbaijani and Israeli political experts as the culmination of relations between the two countries. Israel was one of the first states to recognize the Republic of Azerbaijan, which had just declared its independence in October 1991, on December 25, 1991. Within a short period of time — 103 days later, on April 7, 1992, de jure diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, and in August 1993, Israel elevated these relations to the level of embassy. The close relations between the two countries are considered by the international community to be based mainly on economic interests. However, this approach does not fully reflect the historical depth of the relations. The history of relations between the Azerbaijani and Jewish peoples goes back millennia. The Jewish community, which has lived in Azerbaijan for centuries, has played an important role in the formation and development of these relations. However, despite all these positive factors, Azerbaijan has long postponed the opening of its official diplomatic mission in Israel due to a number of regional-geopolitical reasons. Azerbaijan's membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Karabakh conflict, the Iranian factor in the region, and other reasons have delayed the opening of a de jure diplomatic mission in Israel.

Keywords: Azerbaijan – Israel relations, Armenia, Energy security, Iran – Azerbaijan relations, Military cooperation, Nagorno – Karabakh war, Regional actors

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Azərbaycanın İsraildə Diplomatik Nümayəndəliyinin yaradılması: Tarixi, iqtisadi və hərbi-siyasi amillər

Məcnun Həsənov 

Xülasə. Bu məqalə 2023-cü ilin birinci rübündə Azərbaycan Respublikasının İsraildə səfirliyinin açılmasının tarixi, iqtisadi və hərbi-siyasi səbəblərini araşdırır. Azərbaycan Respublikasının İsraildə rəsmi diplomatik nümayəndəliyinin açılması həm Azərbaycan, həm də İsrail siyasi ekspertləri tərəfindən iki ölkə arasındakı münasibətlərin kulminasiyası kimi qiymətləndirilir. 1991-ci ilin oktyabrında müstəqilliyini yenidən elan etmiş Azərbaycan Respublikasını İsrail 25 dekabr 1991-ci ildə tanıyan ilk dövlətlərdən biri olmuşdur. Qısa müddət ərzində — 103 gün sonra, 7 aprel 1992-ci ildə iki ölkə arasında de jure diplomatik münasibətlər qurulmuş, 1993-cü ilin avqust ayında isə İsrail bu

münasibətləri səfirlik səviyyəsinə qaldırmışdır. İki ölkə arasında mövcud olan sıx münasibətlər beynəlxalq ictimaiyyət tərəfindən əsasən iqtisadi maraqlara əsaslanan əlaqələr kimi qiymətləndirilir. Lakin bu yanaşma münasibətlərin tarixi dərinliyini tam əks etdirmir. Azərbaycan və yəhudi xalqları arasında münasibətlərin tarixi minilliklərə gedib çıxır. Əsrlər boyu Azərbaycanda yaşayan yəhudi icması bu münasibətlərin formalaşması və inkişafında mühüm rol oynamışdır. Bununla belə, bütün bu müsbət amillərə baxmayaraq, Azərbaycan bir sıra regional-geosiyasi səbəblərə görə uzun müddət İsraildə rəsmi diplomatik nümayəndəliyinin açılmasını təxirə salmışdır. Azərbaycanın İslam Əməkdaşlıq Təşkilatına üzvlüyü, Qarabağ münaqişəsi, regionda İran amili və digər səbəblər İsraildə de jure diplomatik nümayəndəliyin açılmasını gecikdirmişdir.

Açar sözlər: *Azərbaycan–İsrail münasibətləri, Ermənistan, Enerji təhlükəsizliyi, İran–Azərbaycan münasibətləri, Hərbi əməkdaşlıq, Dağlıq Qarabağ müharibəsi, Regional aktorlar*

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Introduction

This study examines the formal institutionalization of these relations 31 years after the Republic of Azerbaijan established diplomatic relations with Israel on April 7, 1992. The topic of The Establishment of Azerbaijan's Diplomatic Representation in Israel: Historical, Economic, and Military-Political Determinants is an important area of scientific research in terms of both historical and political context.

Following the collapse of the USSR, which had existed for nearly 70 years (1922, December 30 – 1991, December 26), many new independent states emerged, including Azerbaijan, located in the Caucasus region on the shores of the Caspian Sea. After Azerbaijan declared its independence, Israel, located in the Middle East, was among the first countries to recognize it, following Turkey, a key regional partner of Azerbaijan. On December 25, 1991, Israel officially recognized Azerbaijan's independence, and bilateral diplomatic ties were established on April 7, 1992 (Avinoam & Shaffer, 2021, p. 191). The end of the Cold War was an essential factor in the formation of the Israeli–Azerbaijani entente. The memory of the historic good ties between the Jewish Community and the Azerbaijani majority was a crucial psychological element that added legitimacy and continuity to the upgraded Israeli–Azerbaijani relations (Murinson, 2014, p. 10). The Republic of Azerbaijan, which declared its independence on October 18, 1991, has attached special importance to establishing relations with the State of Israel since the first years of its independence. Thus, at the initial stage — during 1991–2008 — relations with Israel were formed and consistently developed in both bilateral and multilateral formats in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In particular, after the presidential elections held in October 2003, Azerbaijani–Israeli relations entered a new stage, and strategic cooperation between the two countries deepened. The diplomatic relations between Baku and Tel Aviv, which have been steadily strengthening over time, have attracted the attention of the world community. When we examine the development of relations between these two states in the past and recent history, we can see that these relations are not accidental. Building diplomatic relations with independent Azerbaijan was an opportunity for Israel to improve its image in the countries of the region, where Israel's regional legitimacy has historically been contested. Moreover, recognizing Azerbaijan's independence seemed to the Israeli authorities to be a step towards improving its position in the United Nations as a state that, while in conflict with Arab countries, can maintain proper relations with another Islamic

country and to establish cooperation with new entities in international relations to facilitate Jewish immigration to Israel. One of the main factors determining the relevance of the topic is the important role played by the Jewish community in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani Jews living in Israel in the development of relations between the two peoples and states in modern times. The chronological framework of the study covers the years 1991–2023. The beginning of the chronological framework is from the restoration of the state independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991, and its final boundary ends with the opening of the official diplomatic representation of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Israel in 2023. The existing chronological framework allows us to examine all areas of the current relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel and to follow the dynamics of their development. The object of the study is the mutual relations formed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel during 1991–2023 and the process of institutionalization of these relations.

The subject of the research is the study of the main factors determining the bilateral relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel, as well as the main features of the formation and development of cooperation in the diplomatic-political, trade-economic, military, scientific-technical and cultural-humanitarian spheres. At the same time, the impact of Armenia's aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan and the Iranian factor in the region on these relations is also included in the subject of the study. Objectives and tasks of the study. The main objective of the study is to examine the relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel in 1991–2023 from both a historical and diplomatic perspective. In order to achieve the set goal, the following tasks were attempted:

- To interpret and analyze the factors and historical circumstances that determine the diplomatic-political relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel;
 - To analyze and assess the main factors affecting the formation of mutual interests;
 - To monitor the dynamics of the development of historical-political relations;
 - To examine the attitude of the State of Israel to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict created as a result of Armenia's military aggression against the Republic of Azerbaijan;
 - To examine relations in the economic, scientific-technical and military spheres;
 - To analyze the extent to which the Iranian factor accelerated the opening of the embassy in Israel;
- Research methodology in this article the factors influencing the formation of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations and the decision of the Republic of Azerbaijan to open a diplomatic mission in Israel were investigated based on qualitative research methods.

1. The historical-comparative analysis method was used to systematically examine the historical-social foundations of the relations between Azerbaijanis and Jews, the Soviet period and the stages after independence. This method allowed us to explain the opening of the embassy in Israel as a long-term political process in chronological terms. The comparative analysis method was synthesized with historical analysis and allowed us to compare the pre-war and post-war stages of relations. Here, the historical analysis method also showed its influence.
2. Within the framework of the document analysis method, official state statements and sanctions, diplomatic documents, decisions of international organizations and analytical reports were analyzed. This method created conditions for determining the foreign policy discourse of states and the strategic nature of diplomatic decisions.
3. The case study method was applied to the example of the first and second Karabakh wars. The impact of the war on the security environment and the institutionalization of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations was analyzed using this method.
4. The analysis of international and national legal documents included the legal framework of diplomatic relations, the Vienna Convention, as well as the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as resolutions and decisions of the United Nations.

Source base of the research. The dissertation work was written on the basis of numerous sources in different languages. The theoretical and analytical base of the research was formed on the basis of academic books and scientific articles related to international relations, security studies and foreign policy. Official state documents and statements played an important role in the collection of empirical materials. During the research, reputable international media and analytical publications, as well as Internet resources, were also used as a supporting base.

1. The Historical Background of Azerbaijani-Jewish Relations and the First Interstate Relations

This chapter examines the historical roots of relations between Azerbaijan and the Jewish people, and analyzes how and in what stages modern Azerbaijani–Israeli relations were formed. The main problem posed during the research, why Azerbaijan has not opened its diplomatic representation in Israel since April 7, 1992, will be systematically analyzed, including geopolitical and regional reasons and factors. In recent years, Azerbaijan and Israel, two countries with predominantly Jewish and Muslim populations, with different ethnic, cultural, social and political structures, and not very similar in terms of economic development, have been increasingly approaching each other. This is attracting attention. This rapprochement, which began in the fields of diplomacy, trade and economic fraternity, is gradually turning into a strategic partnership, covering the fields of intelligence and security (Erdoğan, 2013, p. 21). Furthermore, Azerbaijan arose as the key pillar of Israeli cooperation in the South Caucasus and the geopolitical isthmus which allowed for the realization of the vision of a new “Turkic world” commonwealth that would prevent the Iranian penetration of Central Asian (Murinson, 2014, p. 9). In modern times, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel maintain bilateral relations in political, economic, cultural, humanitarian and other areas. Political, economic, geopolitical, geostrategic factors and regional security issues have elevated the relations of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the State of Israel to the level of strategic partnership. In this context, Azerbaijani–Israeli relations have always been a topical subject of discussion by historians, politicians, and political analysts. In order to understand the development and formation of diplomatic and political relations between Azerbaijan and Israel, we must also examine the historical aspect of these relations. Then we will understand that it is not at all a coincidence that these relations officially began at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, developed on an upward trajectory. It is known that the Mountain Jews came to the Caucasus from 722 BC onwards, during the Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid, Sasanian, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Afsharic periods, for various reasons. However, despite being a minority within the ethnic origins and cultures of the region, they managed to preserve their religious and national traditions. At the same time, sources indicate that the Mountain Jews were influenced by the customs and traditions of their environment. This interaction continues to this day in cultural life. In Azerbaijan, the Mountain Jews have become a part of their society in many areas, from their folk beliefs to social activities, food, and music. The peoples of moi Jewish who were in contact with the surrounding peoples, also maintained their relations with their co-religionists and educational centers, including digər yaxın ölkə və şəhərlərdəki (Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Jerusalem, Bukhara, etc.). However, they are not mentioned as a people in official documents from Tsarist Russia until the 19th century (Osmanlı & Güç, 2020, p. 51).

