



CENTER OF ANALYSIS  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS

# GLOBAL SOUTH: HOW AZERBAIJAN CAN BENEFIT



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## Abstract

This paper examines the evolving role of the Global South in contemporary international relations, with a particular focus on how Azerbaijan – a strategically positioned state – can leverage enhanced cooperation with Global South actors to diversify its economy, foster sustainable partnerships, and strengthen its foreign policy orientation. Given the limited academic attention to this topic, the study seeks to fill an existing gap in the literature by exploring both the conceptual significance and practical implications of Global South cooperation for Azerbaijan.

The analysis draws upon existing scholarship, the historical evolution of the term “*Global South*,” major international developments, case studies of conflicts such as those in Gaza and Ukraine, and expert perspectives to trace the emergence and historical relevance of the Global South as a political and economic coalition. The study also investigates the shifting agendas of the Global South – particularly within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – and situates Azerbaijan’s engagement within these broader dynamics.

The paper identifies key opportunities for Azerbaijan to enhance its diplomatic visibility, bolster international legitimacy, and increase the market competitiveness of its non-oil sectors through deeper engagement with Global South partners. The policy recommendations section outlines a strategic roadmap for achieving these objectives, consisting of one primary recommendation supported by two alternative approaches. These recommendations assess not only potential outcomes but also relevant constraints and the roles of domestic and international stakeholders in their implementation.

Ultimately, the central argument of this paper is that Azerbaijan’s proactive engagement with the Global South advances its national interests while contributing to the emergence of a more balanced and inclusive global order.

*Keywords:* Azerbaijan, Global South, Global North, Cooperation, Opportunities.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	4
2. Methodology.....	6
3. History.....	7
3.1 Etymology of Global South.....	7
3.2 Conflict Response: Gaza and Ukraine.....	12
4. Agenda of the Global South .....	15
4.1 Shifting Agenda .....	15
4.2: Economic Challenges of Global South .....	18
5. Azerbaijan’s Agenda and Cooperation Benefits.....	20
5.1 Azerbaijan’s Emerging Global South Agenda .....	20
5.2 Cooperation Benefits .....	25
6. Policy Recommendations .....	28
6.1 Recommended Policy: Economic Integration with the Global South .....	28
6.2 Alternative One: Diplomacy and Mediation .....	30
6.3 Alternative Two: Culture and Knowledge Sharing for Diplomacy.....	32
Conclusion .....	34
References.....	36

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of the *Global South* has gained significant prominence in the field of International Relations, emerging as a major actor in global economics and diplomacy. The term has evolved from a mere geographical classification into a broader framework signifying shared historical experiences of colonialism, economic dependency, and, for many states, an ongoing pursuit of autonomy and greater influence within the international system. Over the past decade, the Global South has sought to challenge the existing global order by strengthening its collective economic and political presence on the world stage. Prominent countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa have become leading drivers of this transformation, while organizations like BRICS and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have played pivotal roles in fostering solidarity and cooperation among Global South nations.

Against this backdrop, several states have sought to develop new strategies to deepen their engagement with the Global South. Azerbaijan, strategically located between East and West and characterized as a developing economy, is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this evolving dynamic. Strengthening cooperation with the Global South presents an opportunity for Azerbaijan to diversify its foreign relations, enhance economic resilience, and expand its diplomatic outreach. Through closer collaboration, Azerbaijan could improve its international standing by advancing trade partnerships, attracting investment, and participating in regional frameworks. As an energy-rich state, Azerbaijan also possesses the potential to establish new partnerships with fellow energy-producing nations in the Global South while simultaneously broadening its energy export markets. Moreover, its longstanding association with the NAM provides a valuable platform for deepening engagement within this context.

Despite its growing relevance, the potential for Azerbaijan's engagement with the Global South remains largely unexplored in academic research. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how Azerbaijan can benefit from closer collaboration with Global South actors across economic, political, and diplomatic dimensions. Particular attention will be given to the ways in which such engagement aligns with and reinforces Azerbaijan's broader foreign and domestic policy objectives. The research will examine potential strategies,

opportunities, and challenges inherent in this cooperation and will culminate in a set of policy recommendations. Methodologically, the study draws upon academic literature, scholarly analyses, case studies, and expert interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and implications of Azerbaijan's prospective partnership with the Global South.