During the USSR, a number of Jewish communities, especially Mountain Jews, settled in Azerbaijan and considered these lands their native homeland. The main reason for this was that, compared to many other territories of the union republics, there was no discrimination and anti-Semitism against Jewish communities in Azerbaijan. It was this tolerant environment that created the conditions for the long-term and stable settlement of Jewish communities in Azerbaijan. However, at that time, Azerbaijan was subordinate to the Soviet government and decisions came from the center. Even after Israel declared its independence from a difficult geopolitical location in 1948, it could not establish official diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan for a long time. This was not because Azerbaijan did not want to establish relations with Israel, but because it could not. This is because Azerbaijan was part

of the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1991. The foreign policy of each member country of the union was determined from the center, that is, officially in Moscow. Even now, the world was divided into two blocs, with the United States supporting Israel, and the Soviet Union, in turn, supporting the Arab countries. Official diplomatic relations between Israel and Azerbaijan became possible only 44 years later, precisely after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1.1. Settlement of Jews in Azerbaijan and historical and cultural heritage

The relations between these two peoples – Azerbaijanis and the Jewish people, who have no ethnic or religious ties with each other – have deep historical roots. It is necessary to pay attention to the historical and social relations that have existed between Jews and Azerbaijanis since ancient times. As is known, the Jewish people who migrated to Azerbaijan at different stages of history have tied their fate with these lands. There are different explanations for the settlement of the Mountain Jews in this territory, like that their origin comes from the Khazar Turks, who converted to Judaism or migrated from Persia nearly three hundred years ago (Saffron, 1998, pp. 46–47). But the commonly accepted theory is that Jews have been settled in the territory of Azerbaijan since the 5th century BC, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. During his. Ruling period, a number of Jews from the Judean kingdom moved north to today's Azerbaijan. After the defeat of the Babylon Empire by the Achaemenian Empire in 539, King Cyrus of the Persian Empire decreed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, but some of the Jewish population remained settled in the northern territory. This population became the Mountain Jews. They currently. Dominate the Jewish community in Azerbaijan and speak the distinct dialect of the Tat language known as Juhiri or Judaeo-Tat (Murinson, 2008, pp. 160–161). Azerbaijan has been home to various ethnic groups since ancient times, and they have lived in peace for many centuries, whether in the Middle Ages, during the years when Tsarist Russia and Soviet rule were established in Azerbaijan. It is especially important to note that from the time Jews settled in Azerbaijan until the modern era, there has never been a single conflict.

Methods

In this regard, the National Leader of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, said: Jews have lived in Azerbaijan for centuries and there have never been any cases of discrimination against them. It is also known from history that some representatives of the Jewish people moved to Azerbaijan to escape the massacres and found a place where they could live peacefully without feeling discrimination. This is a characteristic of our people. This is also a demonstration of the policy pursued by the independent Azerbaijani state (Məmmədova, 2022, p. 15). From Heydar Aliyev's quote, we can conclude that Jews sought refuge in Azerbaijan in order to escape physical persecution and survive during certain bloody periods of history. Despite being under constant pressure, Azerbaijan, especially during the Tsarist and Soviet periods, not only provided shelter to Jews, but also created all kinds of favorable conditions for their integration into social life and society. After a long historical period, several Jewish communities have formed in Azerbaijan. There are three Jewish communities on the territory of Azerbaijan: Mountain Jews living in the areas of Guba and Baku, Mountain Ashkenazim living in Baku and Sumgayit, and a community of Georgian Jews in the areas bordering the Republic of Georgia. Historical sources show that Mountain Jews have been rooted in the territory of Azerbaijan since ancient times. Their ancestors arrived in the country in the Middle Ages, about 15 centuries ago (Shapiro, 2013, p. 6). These Jewish communities, which have not faced any anti-Semitism throughout history in Azerbaijan, have settled in these areas for a long time. However, throughout history, the presence of smaller groups such as the Krymchaks, Bukhara Jews, Kurdish Jews, Gerim and Suhbotniks has also been mentioned here (Hasanoğlu, 2022, p. 195).

The Ashkenazi Jews are a group settled in the region by the Russian Tsarist regime with the aim of imposing their own culture. However, this Ashkenazi community again came to Azerbaijan during

World War II, fleeing Nazi persecution (Marcus, 2009, p. 15). In particular, this historical process took place in the 18th century during the reign of Tsarina Elizabeth II of Tsarist Russia (1741–1762), when mainly people who had converted to Judaism were deported from the territory of Tsarist Russia and sent to Azerbaijan. They settled, european jewish compactly in the Privolneye settlement of the Ismayilli region. Before the Russian occupation of the Caucasus, the names of the Mountain Jews were not mentioned in official records and literature. The name Mountain Jews was given to them by Russian aauthorities in the half of the 19th century. After the annexation of the Caucasus to Russia, surnames such as Ashurov (son of Ashur), Sadikov (son of Sadiq), Shaulov (son of Shaul), Nisimov (son of Nisim), Danilov (son of Danil), Davidov (son of David) were created by adding “ov” to the end of the name, creating the name of the father or mother in Russian. There are also exceptional names and surnames such as Shomoil ben Ovşolom. When Dagestan became part of the Russian Empire in 1813, surnames were required because all merchants had to obtain a certificate of membership in the merchant guild. The surname Hanukayev was given in honor of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. There are also some surnames Peysahov and Abramov (Osmanlı & Güç, 2020, pp. 51–52).

At the beginning of the 19th century, Tsarist Russia began an expansionist policy in the Caucasus region to seize new lands. As a result, the Gulistan Peace Treaty was signed in 1813 as the final result of the war between Tsarist Russia and the Qajar state in 1801–1813. During this period, Tsarist Russia prepared a new demographic plan. The first Ashkenazi Jews were settled in the territory of the former Baku Khanate, the present city of Baku, after 1813.bIn 1832, only 26 Jews lived in Baku. In 1835, 5,492 Jews lived in Guba (2,718 of whom were concentrated in the form of a community). In 1866, their number had reached 6,282. In 1864, the majority of the population living in Vartashen (now Oghuz M. S.) was made up of Jews. In 1870, the first synagogue of craftsmen was opened. In 1886, 1,400 Jews lived here. They had 3 houses of worship and two Talmud-khuns, where 40 students were educated, and 70 literate Jews who could read the Torah (Eleven.co.il, n.d.).

The Mountain Jews, one of the Jewish communities that had settled in Azerbaijan centuries earlier, settled compactly in the early 19th century along the Caspian coast, near the North Caucasus, especially in the cities of Derbent and Guba. During the Caucasian Wars (1817–1864), the Russian army’s punitive campaign against the Chechens, Avars, and Dagestanis was accompanied by continuous armed clashes the mountainous regions. In turn, the civilian population, especially the Mountain Jews, sought refuge in the interior of the North Caucasus, namely in Nalchik, Khasavyurt, Grozny, Temir-khan-shura and other cities, in order to protect their lives and property. This process led to an increase in the demographic presence of Mountain Jews in the North Caucasus, and these changes were also reflected in the official statistical materials of the 19th century.

The Russian military administration gave the name of Mountain Jews to the Jews of Dagestan and North Azerbaijan (Russian: Gorskie Evreu-Gorskiye Yevrei), seeing it as one of the many mountains of the Caucasus. Local Muslim peoples called them juhud or juhuds. According to the official census of Tsarist Russia in 1886, the total number of Mountain Jews in the Caucasus was recorded as 21,138 men, and they lived collectively in the 34 settlements listed below (Osmanlı & Güç, 2020, p. 52). These indicators are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1*Settlements and numbers of Mountain Jews in the Caucasus in the first census of 1886*

Nº	Location	Number of Jews	Including women and people over 20 years old	Population growth rate taking into account death and birth	Note
1	Aglabi	33	15	2	
2	Karabudak	71	35	3	
3	Buynaksk	90	40	4	
4	Gimeyde	100	50	5	
5	Petrovsk	123	60	6	
6	Rukel	126	63	6	
7	Durgalı	130	65	6	
8	Cheriyurtı and Sulak	141	70	7	
9	Nutug	152	76	7	
10	Andrevka	157	75	7	
11	Hoshmenzil	167	84	8	
12	Muhtadir	232	116	11	
13	Hangal-gala	243	120	12	
14	Karchag	255	125	12	
15	Poselok Chekan	276	135	13	
16	Cherag	276	235	23	
17	Kustek	293	145	4	
18	Tarke	300	150	15	
19	Dashlaqar	309	105	15	
20	Temir Khan Shura	335	167	16	
21	Nalchik	335	167	16	
22	Hosrov Yurt	348	174	17	
23	Meclis	529	264	26	
24	Malrag	668	330	33	
25	Yani Kent	684	342	34	
26	Tashkala	690	340	34	
27	Haftaran Mug	692	340	34	
28	Arag	705	350	35	
29	Nuygedi Myushkur	778	389	38	
30	Mücü	957	470	47	
31	Oguzh	1396	698	70	
32	Grozny	1594	790	79	
33	Derbent	1671	835	83	
34	Guba, Jewish Quarter	6282	3141	31	
Total		21138	10606	769	3.6%

Source: Jabir Osmanlı and Ahmet Güç, “Religious and Social Situation of Azerbaijan’s Mountain Jews During Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union,” *Journal of Theology Faculty of Bülent Ecevit University* 7, no. 1 (2020): 54–55.

The statistical table from 1886 shows that the settlement pattern of Mountain Jews in the Caucasus region was not accidental, but a direct result of historical and political processes. The vast majority of the 21,138 people listed in the table were compactly settled in 4 specific settlements. Another aspect that is noteworthy is the unevenness of this demographic distribution.

For instance;

- Guba Jewish Settlement – 6,282 people, or approximately 29.7% of the total
- Derbend – 1,671 people (~7.9%)
- Grozny – 1,594 people (~7.5%)
- Oguz – 1,396 people (~6.6%)

These four settlements account for approximately 52% of the total population. The places where Jewish communities are compactly settled are the cities of Guba and Oghuz in the modern Republic of Azerbaijan, and the other two are the cities of Grozny and Derbent in the Russian Federation. This table shows that Jewish communities are concentrated in several strategic locations, while in peripheral areas, i.e., places outside the central political and economic structures, the areas of Aglabi (33), Karabudak (71), Buynaksk (90), and Gimeyde (100) are represented by small and weak communities. These types of settlements are characterized as transitional or temporary residential zones.

The main occupation of the Jews living in Northern Azerbaijan was agriculture, small trade and labor. Their economic situation was difficult. Since the 70s of the 19th century, Jews from western Russia began to flock to Azerbaijan in connection with the development of the oil industry in Baku. They began to play a major role in the development of the oil industry, which was an important sector of the national economy. They founded several firms. The firms created by G. A. Polyak Polyak and Sons, A. Dembo and H. Kagan Dembo and Kagan, G. Gintsburg Gintsburg and Family, and A. Fischel were of great importance. The Caspian-Black Sea Oil Industry and Trade Society created by the Rothschilds began to play a leading role at the beginning of the 20th century. Mechanical engineers A. Gukhman and M. Fin and engineering technologists D. Landau and I. Pilkevich were particularly active in this campaign (Akiner, 2004, pp. 90–91). The history of the settlement of Georgian Jews in Azerbaijan dates back to the 18th-19th centuries. After the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861, the arrival of Georgian Jews to Azerbaijan increased, as they had already gained freedom of movement. Until 1861, members of the Jewish communities in Georgia were in feudal dependence. After the abolition of this law, economic migration of Georgian Jews became inevitable, and for the first time, Georgian Jews were able to partially choose their location. The vast majority of this community settled in Baku. Because the mass migration of them started in the 1870s with the first oil boom in Azerbaijan. (Eleven.co.il, n.d.) They settled mainly in the oil-rich city of Baku. Already in the 70s of the 19th century, the development of the oil industry and investments in Baku led to urbanization and the expansion of the market economy. This is precisely why Georgian Jews were eager to settle in Baku.

The main occupation of Georgian Jews living in Icherisheher was petty trade. Most of them had kerosene stalls. Here they sold small items such as soap, mazut, etc. The situation of Georgian Jews was particularly difficult. They could not even get an education in secondary and higher schools. Therefore, the Georgian Jews Enlightenment Society began to operate in Baku. (Kaspiy.az, 2014) However, this society ceased its activities in April 1920, when the Soviet army attacked Baku and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic collapsed.

1.2 Historical foundations of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Soviet period (1918–1990)

To understand the history of the formation of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations more deeply, it is not enough to look at these relations only within the framework of 1992–1993. It is necessary to analyze these relations within the framework of the period before the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, within a broader historical and political context. In this regard, the principles of statehood formed during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the political restrictions that existed during the years of Soviet rule, and finally, the complex international and domestic conditions that emerged in

the first years of independence played an important role in shaping the initial foundations of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations.

During its 1 year and 23 months of rule in 1918–1920, the ADR was the first parliamentary democratic republic in the Muslim East, and it also treated all citizens living within the country's borders, regardless of their national, religious, or ethnic affiliation, with equal rights. During the ADR, there were many national minorities, one of which was the Jewish community. The Jewish community in Azerbaijan continued to grow after the formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28, 1918. Article 4 of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic's Declaration of Independence guarantee to all its citizens within its borders, full civil and political rights, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, class, profession, or sex (Asadov, 2023, p. 70). Like many peoples living in the territory of the ADR, the absence of any systematic restrictions on the religious and cultural activities of the Jewish communities, and the fact that these peoples lived within the borders of the ADR in an integrated manner into society, demonstrated that the traditions of multiculturalism and tolerance were officially accepted at the state level. Considering the importance of the participation of people's representatives in resolving political issues, the founders of our Republic decided to form a parliament. The law on the establishment of the Azerbaijani parliament was adopted by the National Council on November 20, 1918. Secular and democratic principles were taken as the basis when determining its composition (Ismayilova, 2023, p. 42). Secular and democratic principles were taken as the basis when determining its composition. These rights recognized by the newly established Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to its citizens, also allowed the Jewish people living in the country to operate freely and independently in the economic, political, and social life of the state. There were 80 Muslims, 21 Armenians, 10 Russians, 1 German, 1 Polish and 1 Jew in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic's National Council (Asadov, 2023, p. 70).

During the ADR period, the representation of representatives of various peoples and communities in the parliament is not a coincidence. Because it was a conscious decision arising from the ideological, legal and political foundations of the state. Since the ADR was founded on the basis of the republican model, the idea of political representation of the people was at the forefront. Taking this reality into account, the integration of all strata of society into the state was an institutional expression of the policy of multiculturalism and tolerance. "Despite all the pressure and difficulties, the parliament was opened in Azerbaijan for the first time in the Muslim East on December 7, 1918. In addition to Russians, Armenians, and Georgians, representatives of minority nations were also represented in the parliament, one from each of Poles, Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians. Representatives of these nations represented in the parliament united and formed the National Minorities faction in accordance with the requirements of the parliamentary charter on the creation of factions (Ismayilova, 2023, p. 42).

Some prominent members of the Jewish community have been given high positions in the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijani National Council. The composition of the government changed several times but there were always 1–2 Jews here as a minister, or deputy minister. In the third cabinet of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which functioned from December 1918 to March 1919, Y. Gindes served as Minister of Public Health, and K. Lisgar as Minister of Food. R. Kaplan served as Minister of Education and Religious Affairs in the ADR's fourth cabinet, which ran from March to December 1919. In addition to receiving education in their native language, the Jews published periodicals in Russian, Yiddish, Juhut and Hebrew during the years of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic under various names: Kavkazskii evreiskii vestnik (The Caucasus Jewish Vestnik), Molodoj Siona (The Young Sion), Palestina (Palestin) and one period-ical in the Dzhuhuri dialect Tobushi Sabakhi (Sunrise) (Asadov, 2023, p. 71). Despite the strengthening of anti-Semitism in many countries of the world during this period, Jewish communities in Azerbaijan lived in relatively safe and stable conditions. The policy of tolerance and legal equality implemented by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in relation to national and religious minorities allowed Jews to function in an integrated manner in society. However, this positive development process ended with the occupation

of Baku by the XI Red Army on April 28, 1920, and with the establishment of Soviet power in the country, serious changes occurred in the legal and political status of national minorities.

After the occupation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by the Red Army in 1920, Soviet Rule was established in Azerbaijan. Russia was one of the birthplaces of anti-Semitism in Europe, and during the civil war in Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, following their anti-Semitist attitude, soldiers of Red Army engaged in a pogrom against the Jewish population, killing tens of thousands of Jews between 1918 and 1920. However, this policy was also continued in Azerbaijan through a different approach by the occupation of Azerbaijan (Abilov, 2009, p. 149). Thus, the democratic legal institutions inherited from the ADR period were abolished, and although the rights of national minorities were formally protected, in fact, serious restrictions were imposed. Political rights were completely eliminated, the parliamentary system governed on democratic principles and multi-party political representation were abolished. With political decisions coming under the sole control of the Communist Party, the faction of national minorities had already lost its role in the socio-political life of the state. Religious freedoms implemented a policy of suppression of national identity and assimilation against the Jewish community, along with Azerbaijanis. During the period of atheism, especially in the 1920s and 1930s of the twentieth century, the use of administrative violence led to the destruction of many places of worship and the repression of thousands of clergy and laity. In the 1920s, the activities of all Zionist organizations and related cultural and educational institutions that worked in Hebrew were banned. However, cultural development continued in other Jewish languages. There were Yiddish and Jewish-Tat schools in Baku; the famous teacher F. Shapiro taught here. Mountain Jewish schools also functioned in other cities of the republic until 1938, when most of the schools of national minorities were closed. Other cities of the republic until 1938, when most of the schools of national minorities were closed. The Mountain Jewish Department of the Azerbaijan State Publishing House, managed by Y. Agarunov and headed by Y. Semenov, published the periodical *Kommunist* in the Jewish-Tat language in Azerbaijan from 1934 until 1938 (Azerbaijan Jews, 2004). It was during this period that many Jews left Azerbaijan and emigrated to various countries. Despite the fact that the Jewish communities in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics suffered from the harsh.

Police of the Soviet regime in the 1920s and 1930s, their mass influx to Azerbaijan during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) can be explained by a number of objective and historical factors. The territories occupied by Nazi Germany in the summer of 1941 were also subjected to genocide. At the same time, the wave of anti-Semitism raging in Europe also prompted European Jews to return to other Jewish communities that had once lived in peace in Azerbaijan. The influx of Jews from Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, the Baltic States and Russia to Azerbaijan during the Great Patriotic War is once again an indicator of the tolerance of the local population. During the Second World War, a ruthless policy was pursued in Germany against the Jews. Representatives of this people were massively exterminated. Jews who were together with Azerbaijanis in fascist captivity were also killed. In such circumstances, Azerbaijani prisoners gave the Jews Azerbaijani names and surnames, taught them the *kelmeyi-shehadet*, and saved them from death (Qasımlı, 2006, p. 652).

In 1948, the Jewish people declared their national state – the state of Israel – in a geopolitically complex geographical space. This historical event was an important moment in decision was aimed precisely at weakening the position of Britain in the region and increasing its influence in the Near Middle East. However, despite this official recognition, Azerbaijan did not establish direct official relations with Israel. The issue to be considered here was not the unwillingness of the Azerbaijani SSR to establish this relationship, but the lack of any legal, political, or sovereign right to do so. Within the framework of the Soviet political system, the union republics were not considered foreign policy subjects, and all decisions in the field of international relations were made centrally by official Moscow. For this reason, Azerbaijan remained only in the position of a passive observer in the process of the creation and recognition of the state of Israel, deprived of the opportunity to pursue a separate

diplomatic line in accordance with its national interests. The relations of the state of Israel, which declared its independence, with the United States and Western countries caused deep concern in the leadership of the USSR, and the state of Israel began to be evaluated as an ally of the capitalist world in the Soviet discourse. This process reached its culmination after the Six-Day War in 1967, which ended with the severance of diplomatic relations between the two sides. Many Jews in the Soviet Union felt a high sense of pride and patriotism after Israel's victory in the Third Arab–Israeli War, often known as the Six-Day War, which took place from July 5–10. Immigration requests to Israel were increasing. During this period Jewish movement began to develop in Azerbaijan too. The leader of the protesters in Baku S. M. Kushnir (Asadov, 2023, p. 73). At that time, the right to free migration did not exist in the USSR. Exit from the USSR, especially to Israel, which was considered hostile for geopolitical reasons at that time, was severely restricted by the Soviet authorities. That is why uprisings began in many regions of the USSR regarding the increase in immigration quotas, and the USSR was severely condemned by representatives of the international community. In this context, the concept of increasing immigration quotas meant taking practical measures to soften the special permit system in the Soviet context. The state, however, annually imposed certain limits on exit to Israel and other third countries, and these quotas were under the control of state security services. Even the Soviet leadership put forward a number of fabricated arguments to prevent immigration. Due to the rupture in Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations resulting from this war, the Mountain Jews in the Soviet Union were prevented from immigrating to the state of Israel. Although the obstacles were political, it was accepted that the Mountain Jews were not ethnically Jewish. Those who defended this view in later years defined their arguments as follows:

The Mountain Jews are Persian-speaking.

Except for some terms related to Jewish rituals, the claim is that Hebrew words in their own languages are incomplete.

The religious life of the Mountain Jews is in many cases far removed from the commandments of the Mishnah and Talmud.