## 2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, drawing primarily on secondary sources such as academic literature, scholarly articles, and case studies to examine the significance and role of the Global South in international relations, as well as the ways in which Azerbaijan can benefit from enhanced engagement with it. In addition to the literature review, two case studies – the Gaza–Israel and Ukraine–Russia conflicts – are incorporated to illustrate how the Global South collectively responds to major international crises. These cases provide insight into the strategic priorities and foreign policy orientations of Global South actors, while also offering a framework for analyzing Azerbaijan’s position and approach to such conflicts.

To deepen the analysis and incorporate diverse perspectives, expert interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative methodology. Four semi-structured interviews were held with experts possessing substantial knowledge and practical experience in the areas of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy and its cooperation with the Global South. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling the exploration of new ideas and emerging themes throughout the discussions. While the primary focus of these interviews was to assess Azerbaijan’s strategic potential within the Global South, the conversations also addressed broader issues such as the evolving definition of the Global South, its current agenda, and its expanding influence in global affairs.

The collected interview data were systematically analyzed to identify both recurring and divergent viewpoints among participants, providing a multidimensional understanding of the topic. The insights obtained from these expert perspectives complement and enrich the findings derived from secondary sources, thereby enhancing the analytical depth and overall quality of the study. Ultimately, this research aims to evaluate Azerbaijan’s position and opportunities within the Global South through an integrated approach combining literature review, case study analysis, and expert interviews.

## 3. History

### 3.1 Etymology of Global South

A growing trend in academic discourse reflects the increasing use of the term “*Global South*” (Haug et al., 2021). Accordingly, it is essential to define the concept, trace its historical evolution, and clarify the manner in which it is employed in this study. Throughout history, different powers have dominated the international system and shaped global order – examples include the *Pax Romana* under the Roman Empire, *Pax Britannica* during British hegemony, and the post–World War II bipolar order of the Cold War. Following the Cold War, the emergence of a unipolar system centered on the United States gave rise to the notion of *Pax Americana* (Layne, 2011). Each of these hegemonic eras profoundly influenced international relations and the structural configuration of global politics.

In academic and political discourse, the world has often been conceptualized through binary classifications such as “First” and “Second” Worlds (and, later, the “Third” World), “Core” and “Periphery,” or “East” and “West.” Similarly, the “North–South” divide has served as a framework to capture enduring asymmetries of power (Haug et al., 2021). These dualisms have historically reflected geopolitical hierarchies, shaping global economic, cultural, political, and ideological understandings. Within the discipline of International Relations, such terms became embedded not only as analytical categories but also as lenses through which global affairs were interpreted—typically from the perspective of dominant powers. This epistemological bias can be compared to a heliocentric model, wherein great powers act as “suns” within a political planetary system, and smaller or less influential states revolve around them according to their relative gravitational pull.

As noted by F. M. Özkaleli (personal communication, May 2, 2023), this type of categorization offers a degree of analytical predictability by enabling the conceptualization of global politics within a two-dimensional Cartesian framework. For instance, the “First World” encompassed the developed industrial democracies, while the “Second World” referred to the former Soviet Union and its Communist allies. Such distinctions have facilitated structured

analyses of global alliances, political alignments, and foreign policy behavior. One of the most enduring of these dichotomies is the division between the *Global North* and the *Global South*.

Importantly, *Global South* was not the initial term used to describe the “non-Western” world. As Haug et al. (2021) observe, the human tendency to conceptualize the world through dyadic oppositions – constructing the *Self* and the *Other* – has long underpinned these categorizations. Thus, the concept of the *Global South* represents both a continuation and a transformation of these earlier dual frameworks. Unlike purely geographical or developmental distinctions, however, the term carries deeper historical and political connotations, shaped by legacies of colonialism and the quest for self-determination.