Physical similarities between Mountain Jews and other Tat peoples (Osmanlı & Güç, 2020, p. 64).

However, as these actions of the USSR were regularly brought to the agenda in international conferences and the press of both Western countries and the United Nations, the USSR did not change its policy, but it did soften it somewhat. If in 1970 only one thousand people left the USSR on Israeli visas, then in 1971 – already about 13 thousand, in 1972 more than 31 thousand, and in 1973 – over 34 thousand people. Subsequently, the number of leave visas declined, and less than 21,000 Jews and their families fled the USSR in 1974. In 1975–1977, even fewer people left every year, from 13 to 16 thousand people. The next three years saw a new increase, and in 1979 the peak of Jewish emigration of the 1970s was noted: more than 51 thousand left. Then, once again, significant limits were imposed on this emigration (Asadov, 2023, p. 73). According to the 1926 census, there were nineteen thousand European Jews and 7.5 thousand Mountain Jews in the Azerbaijan SSR; according to the 1959 census, there were 40,204 Jews (1.1% of the total population of the republic) living in the country, of which 38,917 lived in cities. 8,357 Jews spoke Judeo-Tat as their native language, and 6,255 spoke Yiddish. According to 1970 data, there were 41,288 Jews in the Azerbaijan SSR. According to the 1979 census, there were 41,288 Jews in the Azerbaijan SSR. According to the 1979 census, there were 35.5 thousand Jews living in Azerbaijan, and according to the 1989 census, there were 30.8 thousand Jews (Azerbaijan Jews, 2004). Over the past period, this process has affected not only Jews but also representatives of other peoples in Azerbaijan. These indicators are illustrated in Figure 1.

İnzibati ərazi bölgüsü, əhalinin sayı və tərkibi <i>Administrative territorial divisions, number and structure of population</i>									
1.11. Əhalinin milli tərkibi ¹⁾ (əhalinin siyahıyaalınmalarının məlumatlarına əsasən) <i>Population by ethnic groups ¹⁾ (based on population censuses)</i>									
Milli tərkib	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009	Ethnic groups
<i>min nəfər thsd. person</i>									
Əhalinin sayı - cəmi	2314,6	3205,2	3697,7	5117,1	6026,5	7021,2	7953,4	8922,4	Number of population - total
o cümlədən:									including:
azərbaycanlılar	1438,0	1870,5	2494,4	3776,8	4708,8	5805,0	7205,5	8172,8	azerbaijanians
ləzgilər	37,3	111,7	98,2	137,3	158,1	171,4	178,0	180,3	lezgis
ermənilər	282,0	388,0	442,1	483,5	475,5	390,5	120,7	120,3	armenians
ruslar	220,5	528,3	501,3	510,1	475,3	392,3	141,7	119,3	russians
talışlar	77,3	87,5	0,1	...	...	21,2	76,8	112,0	talyshs
avarlar	19,1	15,7	17,3	30,7	36,0	44,1	50,9	49,8	avars
türklər	...	...	0,2	8,5	7,9	17,7	43,4	38,0	turkisks
tatarlar	9,9	27,6	29,6	31,8	31,4	28,6	30,0	25,9	tatarsians
tatlar	...	...	5,9	7,8	8,9	10,2	10,9	25,2	tats
ukraynalılar	18,2	23,6	25,8	29,2	26,4	32,3	29,0	21,5	ukrainians
saxurlar	15,6	...	2,9	6,2	8,5	13,3	15,9	12,3	sakhurs
gürcülər	9,5	10,2	9,5	13,6	11,4	14,2	14,9	9,9	georgians
yəhudilər	30,9	41,2	40,2	41,3	35,5	30,8	8,9	9,1	jews
kürdlər	41,2	6,0	1,5	5,5	5,7	12,2	13,1	6,1	kurds
qızılzar	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4,4	kryzs
udinlər	2,4	...	3,2	5,5	5,8	6,1	4,1	3,8	udins
xınalıqlar	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2,2	khynalygs
digər millətlər	112,7	94,9	25,5	29,3	31,3	31,3	9,6	9,5	other nationalities

Figure 1
Administrative territorial divisions, number and structure of population

Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Population of Azerbaijan, 2021 (Baku, 2022), 21.

Despite all this, Jewish communities still lived in Azerbaijan, especially in the northern regions, in the cities of Guba and Oghuz. From the mid-1980s, a new situation began to emerge in the USSR. M. S. Gorbachev, who became the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, announced a program of political and economic reforms under the name of “openness”, “democratization” and “perestroika” at the April plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in February 1986 in order to carry out fundamental reforms in the Soviet economic and political system. This changed the situation in the country. Jews who wanted to emigrate were sent to Israel in groups from 1988 on the initiative of the SOXNUT organization. Jews also began to emigrate in Azerbaijan. These were the first Jews who once settled in Azerbaijan in the form of societies. They began to establish their societies. Thus, in 1990, the Azerbaijan–Israel Friendship Society was established on the initiative of the chairman of the European Jewish community, the famous lawyer M. Khaykin (Məmmədova, 2022, p. 21).

“The Azerbaijan–Israel Friendship Society maintained contact with all officially established Jewish societies in Azerbaijan. Thus, 12 Jewish societies were officially established in Azerbaijan. These

societies operated in accordance with the interests of the Azerbaijan–Israel Friendship Society. These societies were the following:

- Mountain, European and Baku Synagogues;
- Mountain Jews Society in Guba;
- Azerbaijan Jewish Women's Organization;
- Machgavi Sports Club;
- ALEF Youth Jewish Club;
- Club 22 in Sumgayit city;
- Council of Jews Who Participated in World War II;
- Azerbaijan Jewish Trade Union;
- Jewish Cultural Association;
- Karchakov Union (Məmmədova, 2022, pp. 25–26).

1.3 Geopolitical changes in political relations in the first years of independence, a phase of new opportunities

The deep political, economic and social crisis observed in the Soviet Union since the late 1980s, the weakening of central power and the instability in governance ultimately culminated in the disintegration of the USSR in December 1991 and the declaration of independence by 15 of its constituent republics. One of these states was Azerbaijan, located in the Caucasus region. After the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence, a new stage began in state-religious relations, long-term bans on religious activity were lifted, freedom of religion and conscience was ensured, conditions were created for the activities of religious organizations and the performance of religious rites, and international law was followed in the adoption of legislative acts. The rights and freedoms of national minorities and ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan, where multiculturalism is part of state policy, are protected by the articles of the Constitution, and other normative legal acts. In general, all these actions of the state have significantly affected the lives of Jews who decided to choose this state as their homeland after the Azerbaijan gained independence, and especially. Those Jews who are actively involved in the religious organizations of Jews of Azerbaijan (Asadov, 2023, p. 75). All these provisions are reflected in Articles 24, 25, 44, 45 and 48 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Jews living in Azerbaijan also played a role in the relations between the two countries. After gaining independence in 1991, Azerbaijan emerged as one of Israel's closest friends in the Muslim world. Furthermore, Azerbaijan arose as the key pillar of Israeli cooperation in the South Caucasus and the geopolitical isthmus which allowed for the realization of the vision of a new Turkic world commonwealth that would prevent the Iranian penetration of Central Asia. Since its establishment, Israel always sought allies among Muslim nations, in order to buttress its international legitimacy and to dilute the religious dimension in the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Israel's foreign policy options expanded. Israel made a decision to engage in deeper relationships with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, in particular with Azerbaijan (Murinson, 2014, p. 9). Many states began to recognize Azerbaijan, which had just regained its independence after 70 years of Soviet dependence, both *de facto* and *de jure*. On December 25, 1991, Israel was officially recognized Independence of Azerbaijan, diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on April 7, 1992 (Mammadova, 2023, p. 129).

The State of Israel, founded in 1948, officially established diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan exactly 44 years later. This historical event was the initial stage in the formation of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations in the 21st century. The reason that delayed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was precisely the foreign policy pursued by Ayaz Mutallibov (1990-1992), who held the post of president at that time, against Russia and Iran. Relations with Israel remained distant in the initial period. Ayaz Mutallibov resigned from his post in 1992 during a difficult political

period and was temporarily replaced by Yagub Mammadov. It was during his time that the first diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Israel were established. This step was of historical importance, despite the political instability at that time.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan decided to recognize the State of Israel only seven months later, thus becoming the third Muslim country after Turkey (1949) and Egypt (1979) to establish relations with Israel (Mruk & Piwowska, 2021, p. 37). Israel's arms sales to Azerbaijan and support for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since the early 1990s, before Azerbaijan declared its independence, paved the way for the expansion of relations between the two countries. These years can be considered the beginning of the Azerbaijan–Israel Strategic Partnership. Building diplomatic relations with independent Azerbaijan was an opportunity for Israel to improve its image in the countries of the region, where Israel's regional legitimacy has historically been contested. Moreover, recognizing Azerbaijan's independence seemed to the Israeli authorities to be a step towards improving its position in the United Nations as a state that, while in conflict with Arab countries, can maintain proper relations with another Islamic country and to establish cooperation with new entities in international relations to facilitate Jewish immigration to Israel (Mruk & Piwowska, 2021, p. 37). That is why Israeli officials have had many official visits and meetings with the Republic of Azerbaijan to develop these relations to a higher level. In particular, during the visit of Israeli Ambassador and UN Ambassador Aryeh Levin to Azerbaijan in 1992, the issue of opening an embassy of the State of Israel in the Republic of Azerbaijan was raised. In spite of this, Azerbaijan–Israel strategic cooperation grows step by step. The Azerbaijani government does have an unofficial representative, AZAL (Azerbaijan National Airline), in Israel. In addition to AZAL, the newly opened bureau of Lider TV Channel unofficially represents the Azerbaijani government in Israel. It was the first time for an Azerbaijani television network to send a permanent correspondent to report from Israel and send reports from Israel and other Middle East states to the Azerbaijani audience (Abilov, 2009, p. 151).

In 1992, at a meeting held by the Azerbaijan–Israel Friendship Association in Haifa, Israel, it was requested that Israel support Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. Azerbaijani statesmen held various contacts in Israel in September 1992. The close relations that Azerbaijan developed with Israel and the influence of the Jewish lobby made it easier for it to gain support from political circles in the United States. This situation made it possible to limit the impact of negative political initiatives carried out by the Armenian lobby against Azerbaijan (Durmuş & Mahmudlu, 2025, p. 64). In February 1993, the former President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, received Haim Barlev, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel to Russia. The prospects for cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel were discussed at the reception, and it was noted that there are wide opportunities for expanding relations in the political, trade-economic, especially agricultural, cultural and humanitarian, medical and scientific spheres. The issue of establishing interparliamentary relations and opening embassies between the two states was also discussed. On the same day, the Israeli Ambassador also held a number of meetings in the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the discussions, the parties exchanged views on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which arose as a result of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan, and on the migration problem. The Israeli side was interested in establishing and developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Azerbaijan. However, these were only the first steps. Abulfaz Elchibey's position on Israel was that Azerbaijan should evaluate Israel not through an ideological or religious prism, but within the framework of national interests and pragmatic foreign policy. He saw Israel as a potential partner for Azerbaijan, but emphasized the importance of conducting these relations in a balanced manner so as not to create hostility with other regional states. According to Elchibey, cooperation with Israel could strengthen Azerbaijan's international position on the path to independence, but this cooperation should be based on state interests, not emotional closeness (Axar.az, 2025). Scholars usually divide Azerbaijan's history into three main periods: the post-Soviet period from 1991 to 1993, when Heydar Aliyev rose to power, the period from 1994 to

2003, and a third that began in 2003 with the rise to power of Heydar's son, Ilham Aliyev. The first three decades of foreign policy, from 1992 to 2010, were characterized by Azerbaijan's tendency toward a realist balancing strategy to secure its national independence (Traub et al., 2024, pp. 2–3). When analyzing Abulfaz Elchibey's speeches during his presidency and his negotiations with the Israeli side, he positively assessed Azerbaijani–Israeli relations. However, the opening of Azerbaijan's diplomatic representation in Israel is explained by a number of historical, political and geopolitical factors. Because the internal situation in the country was not stable, the country that had just gained independence was at war with Armenia. In the tense phase of the Karabakh conflict, the main priority of the state was the protection of the physical and political existence of the state. The second factor to be taken into account was Elchibey's ideological orientation towards Turkey, integration with the Turkic world and exit from the sphere of influence of Russia. In terms of geopolitical and regional balance, the Iranian factor should have been taken into account, because Azerbaijan faced additional risks in its relations with Iran due to both geographical proximity and ethnic factors. Although initial diplomatic contacts and relations with Israel were established during the reigns of both Ayaz Mutallibov and Abulfaz Elchibey, current geopolitical realities prevented these relations from reaching a deeper and institutional level. From 1991 to August 1993, Azerbaijani–Israeli relations were limited and uninstitutionalized, and during this period, it was not possible to establish full diplomatic relations and mutually open embassies. The turnaround in mutual relations between the two countries occurred precisely after Heydar Aliyev came to power. An Israeli embassy was opened in Baku in 1993. While Azerbaijan declined to open a diplomatic mission in Israel, the Azerbaijani authorities would always explain this diplomatic imbalance by referring to political constraints Azerbaijan pointed out “its complicated geopolitical situation, particularly its proximity to Iran, as well as its membership in international Islamic organizations (such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), as the reason preventing it from opening a mission in Israel. Israel demonstrated understanding to Azeri sensitivities, while pursuing multi-level cooperation with this Muslim republic, including security, military procurement, energy, telecommunications, medicine, trade, education and culture. Israel hoped that Azerbaijan would eventually change their position on this matter (Murinson, 2014, p. 14).

Azerbaijan pursues a foreign policy aimed at moving beyond its close-neighborly relations and gaining strategically relevant allies that can help the country strengthen its position in the South Caucasus and reduce the influence of regional powers such as Russia and Iran. Since gaining independence, Azerbaijan has been open to expanding its network of partners and gathering support for the restoration of the country's territorial integrity. One such ally was Israel. After the opening of the Israeli embassy in Baku, Heydar Aliyev sent Deputy Foreign Minister Vafa Guluzadeh to Tel Aviv with special assignments. The current state and prospects of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations were widely discussed at the meetings. However, there were some factors that prevented the opening of the Azerbaijani embassy in Israel. V. Guluzadeh said in an interview about the importance of bilateral relations and the difficulties: This state supports Azerbaijan on certain issues in international organizations. However, Azerbaijan is a young state, and the opening of each embassy requires a lot of resources (in financial and technical terms (Quluzadə, 1999, p. 233). Vafa Guluzade's negotiations with Israeli officials were carried out within the framework of the basic principles of Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy course. In this context, Aliyev defined the main directions of the country's foreign policy as:

- Protection of the country's integrity;
- Ensuring and protecting economic and political sovereignty;
- Determining and protecting national interests;
- Ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens;
- Determining the countries necessary for the protection of Azerbaijan's interests and establishing close relations;
- Carrying out a balanced and reciprocal foreign policy with other countries (Yılmaz, 2010, p. 77).

It was after the official diplomatic mission of Israel in Azerbaijan began its activities that dialogues between the two countries expanded. During these meetings, cooperation in certain areas was already on the agenda. Bilateral meetings continued in 1995. On January 28, 1995, Heydar Aliyev met with Shimon Peres, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, while attending the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. The meeting was an important step towards the development of relations between the two countries. During the conversation, it was emphasized that there is great potential for the development of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations in the fields of economy and technology. Both sides noted that there are many opportunities for expanding cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel in the fields of technology, agriculture, industry and medical services. Shimon Peres stressed that they were looking forward to the visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev to Israel. The Azerbaijani head of state said that he would appreciate this invitation. Although the meeting held in Davos was the first meeting held at a high level between these two states, it showed that mutual relations are at a good level and have great potential (Məmmədova, 2022, p. 35). Azerbaijan's application of certain political limits in relations with Israel from time to time was a result of a forced balancing strategy. Because even though Azerbaijan signed a ceasefire agreement with Armenia on May 8, 1994, the political leadership understood that this conflict would remain frozen. Also, Azerbaijan's international political and lobbying opportunities were extremely limited. Compared to Armenia's powerful diaspora, Azerbaijan was in an asymmetrical position. From this point of view, Israel was instrumental for Azerbaijan in this matter. At that moment, Azerbaijan could not draw a line under relations with Israel, according to the power actors in the region. Taking advantage of the lack of existing alternatives, Azerbaijan kept relations with Israel as a strategic reserve.

Results

In this context, one of the main issues that worries Armenia regarding Azerbaijani–Israeli relations is the influence of the Jewish lobby. The Azerbaijani leadership considers Jews who emigrated from Azerbaijan to Israel to be connected to Azerbaijan and calls them the Azerbaijani diaspora. It is no coincidence that the Jewish lobby in the United States played a major role in the suspension of the famous “Amendment 907” adopted by the US Congress. In November 1998, the leaders of Jewish religious communities operating in Azerbaijan visited the United States, brought to the attention of the facts regarding Azerbaijan during the visit, and justified to the American public and influential Jewish organizations that “Amendment 907” was a wrong decision. They called on these organizations to protect their interests. Progress in this direction was based on the joint efforts of both countries (Azadgil, 2023, p. 39). This success was the result of pragmatic and silent cooperation with Israel. This case study fully demonstrates strategic diplomacy of precaution, which is one of the characteristic features of Azerbaijani foreign policy. Official Baku has neither elevated these relations to an extreme ideological level, nor has it completely abandoned these relations, taking into account the regional sensitivity in the region. On the contrary, it has preserved these relations as an adequate political tool in specific situations.

2. Deepening of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations in the geopolitical and economic context during the Ilham Aliyev era

A new political figure came to power in Azerbaijan after winning a high percentage of the vote in the presidential elections held in October 2003. Ilham Aliyev's coming to power in 2003 was not only the basis for a new beginning in the country's domestic politics, but also the beginning of a new historical era in the foreign policy arena. In this context, the head of state had a number of important issues that needed to be resolved;

- Restoring Security and Territorial Integrity

The main priority is the return of lands lost during the Karabakh conflict in the 1990s. In this context, the importance of Israel as a reliable partner emerges. Azerbaijan, choosing the path of technological modernization and military armament, cooperates closely with the state of Israel in this area.

- Maintaining a Balanced Foreign Policy Course

The main task facing the head of government in a sensitive geopolitical historical period was to maintain the balance of power with the dangerous regional powers in the region – the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation. It was during this period that the maintenance and development of relations, especially with Israel, was carried out in a phased manner. Azerbaijan, while maintaining the balance in the region, preferred pragmatic and functional partnership rather than an open alliance.

- Energy Security and Expanding Economic Interests

Bringing Azerbaijani energy resources to international markets and thereby establishing long-term relationships with strategic partners. Considering that Azerbaijan provides more than 40% of Israel's energy reserves, this aspect has transformed from a difference between the two states into a strategic partnership and has reached the political level.

- Strengthening International Positions and Lobbying Opportunities

In the context of the conflict with Armenia, Azerbaijan had little lobbying opportunities and political support in the international arena. It was in this aspect that relations with Israel filled this gap for Azerbaijan and received political support from Israeli lobbies in the USA and many European countries. It was during this period that Azerbaijan intensified its cooperation with strategic partners across the economic, political, technological, and military sectors. Among these countries, Israel emerged as a key partner. When analyzing relations between Israel and Azerbaijan, attention should also be paid to economic cooperation, as one of the most important aspects of bilateral ties, especially in the context of Israel's energy security. Israel is one of Baku's five key trading partners (Sattarov, 2017, p. 45). It should also be noted that the official working visit between the two countries played an undeniable role in establishing these relations. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, while giving an interview to the Azerbaijani Today, Az. News Agency on December 25, 2008, clarified the question of why the Azerbaijani embassy in Israel has not yet been opened and expressed the following thoughts: Even though the Azerbaijani embassy in Israel has not been opened, cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel in the economic and cultural fields is developing at a high level (Məmmədova, 2022, p. 76).

In response to their commitment to act on behalf of Azerbaijan, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov asserted that "American Jews have helped us lobby in Washington against the Armenians and their help is very important. We are very appreciative. In fact, relations between the two countries have become so close that according to Foreign Minister Lieberman, Azerbaijan could become a mediator between Israel and the Arab world (Ismayilov, 2013, p. 71).

The logical and political conclusion of diplomatic and political relations between the two countries was reached with the official visit of the President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, to Azerbaijan on June 28-29, 2009. The delegation included a number of ministers, government representatives, and businessmen. This indicated that the visit had a rich program and was aimed at deepening mutual relations in a number of areas. In the exclusive interview granted to the Azerbaijani news agency Trend News, Peres said: A lot of things unite us... Azerbaijan manifested tolerance and respect for that place where Jews, Muslims, and Christians can live without hatred and fanaticism. That is why [Azerbaijan] is, for me, a special country that I can trust (Murinson, 2014, p. 16). Peres also

emphasized the Israeli leadership's desire to share technological and scientific assets with Azerbaijan. He continued his interview by saying that: "Israel does not possess significant territory, water, natural gas, or petroleum. That is why we have to rely on our brainpower and our science. We must share everything we possess with Azerbaijan in areas of mutual interest (Trend News Agency, 2009).

The issues discussed coincided with the interests of both sides. The Palestine-Israeli and Armenia-Azerbaijani conflicts were also discussed during the meeting, and both sides stated that they are working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In particular, the contacts and meetings that began between Azerbaijani and Israeli government representatives since 2003 opened a new page in relations with the visit of the Israeli President to Azerbaijan in 2009. The next stage of cooperation began in the military and economic spheres.