The intellectual origins of the term “*South*” can be traced to Antonio Gramsci, who used it in an essay to describe class disparities between northern and southern Italy (Dados & Connell, 2012). Gramsci associated the capitalist dominance of northern Italy with the subjugation and exploitation of the southern proletariat, framing this dynamic through a Marxist lens. He argued that the capitalist North effectively “colonized” the agrarian South, calling upon northern workers to achieve emancipation not only for themselves but also for their southern counterparts (*The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, 1957/2021).

Although Gramsci’s reflections focused on Italy in 1926, his conceptualization of the *South* as a socio-economic and political periphery laid the groundwork for what would later evolve into the broader notion of the *Global South*. Subsequent scholarship extended this framework to describe structural inequalities in the international system, linking the “South” to underdevelopment and dependency, while identifying the “North” or “core” with capitalist dominance (Dados & Connell, 2012). Gramsci’s warning that southern Italy should not become a base for capitalist counter-revolutionaries presciently foreshadowed the later alignment of so-called “Third World” states during the Cold War – seeking autonomy from both Western and Soviet blocs.

The emergence of the term *Global South* in academic discourse coincided with significant historical milestones that profoundly reshaped the international order. The aftermath of the Second World War marked a turning point in global politics, characterized by the processes of decolonization and the rise of two competing superpowers. Decolonization, driven by the forces of nationalism and the pursuit of sovereignty, fundamentally transformed the international system (Collins, 2015). As a result, by 1965 the number of independent states represented in the United Nations had grown to 117 (Collins, 2015).

In the post-war era, the global order became bipolar, divided between two ideologically opposed blocs. The *First World* – led by the United States and its Western European allies – was defined by liberal democracy and market capitalism, while the *Second World*, under the leadership of the Soviet Union, embraced communism and a centrally planned economy. Both blocs sought to expand their ideological influence and integrate newly independent states into their respective spheres of power. However, many of these newly sovereign countries – collectively referred to as the *Third World* – pursued an alternative path rooted in nationalism and non-alignment. This led to the establishment of the *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)* and the emergence of what Byrne (2015) describes as “*insurgent neutralism*.”

Third World states, united under the NAM, advocated for global military de-escalation and neutrality amid the superpower rivalry. They viewed the Cold War as a direct threat to their sovereignty and national security, fearing that the confrontation between the two blocs could escalate into a nuclear conflict (Byrne, 2015). The founding of the NAM was therefore a historic milestone, as it brought together states with diverse political systems, economic capacities, and colonial legacies under a shared commitment to independence and peace. Over time, the NAM’s focus evolved from primarily political to economic issues, expanding the reach of Third World solidarity across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Byrne, 2015).

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked another critical shift. With the disappearance of the “East–West” divide and the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the binary geopolitical framework was replaced by a more inclusive conceptualization of global inequality. The term *Global South* emerged to encompass a wider range of states from different regions and developmental contexts. According to Haug et al. (2021), the Global South came to represent not only a set of geographical or economic conditions but also a collective political stance advocating for the dismantling of postcolonial hierarchies and resistance to global domination, particularly in the realms of trade and development.

As the Global South concept evolved in the post–Cold War period, the international system was simultaneously being reshaped by liberal globalization. Under the so-called *Washington Consensus*, the United States positioned itself as a provider of “global public goods,” offering developing nations access to the U.S. dollar, military assistance, and cultural influence (Sushentsov, 2024). The English language became the dominant medium of international

communication – even in states with strained relations with the United States, such as Iran and Cuba – further entrenching Western cultural and ideological influence (Sushentsov, 2024).

This dominance extended into the global information sphere, where American popular culture and English-language media became primary sources of imagery and metaphors shaping the Western interpretation of international relations. Many diplomats and political elites from Global South countries, educated and trained in Western institutions, absorbed these perspectives and often reproduced them within their domestic and foreign policies. Moreover, the perceived “protection” offered by the United States and the European Union fostered a sense of dependence and conformity among developing nations. In this environment, expressions of anti-Western sentiment were frequently stigmatized as “uncivilized” or “undemocratic,” reinforcing structural hierarchies within the global order and constraining the political agency of Global South states.