One of the important factors influencing the relations between Israel and Azerbaijan is undoubtedly Azerbaijan's abundant energy resources, especially oil fields. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project, whose construction began in 2002, began operating in 2005 and facilitated Azerbaijan's access to the international energy market. In July 2007, the first bilateral investment protection agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Israel. The agreement emphasized the strengthening of economic ties between the two nations. As noted in the agreement, Azerbaijan's exports to Israel covered a range of goods, reflecting the growing trade partnership. These indicators are illustrated in Figure 2 and 3.

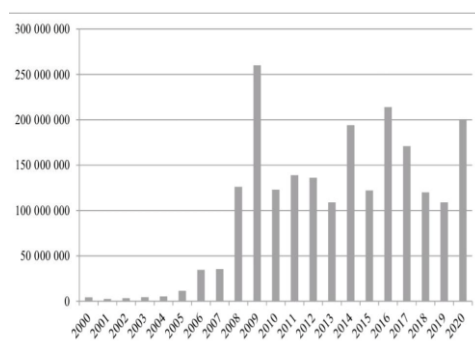


Figure 2

Value of exports from Azerbaijan to Israel in 2000-2020

Source: Marzena Mruk and Sara Piwowska, "Israel and Azerbaijan in the 21st Century – Sincere Cooperation or a Marriage of Convenience? Outline of the Issues," *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, no. 4 (31) (2021): 41.

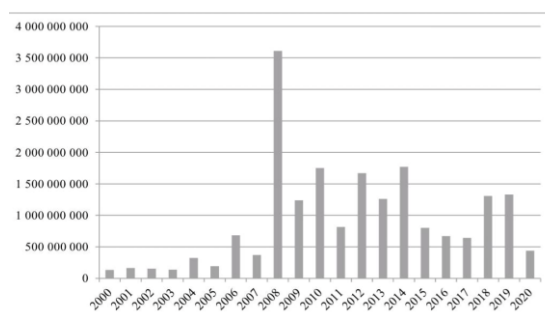


Figure 3

Value of goods exports from Israel to Azerbaijan in 2000-2020

Source: Mruk and Piwowska, "Israel and Azerbaijan in the 21st Century," 41

Between 2000 and 2005, Israel's position among Azerbaijan's trading partners changed significantly. Statistical indicators clearly show that during this period, Israel rose from 10th to fifth place among Azerbaijan's main trading partners. This dynamic indicates the intensification of economic relations and an increase in trade volume between the two countries. Thus, in 2008, the value of oil and oil products imported by Israel from Azerbaijan exceeded 3.5 billion (Hasanov, 2025, p. 174). These graphs clearly explain the economic, political, and strategic anatomy of the Azerbaijani and Israeli positives. Due to its difficult geopolitical position, Israel sees Azerbaijan as its energy supplier to meet its energy needs. Israel views crude oil as a matter of Azerbaijan's exports to Israel. Therefore, this trade is not a normal economic, but a strategic energy relationship. Another nuance that attracts attention in the table is the increase in exports from Azerbaijan to Israel in 2007-2009 compared to 2000-2006. The reason for this is that the diplomatic base between the two countries was not fully strengthened in 2000-2006 and trade turnover had not yet reached the strategic project stage. The increase in exports in 2007-2009 coincides with 3 processes;

1. The BTC oil pipeline begins to operate at full capacity.
2. The search for alternative and secure energy sources against the backdrop of Israel's conflicts with its neighbors and the IRI.
3. Azerbaijan's transition to an institutional and open stage in relations with Israel since 2007.

In an interview with the Azeri News agency APA, Israeli former Ambassador Arthur Lenk said that, Israel is Azerbaijan's second largest partner in the business field on April 29, 2009. Israel purchases oil from Azerbaijan and it assumes great importance for us. According to the outcomes of 2008, the commodity turnover between the two countries totals \$180 million, but we don't want to be satisfied with this figure. We are eager to have more business. The Ambassador also stressed that we will try to increase the trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Israel, which in January-March 2009 reached \$180 millions (Abilov, 2009, p. 157). In 2009, these exports peaked at approximately \$260 million. This is a clear example of the reflection of geopolitical decisions on the chart, not just market ones. According to the third figure the products exported from Israel to Azerbaijan were not consumer goods, they were mainly military technologies, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), radar and surveillance systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, communication technologies, etc.

One of the areas where Azerbaijan closely cooperates with Israel is the military industry. Israel plays a crucial role as a supplier of various types of military equipment and technologies to Azerbaijan. During the First Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Israel's support for Azerbaijan, both politically and technically, played a significant role in the development of relations between the two countries. During visits by Israeli officials to Azerbaijan, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the issue of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity were widely discussed. In particular, the occupation of more than 20% of Azerbaijan's territory by Armenia drew global attention to the region's security and stability challenges (Hasanov, 2025, p. 174).

The statistics in the figure show that the total value of products exported from Israel to Azerbaijan during the years 2000-2004 did not even reach \$1 billion. There are several reasons for this;

1. The Azerbaijani Armed Forces have not yet fully emerged from the post-Soviet structure.
2. The main countries in terms of arms supply are Russia, Ukraine, Belarus.
3. Israel has not yet formed Azerbaijan as an alternative military-technological partner.
4. Economic restrictions and oil revenues have not yet been formed.

Statistics show that the rapid growth that began in 2005-2007 reached its peak in 2008-2009, when more than \$3.6 billion worth of equipment was exported from Israel to Azerbaijan. This means that one or more mega contracts were signed. Because the relations between the two countries had moved to a qualitatively different stage at that time. This was due to the visit of Shimon Peres, the Minister

and then President of the State of Israel, to Azerbaijan in 2008-2009, and the cooperation achieved in many areas. In this regard, the two sides do not see each other as mere trade partners, but as strategic partners that reduce risks.

In the economic sphere, Israel has been among Azerbaijan's top five trade partners for most of the post-Soviet period. Azerbaijan is Israel's top oil supplier, delivering both crude and refined products, and providing around 30-40 percent of Israel's annual consumption, depending on the year. Israeli imports represent approximately 10 percent of Azerbaijan's oil exports. The oil trade between Azerbaijan and Israel takes place via direct sales from SOCAR to Israeli refineries and via European oil traders (Idan & Shaffer, 2021, p. 192). The level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Israel is considerable. In 2015, Baku-Tel Aviv trade was valued at \$5 billion, exceeding that between France and Israel. (Omidi & Kheiri, 2018, p. 35) Azerbaijan's dire need for modern technology, economic progress, and foreign investment, well as the region's limited infrastructure, has led Azerbaijani officials to cultivate relations with Israel and bolster the country's economy. The vast 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 & Quli, 2023, p. 27). The close cooperation between these two states in the economic and commercial sphere was undoubtedly due to the rich energy resources of Azerbaijan, and Israel, in turn, has modern equipment in the energy sector. The formation and development of cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector covers the years 1999-2014.

It was during these years that the foundations of cooperation in the energy, trade, and military fields were laid and memorandums and agreements were signed with regular meetings of state officials of both sides. In 2005, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov visited Israel, and in 2007, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Lieberman visited Baku, demonstrating the parties' desire to develop relations. In addition, in 2007, Israel even held a ceremony in the Knesset to celebrate Republic Day and show its value to Azerbaijan. During this process, Azerbaijani bureaucrats thought: "Israel, a Jewish state, may be seen as a threat by Muslim states, but with its secular, democratic, Western image and strong military structure, it is becoming an option for Azerbaijan (Cankara & Cankara, 2022, p. 5).

In addition, it should be taken into account that the development of cooperation in the energy sector was in part also connected with BTC. Because this belt diverted Azerbaijani oil away from the Russian and Iranian routes. Therefore, this belt created the logistical and geopolitical basis of energy cooperation. On June 5, 2005, during the opening of the 14th "Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition" in Baku, former Israeli Ambassador Arthur Lenk spoke about cooperation in the energy sector between the two countries and even noted the importance of the BTC oil pipeline during his speech at the exhibition. During his interview with the Azerbaijani news agency APA, Mr. Ambassador said: The main thing is that Israel buys Azerbaijan's oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Israel and Azerbaijan have close political and economic relations. Interstate relations are also strengthening and the ministries of the two countries pay mutual visits (Abilov, 2009, p. 155). Energy security is an important part of this bilateral relationship due to Azerbaijan's vast energy resources and its geographic position. On July 6, 2006, at the opening ceremony of the BTC in the Mediterranean port of Turkey, Minister of National Infrastructure Ben Eliezer stated in his speech that the main export oil pipeline is an important factor in Israel's energy policy towards Azerbaijan. Israel was officially one of the 36 participating representatives at the ceremony. Later, the Israeli side proposed extending the BTC main export oil pipeline to the Red Sea port of Eilat. The main goal here was to create conditions for transporting Azerbaijani and Central Asian oil to the markets of India, Japan and South Korea via Israel (Abilov, 2009, p. 156). Israel, in turn, has provided Azerbaijan with many modern technological equipment in order not to lose its safe and sustainable energy source. This process began precisely after the first oil was transported to Israel after the opening of the BTC pipeline. Table 3 illustrates the structure of Israel's non-military exports to Azerbaijan.

Table 3*Israeli Non-military Exports to Azerbaijan*

Year	Export Volume
2007	\$82.5 million
2008	\$129.4 million
2009	\$250 million
2010	\$200 million
2011	\$125 million

Source: Alexander Murinson, *The Ties between Israel and Azerbaijan* (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2014), 7.

Statistics demonstrates us that Israel-Azerbaijan relations did not start only with the military sphere. We should take into account that in 2002-2010, Israel took 2nd place in Azerbaijan's foreign trade turnover. This is calculated directly with oil exports. We can also see from the statistics that exports worth 82.5 million US dollars in 2007 reached 129.4 million US dollars in 2008. This was a 57% increase compared to the previous year alone. The growth trend increased further in 2009 and reached its peak, reaching 250 million US dollars. Thus, exports increased more than 3 times in two years, the total volume was 167.5 million dollars. This was a total increase of 203% compared to 2007. In 2010, the export volume fell to 200 million dollars, which was a 20% decrease compared to the previous year. The decline dynamics were also noticeable in 2011, this time the decrease was

37.5% compared to the previous year. However, it should be taken into account that this decline was not a collapse, but a gradual one. Nevertheless, the export balance between the two countries was maintained in the following years. The reason for this is that the main implementation phase of large-scale technological and infrastructure projects has been completed, and military equipment has already begun to be sent to Israel for security reasons in the following years. In general, it is clear from the statistics that the total export expenditure for the five-year period 2007-2011 was 786.9 million US dollars.

2.1. The role of Israeli technologies in the modernization of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces

One of the issues discussed in the relations between the two states was the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which was created as a result of Armenia's military aggression and occupation of Azerbaijan, and the situation of Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons. The research conducted shows that there was no meeting held at various levels that did not pay attention to the issue related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Among the countries to which the Azerbaijani side appealed to stop and condemn Armenia's aggression, the State of Israel occupied a special place. Jewish lobbies and organizations also played a certain role in this matter. In January 1994, the Azerbaijan-Israel Friendship Society sent a letter to the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, L. Rabin, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shimon Peres, requesting assistance in achieving peace in the Azerbaijani-Armenian war and the withdrawal of the Armenian army from the occupied 20% of the lands of Azerbaijan. In response to this request, the Israeli side sent 2 tons of medicines and humanitarian aid for use in Azerbaijani hospitals. such attention was both a humanitarian step and one of the factors affecting relations between the two countries (Məmmədova, 2022, p. 82). These issues were always brought up during official and unofficial dialogues with Israeli state representatives during the reigns of both Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev in order to resolve the Karabakh conflict. One of these dialogues took place during the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to Azerbaijan in August 1997. In the negotiations held, bilateral, regional and international relations were initially on the agenda of the meeting. From 1994 to 2009, the State of Israel expressed its support for the Karabakh conflict only formally. "However, according to some reports, the London-

based newspaper “Al-Wassat” wrote that Israel and Turkey provided Azerbaijan with “Stinger” anti-aircraft missiles during the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict (1991–1993) (Aras, 1998, pp. 73–74). Even many Azerbaijanis expressed the hope that friendship with Israel might help resolve the continued Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and expedite Azerbaijan’s integration with the West. The highest-level meeting held between the parties regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh context was the talks organized on June 28-29, 2009, with the participation of delegations of Israeli President Shimon Peres and Ilham Aliyev, who were on an official visit to Baku. The opinions expressed at the press conference held after the signing ceremony of the documents based on the negotiations and agreements reached showed that the positions of Azerbaijan and Israel on the resolution of regional and international relations are the same. In an interview with Trend news agency, Peres said that Israel supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. This appears to be a clear reference to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, in which ethnic Armenians continue to occupy territory within Azerbaijani borders. I know that Azerbaijan has problems around. Basically, the problems stem from your neighbors. Because in politics you cannot choose your neighbors, as in the family you cannot choose your parents. It is a fact of life. Israel is totally for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. We don’t think that one country can come and annex a part of another land, he said (Trend News Agency, 2009).

The world arms market has become a growing trend. In this market, Israel also exports various weapons technologies and is trying to expand its market network. At this point, in addition to Israel’s historical ties to Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan’s occupied territories and its border location close to Iran cause it to see it as an indispensable opportunity for arms trade. Between 2010 and 2015, Azerbaijan bought the most weapons from Russia (2008 Russia’s interventions in Georgia-Ossetia prompted Azerbaijan to think and make new moves). Azerbaijan, which is looking for better and more reliable weapons than the weapons imported from Russia, has reached the arms market of Israel (Soylu, 2024, p. 26). Thus, in 2011, Azerbaijan signed a military contract worth 1.6 billion dollars to modernize the Azerbaijani armed forces. The delivery of agreed weapons and technologies to Azerbaijan within the framework of military-technical cooperation began in 2012 (Hasanov, 2025, p. 175). 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 experienced 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 (Cankara & Cankara, 2022, p. 6). The list of military equipment worth 1.6 million US dollars exported to Azerbaijan under the relevant agreement signed with Israel in 2011 is reflected in Table 4.

Table 4
Azerbaijani arms orders to Israel 2011

Equipment	Quantity	Date	Comments
Barak MX surface-to-air missile system	1	2011	Delivered in 2016 Part of a \$1.6 billion contract
Barak ER interceptors	40	2011	Delivered in 2016. For the Barak MX system. Part of a \$1.6 billion contract.
Barak LRAD interceptors	40	2011	Delivered in 2016. For the Barak MX system. Part of a \$1.6 billion contract
Heron tactical drones	5	2011	Delivered in 2013. Part of a \$1.6 billion contract.
Searcher observation drones	5	2011	Delivered in 2013. Part of a \$1.6 billion contract.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Arms Transfers Database.

At this point, Azerbaijan's purchase of military equipment from Israel in 2012 was 1.6 billion dollars. In the same year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel paid a visit to Azerbaijan and during this visit to Baku, he stated that Israel relations with Azerbaijan are more important than relations with France. became acquainted with drone systems. A number of Azerbaijani arms orders from Israel since 2011 are described in Table 5. By 2016, the total value of weapons exported from Israel to Baku exceeded 6 billion dollars (Fars News Agency, 2021).

Table 5

Azerbaijani arms orders to Israel 2013-2019

Equipment	Quantity	Date	Comments
Sandcat AFVs	100	2015	Delivered between 2016-2018
Spike LR guided anti-tank missile system	10	2015	Delivered in 2016. For Sandcat AFVs
Spike LR guided anti-tank missiles	250	2015	Delivered in 2016. For Sandcat AFVs
Orbiter 1K loitering munitions	100	2016	Delivered between 2016-2020. Includes component production and assembly in Azerbaijan
Orbiter-3 tactical drones	10	2016	Delivered between 2016-2017
SkyStriker loitering munitions	250	2016	Delivered between 2018-2020
Hermes-900 tactical drones	2	2017	Delivered in 2017-2018
LORA mobile quasi-ballistic theatre missile system	4	2017	Delivered in 2018
LORA surface to surface missiles	50	2017	Delivered in 2018. For the LORA system
SPEAR 120mm vehicle portable mortar	10	2017	Delivered in 2018. For Sandcats
Spike NLOS surface-to-surface missiles	100	2019	Delivered in 2020.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Arms Transfers Database.

In general, one of the main reasons for Azerbaijan's successes in both the 2016 four-day war and the 44-day Second Karabakh War (2020) is the large-scale increase in military spending from 1995 to 2022, funded by oil industry revenues since 1994. During this period, energy-sector resources significantly contributed to modernizing the Azerbaijani armed forces, acquiring advanced military technologies, and enhancing combat readiness (Hasanov, 2025, p. 176). When these indicators are examined comparatively, Figure 4 ("Military Spending: How Azerbaijan Surpassed Armenia") clearly illustrates Azerbaijan's substantial advantage over Armenia in terms of military expenditures.

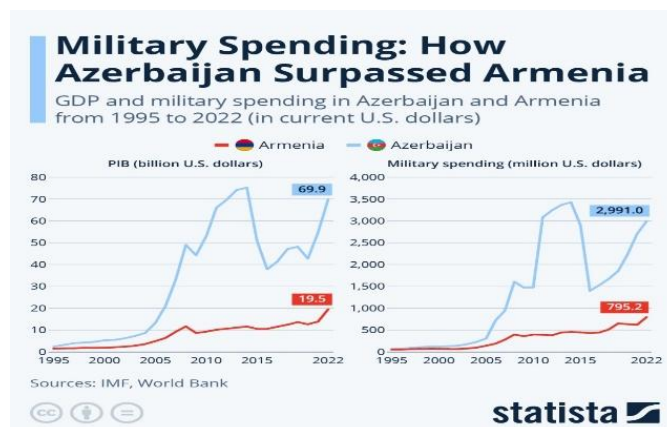


Figure 4
Military Spending: How Azerbaijan Surpassed Armenia

Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

According to the graph, Azerbaijan's GDP has improved significantly since 2005. This is already due to Azerbaijan's projects in international oil and oil products in the region. As a result, while Azerbaijan's GDP in 2022 was \$69.9 billion, Armenia's was \$19.5 billion. When. Looking at the field of military spending, the picture was again heartening for the Azerbaijani side. In particular, the increase that began in the 2000s peaked between 2010 and 2015. Reaching approximately \$3.5 billion. While this figure was \$2.991 billion in Azerbaijan in 2022, military spending in Armenia amounted to \$795.2 million. Thus, Azerbaijan has cooperated with Israel, which has the world's most advanced military technologies, and this cooperation has grown stronger each year (Hasanov, 2025, p. 177).

3. Regional Geopolitical Environment and Reasons for the Late Opening of the Embassy

Notwithstanding, Iran and Azerbaijan are both Shi'i Muslim countries and have a common historical and cultural heritage. History as well as ideological and political factors have shaped relations between the two countries and have influenced the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the Republic of Azerbaijan, Iran was. Among the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan's return to independence in 1991. Establishing diplomatic relations with Baku in March 22, 1992. Since the Soviet disintegration, however, the unstable and complicated Iranian-Azerbaijani relationship has demonstrated Tehran's discomfort with Azerbaijan's existence as an independent and secular state (Khalifa-Zadeh, 2013, p. 58). Although Iran initially sought to spread the Islamic revolution after the collapse of the USSR, it has replaced this policy with more economic dialogues in modern times. After gaining independence, our country's establishment of relations with the West and Israel, and its adoption of a secular state model, have made it difficult for Iran to influence the Shiite population in Azerbaijan (Keskin, 2008, pp. 50–52). An important event that caused Iran's concern was the establishment of relations between Azerbaijan and Israel on April 7, 1992. Despite the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Israel, other factors delayed Azerbaijan's decision to open an official embassy in Israel. One of these factors was Azerbaijan's membership in the OIC. After declaring its independence, Azerbaijan joined this organization in December 1992. The OIC has played a significant role in strengthening Azerbaijan's cooperation with the Arab and Muslim world. Another essential factor to consider was Iran's stance. Iran perceived the diplomatic rapprochement between Azerbaijan and Israel as a potential threat to its national security and regional geopolitical interests. Iran, in turn, put forward many arguments. They claimed that Azerbaijani–Israeli relations and military cooperation were a threat to Iran's national security in the region, they assessed Azerbaijan's relations with Israel as a step contrary to the rights of the Palestinian people, and

considered it against the unity of the muslim world (Hasanov, 2025, pp. 180–181). Iranian political analysts and researchers continue to advance arguments on various platforms and in academic circles about the potential threats posed by Azerbaijan's rapprochement with Israel. For instance, in some Iranian political discourse, Israel is described in delegitimizing terms, and Iranian analysts argue that the Zionist regime, aiming to hinder the 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, financial, and security domains (Sayyar et al., 2023, p. 130). While Israeli foreign policy doctrine has been pursuing partners with common economic and security interests, Iran has remained extremely cautious of such endeavours, perceiving Israel's interest in Azerbaijan to achieve geographical proximity to Iranian territory surreptitiously. The Iranian government believes that Tel Aviv's primary goal in pursuing enhanced cooperation with Baku is to collect intelligence and plan military attacks on Iran from Azerbaijan's territory (Miholjic-Ivkovic, 2023, p. 55).