Against this backdrop, the adoption of the term *Global South* over *Third World* marks not just a linguistic shift but a political and ideological repositioning. Moreover, the transition to the “Global South” signifies global reordering, which is rooted in the legacy of colonialism and the desire for emancipation from structural inequality. As Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic noted during the interview, some countries had an opportunity to take a step forward to “emancipate themselves and become subjects of international order as opposed to objects of great power rivalry”. For other states, it is a first-time chance to stand up and have their voices heard.

The formation of the BRICS cooperation framework effectively acknowledges several Global South core countries as a significant actor in world affairs. The West is struggling with handling this “transformation” since its importance is declining for periphery states. The dominance of the Western-led world will continue for a while but with less of a traditional role as a “global guide,” as can be recognized by the change in the international system, which is multipolar and decentralized now.

Big powers do not want to give up on the domination that they had for decades, and they figure out ways to hamper “economic development and state-making projects” of Global South countries by “soft” means of neocolonialism. Western bloc imposes norms and institutions such as “human rights, rule-of-law, ‘NGOisation’ (non-governmental organization) on low- and middle-income countries, are usually against established traditional national norms, promoting neoliberal policies that slightly contribute to growth, mostly leading

to persistent structural underdevelopment (Artner & Yin, 2023). Furthermore, neo-colonialism leads to the use of foreign capital for exploitation rather than genuine development in less developed regions.

Instead of narrowing global inequalities, such investments often widen the economic divide between wealthy and poorer nations (Nkrumah, 1965). Although the Third World appreciates the additional resources provided by the United States and other Western actors for international development, it rejects the underlying rationale tied to economic protectionism and the broad securitization of global issues. Therefore, the Global South is becoming a self-assigned identity determination for some nations that challenge imposed views and resist externally shaped models of development. In doing so, these states craft a new narrative rooted in their own historical and cultural realities. By shaping their own stories, countries influence diplomacy, trade, education, and global standing, as seen in the cases of South Korea and Singapore, which transformed from colonized or war-torn states into influential economic powers through deliberate policies and rebranding that will separate them from Western tradition (Alakija, 2025).

### 3.2 Conflict Response: Gaza and Ukraine

This section of the paper critically examines the global response on the Russian-Ukrainian and Hamas-Israeli, particularly focusing on the perpetual inequalities in representation of these two conflicts in the Global North and the consequences of these interpretations. It aims to assess how these conflicts are interpreted and engaged with by Global South actors, thereby offering insight into their evolving geopolitical positioning within a transforming international order, especially as these conflicts unfold along the strategic demarcation lines inherited from the Cold War's bipolar configuration.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is significant both in terms of its immediate geopolitical significance and, more importantly, in terms of being a milestone towards the establishment of a multipolar world order, particularly due to the fact that it includes a permanent UN Security Council member as a primary aggressor.

The international response to the conflict in Gaza, and the Western states' response more specifically, has been the focal point of Global South criticism, which tends to view it as a representation of persistent structural disparities in global governance. Countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America have vocally condemned Israel's military actions in Gaza (Emanuele, 2024), criticizing what they perceive as the West's double standards on human rights and international law. This highlights a broader concern in the application of human and humanitarian rights. It can be argued therefore that the global system routinely fails to uphold international law in situations involving non-Western populations. South Africa's decision to bring a genocide case against Israel to the International Court of Justice exemplifies this proactive stance, signaling significant legal and diplomatic confrontation. Israel, due in part to its strategic alliance with the United States, is part of a larger pattern where the voices of those in the Global South appear to be devalued and humanitarian principles seem to be applied selectively (Brauman, 2024).

In the view of Global South, the contrast between Western reactions to Ukraine and Gaza shows moral inconsistencies in the world order, where Ukrainian civilians are widely portrayed as victims deserving protection, while Palestinian people are often vilified or rendered invisible in Western discourse (Brauman, 2024). These diverging narratives have contributed to the development of a sense

of moral asymmetry in the global order. Ayman Safadi, the Foreign Minister of Jordan, criticized double standards towards Palestinians, questioning why blocking access to food and medicine for civilians is considered a war crime in Ukraine, but not in Gaza. Strong Western support for Israel was seen as hypocritical by many Global South states that are supporting the Palestinian right to independence and an “end to Israel’s occupation” (Turner, 2024).

China’s engagement in the Gaza war highlights even more the disparity and change in world order. China is positioning itself as a leader in the Global South and Beijing has called for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, while criticizing the United States’ support for Israel (Jallo, 2024). It is evident that by utilizing its diplomatic impact and media platforms, China’s goal is to present itself as a responsible global actor and an alternative to Western leadership, therefore strengthening its ties with Arab and Islamic nations. This strategic alignment not only improves China’s standing in the Global South but also challenges traditional dominance of the West in international affairs. However, in the view of Western experts, China’s support to Russia has also exhibit certain double standards.

Accusations of double standards have intensified within multilateral diplomacy, particularly at the UN, where many Global South countries challenge the West’s conflicting use of global norms depending on geopolitical interests (Gowan, 2024). Conflict between Russia and Ukraine has showcased varying viewpoints among Global South countries; responses were differentiating across Western nations, some developing states found it suitable to ally with a great power - the US - while other states were strictly opposing American and European stances on war. Indeed, while the Global South supported Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the majority of countries declined to take a side in the conflict (Turner, 2024). Dominant powers of the Global South, such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, continued trade relations with Russia, despite the pressure from Western states, saying that the issue should be solved by a ceasefire and in diplomatic ways. States of the Global South have a distrust of the West caused by double standards, which were seen in responses of dominant powers toward the Israel-Gaza war. Azerbaijan was in a challenging position since the tense security situation posed by the neighboring states made the state rethink its foreign policy strategy. According to Vasif Huseynov (2022), despite maintaining a geopolitical balance, Azerbaijan’s political leadership has supported Ukraine by emphasizing the importance of international law, particularly sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the foundation for resolving the conflict.

Global South has been increasing its political power, and it is evident from the reaction to both major conflicts. The reaction given by the Global South can be stemmed from various reasons such as sovereignty violation and economic burden faced by the Global South states.

Sovereignty violations have been a recurring feature of the post-Cold War period, evident in events such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Western-led interventions in Libya and Syria aimed at regime changes, the muted response to and continued energy trade with Russia after 2014 Crimea annexation, and the ongoing conflict in Gaza (Verma, 2024). As a result, many in the Global South feel increasingly alienated and disillusioned with the Western-led liberal order and are calling for its transformation (Alden, 2023).

Lastly, both conflicts' impact on Global South countries – despite their minimal involvement in the conflict - have been profound. The sanctions imposed on Russia, combined with the supply chain disruptions caused by the war, have led to surging energy and commodity prices, as Russia is a key global energy provider and both Russia and Ukraine play vital roles in ensuring food security for many nations in the Global South. Regarding the Gaza conflict, it initially began confrontation between Hamas and Israel, but over time, tensions escalated and spread to other Global South nations, leading to increased insecurity and instability in the region.

Considering all of the points mentioned above, it is evident that the influence of the Global South is increasing. As a result, these countries are becoming more active in the international arena, which contributes to instability in existing world order. Lastly, henceforth, any conflict that arises globally is likely to affect all Global South states, potentially intensifying tensions among global powers.

## 4. Agenda of the Global South

### 4.1 Shifting Agenda

As discussed in the preceding historical overview, the early objectives of many Global South countries were largely unified around the pursuit of neutrality and independence from Western dominance. However, as these states evolved politically and economically – and as the composition of the Global South expanded – the collective agenda has become increasingly diverse. Today, it reflects a wide spectrum of national priorities, shaped by varying historical experiences, regional contexts, and developmental aspirations.

Global South is still an evolving entity, which has not yet achieved a level of cooperation on the level of Global North. To illustrate, states comprising NATO have a common agenda across different spheres of politics, which creates a strong cooperation between the states. During the interview, Prof. Vasif Huseynov mentioned that a global agenda requires the existence of a distinct and unified global entity, which currently does not exist in any organizational or geographic form.