In response to Iran's concerns regarding this issue, official Baku, in turn, issued a statement to the other side, stating that in the context of relations with Israel, the territory of Azerbaijan cannot, under any circumstances, be used as a military confrontation zone against the territory of a third country. In a situation where the South Caucasus countries are showing political and security orientation towards Israel, the United States and Western European countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran has considered the Russian Federation as a key strategic ally against these influences. In this context, Tehran has openly supported Russia's policy aimed at preventing the political, military and institutional influence of the United States and Western countries in the South Caucasus region. Therefore, we can identify Tehran's strategic priorities in the Southern Caucasus as follows:

1. To stop both Georgia and Azerbaijan from moving toward NATO/EU membership;
2. To minimize Israel's influence and cooperation with the South Caucasian countries;
3. To arrange the security system in accordance with Iran's strategic interests;
4. To control the Caspian energy resources and transportation routes;
5. To contain the rising influence of Turkey and the Turkey-Azerbaijani alliance (Khalifa-Zadeh, 2012, pp. 70–71).

Iran is very concerned that Iranian Azeris may establish their own Azerbaijani state, as happened early in 20th century, or join the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this context, the existence of the Republic of Azerbaijan is a strategic factor for Iran's long-term calculations, as well as for the Azeri nation-al-liberation movement in this country. The mullah's regime in Tehran feels extremely uncomfortable about the possibility of Azerbaijan's secular and successful experience inspiring or igniting the Iranian Azeris to put an end to the mullah's power. Thus Azerbaijan's independence is a strong exacerbating factor for Iran's policymakers. Therefore, Iran's priorities toward Azerbaijan can be identified as follows;

1. To stop Israel's cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia;
2. To minimize America's influence and stop Azerbaijan's bid for EU/NATO membership;
3. To damage Azerbaijan's international image.
4. To contain Azerbaijan's rise to regional power,
5. To provide assistance to Azerbaijan's regional rival-Armenia;
6. To maintain the balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia;
7. To keep Azerbaijan engaged in the war with Armenia;
8. To support Russia's "cosmetic" attempts to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,
9. To keep Azerbaijan under Russia's dominance (Khalifa-Zadeh, 2012, p. 72).

3.1 Opening of Azerbaijan's diplomatic mission in Israel in the context of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

After Azerbaijan's absolute victory over Armenia during the Second Karabakh War, the geopolitical balance in the region has changed significantly. The military-political victory achieved in 2020 was a significant turning point not only in terms of the return of 20% of Azerbaijan's occupied territories, but also in terms of expanding Azerbaijan's foreign policy maneuvering possibilities.

In this context, the opening of Azerbaijan's diplomatic mission in Israel has acquired particular importance. It all starts after the liberation of Karabakh, as the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan by Iran, one of the power actors in the region, raises many concerns in Iran. After the liberation of Karabakh, the concerns that have arisen in the political circles of the Islamic Republic of Iran are in the following areas;

- The possibility of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations entering an open phase
- Turkey's growing influence in the region
- The issue of the Zangezur corridor and transport communications
- Ethnic and internal stability factor
- Iran's declining influence over Armenia
- Expanding Azerbaijan's room for maneuver in foreign policy

It is in this context that Iran once again expressed its concern about the multi-vector policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. After the second Karabakh conflict, relations with Iran reached their peak compared to previous years. Therefore, the Azerbaijani victory in Karabakh was not welcomed by Iran at all. Because after the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, with Azerbaijan's recapture of its territory, Iran's 132-km border with Armenia decreased to 40 km. There are many reasons for this unhappy attitude, including regional economic policies and Iran's internal dynamics. The most important of these reasons is the concern that the increase of Azerbaijan's political influence in the region, which we mentioned earlier, will create a psychological environment for the demand for independence by millions of Turks living within the borders of Iran. In addition, if Turkmen gas is connected to Europe via the Zangezur Corridor, the demand for Iranian gas will decrease, and this concern has become very strong in Iran. Iran, which takes a threatening position on all these issues, has repeatedly expressed that it is extremely uncomfortable with the advancement of relations between Azerbaijan and Israel (Soylu, 2024, p. 28). The fact that the 132 km section of the Iran-Azerbaijan border, as a result of the liberation of Karabakh, came under the full control of Baku was not only a geographical change for Iran, but also a decrease in regional influence, a disruption of the transit balance, and an increase in national security risks. Iran's direct border with Azerbaijan has actually expanded. The reduction of Iran's border with Armenia to 40 km has not only reduced Iran's indirect contact opportunities with Armenia, but also weakened its strategy of influencing the region through Armenia. Also, the emergence of the Zangezur corridor on the agenda has left Iran with the danger of losing its transit role in the region and even being left out of these processes. Between September 11-21, 2021, the "Three Brothers 2021" exercise was held in Baku between Turkey, Pakistan and Azerbaijan, and this situation seriously disturbed Iran. The military exercise, in which new combat tactics were tested using modern technological products, ensured coordination among the participants, and on the other hand, it intimidated other players in the region in terms of showing the extent of cooperation between them. In response to these developments, Iran conducted a military exercise called "Khyber Conquerors" on October 1 in the northwest of the country, that is, on the border of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Although the Commander of the Iranian Ground Forces, General Kiyumers Heyderi, said that the purpose of the exercise was to increase the capacity of the Iranian soldiers to be present, his statements showed that this was not the only issue. Heyderi stated that the party hindering stability in the Middle East is Israel, that Iran does not have a hot conflict with its

neighbors because it has not had a border change policy for a long time, and that they respect Azerbaijan's territory by not supporting Iran's occupation of Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On the one hand, Heyderi tried to draw attention to the military exercises conducted around Iran and mentioned that there is an exercise in Turkey as well (Cankara & Cankara, 2022, p. 12).

Official Baku, which is involved in Iran's baseless claims against Azerbaijan, has an official statement in this context based on international law and international norms. This statement is based on both Azerbaijan's own constitution and a number of other internal laws, as well as laws adopted by the international community. According to Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Charter of the United Nations, all member states may not use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state. Azerbaijan has also accepted this principle as a member of the UN (March 2, 1992). Another legal act to consider is the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Clause 3 of Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan states: The territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is indivisible; a part of the motherland cannot be given or leased to any state. This provision prohibits the use of Azerbaijan's territory for any military purposes, including against a third country (Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, art. 11, para. 3).

According to Article 151 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan, international agreements take precedence over Azerbaijani legislation. This means that Azerbaijan should act in accordance with the principles adopted by organizations such as the UN and the OSCE (Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, art. 151). The religious aspect is the main factor causing ideological contradictions in Tehran's foreign policy regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Iran's full support for Christian Armenia against Muslim, constitution, which states that Iran's foreign policy is based on protecting the rights of all Muslims, but it is also one of the main obstacles to the development of Azerbaijan-Iran bilateral military-political relations (Aghazada, 2023, p. 722). Article 11 of the Iranian Constitution also states that the Islamic Ummah is considered a single society and that the Islamic Republic of Iran considers ensuring unity and solidarity among all Muslim nations as one of the basic principles of its foreign policy (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, art. 11). According to this article, religious solidarity and common identity should play a decisive role in the relations of the Iranian state with Muslim countries and peoples. However, Tehran's support for Christian Armenia in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and its position towards Azerbaijan, which has a Muslim and especially Shiite identity, clearly contradict this constitutional principle. At a time when Muslim countries are normalizing relations with Israel, Azerbaijan's southern neighbor has begun to take steps against Iran. During the Azerbaijan-Armenia border clash in September and on the issue of the Zangezur corridor, the statements of Iranian military and political leaders that "Armenia's borders are Iran's red line were not received unambiguously in Azerbaijan. In the future, the opening of an Iranian consulate in the Armenian city of Qafan, located on the border with Azerbaijan, further heightened tensions in relations (Topchubashov Center, 2022). Another unconstructive step by Iran was demonstrated during the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran. As the host country, Iran was obligated under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to ensure the. of the embassy and the safety of its employees. Article 22 of the Vienna Convention imposes a direct obligation on the receiving state to ensure the inviolability of diplomatic missions and to prevent any threat to the security of the embassy. At the same time, Article 29 of the Convention imposes on the state responsibility to ensure the personal immunity of diplomatic personnel. Iran's failure to fulfill these obligations during the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy was assessed as a gross violation of international diplomatic law (Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961, art. 22).

At the same time, Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits the use of force or the threat of force against states. An attack on a diplomatic mission, in fact, acts as a form of force by one state against the sovereign rights of another state and contradicts this fundamental principle of international law (Charter of the United Nations, 1945). These events clearly show that the principles of friendship and neighborliness officially declared by Iran are not compatible with each other in reality. The attack on

our Azerbaijani consulate in Tehran is a clear indication of Iran's insincere position towards official Baku. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry also announced the opening of the embassy. It was reported that 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 Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen (Qafqazinfo, 2023). The establishment of Azerbaijan's diplomatic mission in Israel marked the beginning of a qualitatively new stage in Azerbaijani–Israeli relations, and bilateral relations were officially elevated to the embassy level.

Conclusion

This article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the historical, economic and military-political factors of the establishment of the diplomatic mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the State of Israel. The main goal of the research is to examine the stages of formation and development of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations, the factors affecting the delay in the institutionalization of these relations, and finally, the geopolitical realities that conditioned the opening of the embassy in Israel in 2023, within a scientific-theoretical and empirical framework. The first part of the research analyzes the historical-social foundations of Azerbaijani–Jewish relations, the existence of Jewish communities in Azerbaijan since ancient times, the legal and social status of Jews during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Soviet period. At the same time, the initial stage of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations after independence (1991–1993) and the reasons for the limited nature of diplomatic relations during this period are examined.

The next part of the dissertation analyzes the impact of the Karabakh conflict on Azerbaijani–Israeli relations and the role of the regional geopolitical environment. During the First Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan's weak international lobbying capabilities and the position of regional power actors, especially Iran and Russia, have been shown to have led to a more pragmatic and “silent cooperation” model of relations with Israel. The failure to open an embassy in Israel at this stage was explained not by a lack of political will, but by a balancing strategy aimed at managing regional risks.

The study devotes special attention to the analysis of the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to Azerbaijani–Israeli relations. The contradictions between Iran's official rhetoric and practical behavior during both the First and Second Karabakh conflicts were assessed in the context of cooperation with Armenia, regional transit interests, and security concerns. In particular, the transfer of the 132 km section of the Iranian–Azerbaijani border to Baku's full control after the liberation of Karabakh in 2020 was interpreted as a decrease in Tehran's regional influence. The main analytical part of the dissertation is devoted to the deepening of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations on military-political, security, and economic grounds during the Ilham Aliyev era. During this period, military-technical cooperation, energy trade, and economic interdependence gave the relationship a strategic character. Azerbaijan's provision of a significant part of Israel's energy needs played an important role in the transition of bilateral relations to a political level. Finally, the dissertation analyzed Azerbaijan's decision to open a diplomatic mission in Israel against the background of new geopolitical realities that emerged after the SKW. This step was assessed not as a sudden and situational decision, but as a logical consequence of long-term strategic planning, a changing risk-benefit balance, and the strengthening of Azerbaijan's regional position. Thus, the opening of the embassy marked the transition of Azerbaijani–Israeli relations from a *de facto* stage of cooperation to *de jure* stage of institutionalization.

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