On the other hand, despite having varying agendas, most states continue to face similar issues such as political instability, economic challenges, wars, and climate change – points that were highlighted by the professors throughout the interviews. Additionally, it is vital to examine the current agendas of the states, which are deeply affected by the economic rise of leading countries of the Global South such as China, India and Brazil, and which contribute to consolidation of the Global South. Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic used the term the doctrine of sovereign equality, which helps indicate the current agenda of claiming an equal status in the international community (United Nations, 1945). Moreover, Damjan Krnjevic--Miskovic accentuated the doctrine of sovereign equality as a fiction, which will never be achieved to its full potential; however, current actions of the Global South reflect their demand from the Global North to view the Global South as equal players of the global politics.

On the other hand, another Anar Valiyev, argued that the current agenda of the Global South is to gain as much representation as possible in the already Western-dominated political landscape. Contrary to the earlier notion of equal footing between North and South, Anar Valiyev claims that many countries,

particularly those rich in natural resources primarily seek greater global presence in order to secure more economic advantages.

Furthermore, it is essential to detect the current turbulency in global politics, which is caused by the transformation in the world order. In order to evaluate the current situation in global politics, Kenneth Waltz's neorealist theory can be used. According to Kenneth Waltz, the international system has an anarchic structure, which compels the states to act in their interest to ensure survival (Waltz, 1979). In the anarchic structure, everything is based on the distribution of power, which shapes the behavior of the states (Waltz, 1979). States can increase their relative power, which may lead them to become revisionist states that seek to improve their position in the international system (Waltz, 1979). The current rise of the Global South states - as individual actors or as a bloc - can be viewed through this perspective, as it contributes to instability by narrowing the power gap between the status quo powers. In addition, the particular rise of states such as China and India may cause a Thucydides Trap. According to Allison (2017), Thucydides Trap interprets the tension between the rising state (revisionist state) and the established state (status quo state), which can lead to conflict due to fear and change in the balance of power. To illustrate, currently, there is a trade war between the US and China, which can be considered as tension in their relationship. All of this can be referred to as a transformation in the world order, driven by the rise in the relative power of Global South states. In addition, transformation in the world order was mentioned by Azer Babayev during the interviews as "the rules of the game are changing".

On the other hand, although a transformation in the global order is underway, it has not yet been universally established in the way it historically was by Western states. According to the theory of hegemonic stability, global superpowers establish universal institutions that reflect their hegemonic power, which is generally accepted by the rest of the world (Keohane, as cited in Cox, 1981). In particular, Pax Americana which appeared after the Second World War, established several international institutions that created a stable world order (Cox, 1981). One of the universal institutions created in the past that continues to reflect the power of the Global North is the United Nations. In addition, in the course of the interview, Damjan Krnjevic--Miskovic, mentioned a similar idea. Moreover, it was pointed out that there are institutions created by the Global South; however, they do not possess universality that would mirror the new changing global order. Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic recognized regional and sub-regional groupings that are rising in importance and reflect new

global realities; however, he acknowledged that they lack sufficient strength and, therefore, are not universal. He noted that the Global South needs power to compel the Global North to go along with the new world order and the ideologies that the Global South proposes. All things considered, Global South is on a path toward transforming the global order, which is currently high on its agenda. Whether the Global South will be able to produce a powerful reflection of change – either through the creation of universal institutions or the spread of its ideology – remains in question.

## 4.2: Economic Challenges of Global South

As discussed previously, there is still no clear consensus in academia regarding the exact definition of the Global South, or which countries fall under this umbrella term. This lack of clarity poses challenges when addressing the shared economic pressures faced by nations. Nevertheless, expert interviews have revealed insightful information on key economic challenges that Global South countries should consider in order to bridge the gap between Global South and Global North.

Since Donald Trump's inauguration for his second term in January, the world has become embroiled in a major trade war between two of the largest economies and global political powers – the United States and China. Aiming to correct the US trade deficit, Donald Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, which have reached 145% by May, as well as on imports from several other countries, some of which are considered part of the Global South (BBC News, 2025). As tensions with China continue unabated, many nations across the globe, especially countries from the Global South, are now feeling the negative impacts of this escalating trade conflict. One of the experts, Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic identified the unpredictability of U.S. tariffs which are “*changing every second day*” as a serious economic obstacle since it negatively affects their international trade which reduces their economic growth.

Similarly, Vasif Huseynov underlines the difficult geopolitical choices facing Global South by referring to the current emerging polarized world order resulting from the international trade war between the economic giants – the United States and China. Global South countries need to establish economic relations with these two giants in order to generate economic revenue to improve the level of prosperity, thus closing the gap between Global North and Global South. However, due to this international trade war these countries are facing either-or situation which contributes to the widening of the gap between Global North and South contrary to the strategic autonomy policy of Non-Alignment.

Apart from the ongoing global trade war, the other significant economic problem for Global South countries is the catastrophic impact of climate change on their economies. The sources of the ongoing climate crisis are traceable to the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, where rushed industrialization

and mass consumption of fossil fuels began causing severe environmental harm. While the harm has, to a large extent, been caused by Global North nations, the Global South bears the brunt of the harm. In this regard, Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic argues that Global South countries through various COP meetings express their concerns about bearing the dire consequences of the damaged climate, which is mostly done by the developed Global North states. Global South demands Global North states not to compensate them for the damage they have inflicted with only funds. According to Damjan Krnjevic-Miskovic, these countries require to be a part of new global economy, rather than just being passive funds recipients. This sentiment reflects the Global South's demand to cooperate with, and be regarded with legitimacy by, the Global North.

When we talk about the economic situation of the Global South, we also have to mention the influence and the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The World Trade Organization has been criticized for perpetuating imbalances that disproportionately benefit developed countries at the expense of developing nations. One of the clearest examples is around agricultural subsidies, which the European Union (particularly France) and the United States have heavily relied upon to support their domestic farming sectors. Despite the WTO's aim of liberalizing global trade, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), established during the Uruguay Round (1986–1994), institutionalized a system that allowed developed nations to maintain high levels of domestic support while pressuring developing countries to open their markets (Clapp, 2006). These subsidies, especially the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), have led to overproduction and the dumping of surplus products into developing countries at prices below market value (McMichael, 2009). Non-aligned states have criticized this double standard: developed nations advocate for free trade principles but selectively shield their sectors through protectionist policies.

The Group of 77 (G77) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have consistently advocated for the elimination of trade-distorting subsidies (Group of 77 and China, 2001). In the 18th Mid-Term Ministerial Meeting of NAM, it was agreed that “...it is important to uphold a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system...” for the purpose of harnessing the full potential of global trade and minimizing detrimental impacts on developing nation (Non-Aligned Movement, 2018, p. 18).

## 5. Azerbaijan's Agenda and Cooperation Benefits

### 5.1 Azerbaijan's Emerging Global South Agenda

Considering all of the mentioned history and definitions, it is essential to understand the stance of Azerbaijan in the historical context and 'Global South'. The Sovietization of Azerbaijan refers to the political history of the occupation of the sovereign Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by Soviet Russia on April 28, 1920, followed by the establishment of Soviet bureaucratic and administrative control in the country (Hasanli, 2017). This system remained in place until Azerbaijan regained its independence on October 18, 1991. This historical event led to Azerbaijan becoming classified as a "Second" World country, alongside other Soviet and Communist states.

As it declared independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan was left to inherit a challenging foreign policy setting, which depended heavily on its geopolitically significant position, that is, a blessing and a curse (Schaffer, 2012). As a landlocked nation, Azerbaijan is geographically situated between 3 regional giants – Russia, Türkiye, and Iran. Moreover, its geographical position in the South Caucasus places it at the crossroads of the geopolitical interests of the United States and Russia, particularly with its rich energy resources (Schaffer, 2012).

Another geopolitical issue for Azerbaijan is presented by its western neighbor, Armenia. Armenia's occupation of the Karabakh region and the surrounding districts of Azerbaijan in early 1990s resulted in Azerbaijan losing effectively twenty percent of its internationally recognized territory, along with approximately a million Azerbaijanis who had been displaced as refugees or as internally displaced persons. These two key factors – the complexities of geopolitical dynamics and shifting global power structures, along with the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict – have played a crucial role in shaping Azerbaijan's foreign policy approach (Schaffer, 2012).

Since gaining independence, Azerbaijan has consistently emphasized its commitment to maintaining balanced relations with both global and regional powers while safeguarding its full sovereignty, refusing to become a de-facto vassal state of any nation. During the presidencies of Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan adopted a more comprehensive and successful foreign policy, which aimed at becoming the status quo power in the South Caucasus region.

As outlined in the National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “the Republic of Azerbaijan pursues a multidimensional, balanced foreign policy and seeks to establish it with all countries”. Since Heydar Aliyev’s presidency, Azerbaijan has strategically engaged in multiple alliances and partnerships, even those with contrasting geopolitical orientations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Azerbaijan’s foreign policy has evolved through multiple phases, shaped by a combination of internal priorities and external influences. Among the most significant factors shaping this evolution has been the protracted and unresolved nature of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group – established in 1992 and co-chaired by Russia, France, and the United States – was tasked with facilitating a peaceful settlement of the dispute. However, despite its international legitimacy and extended mediation efforts, the Minsk Group proved largely ineffective in achieving tangible progress. Its failure stemmed from the divergent interests of the co-chair countries, both in relation to the conflict itself and to the broader geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus region.

In this context, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy was primarily driven by its determination to restore territorial integrity. Baku anticipated that European countries would assume an active and responsible role in facilitating the resolution of the conflict with Armenia. As noted by Azer Babayev during the interview, Azerbaijan initially aspired to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community. However, recognizing the geopolitical risks and potential repercussions of such a move, Azerbaijan ultimately adopted a more cautious and pragmatic approach. Instead of aligning exclusively with any single power bloc, it pursued a non-aligned foreign policy designed to preserve strategic flexibility and maintain balanced relations with all major global actors.

The liberation of Karabakh in 2020, followed by the full restoration of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity in 2023, represented a pivotal moment in the country’s national self-conception and catalyzed a significant transformation in its foreign policy. These developments strategically positioned Azerbaijan within the evolving multipolar world order, enabling it to deepen engagement with the Global South. The restoration of territorial integrity conferred tangible geopolitical leverage, which has facilitated and accelerated Azerbaijan’s outreach to Global South countries.

Another important consequence of regaining full territorial control was Azerbaijan's emergence as a new status quo power in the South Caucasus. Historically, the country had pursued an agenda aimed at overturning the post-First Karabakh War status quo. Azerbaijan recognizes that sustaining regional stability, order, and prosperity requires a balanced approach that does not rely exclusively on either the Global North or the Global South. Consequently, Baku has adopted a multi-vector, autonomous foreign policy framework, emphasizing diversification, strategic flexibility, and pragmatic engagement with multiple global actors.

These developments help explain the timing of Azerbaijan's evolving Global South agenda, illustrating why the country is now actively pursuing enhanced cooperation with Global South partners, rather than having done so in earlier periods. The current geopolitical environment, combined with Azerbaijan's strengthened regional position, creates conditions conducive to a more assertive and strategically calibrated engagement with the Global South.

Azerbaijan's initial engagement with the Global South is exemplified by its accession to the *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)* in 2011, a move that also reflected a broader orientation toward an independent foreign policy. As noted earlier, NAM was established to promote the neutrality of "Third World" states, offering an alternative to alignment with either of the major Cold War blocs. Azer Babayev, in an interview, highlighted that Azerbaijan's decision to join NAM constituted a clear declaration of neutrality. Despite its post-Soviet background – which might conventionally associate the country with the so-called "Second World" – Azerbaijan's accession signaled a deliberate rejection of colonial legacies and a commitment to assert an autonomous path in international relations.

Moreover, Azerbaijan has acted as a revitalizer of the NAM as an institution during its chairmanship and increased NAM's influence in the international arena (Huseynov, 2023). A key priority in Azerbaijan's agenda during its NAM chairmanship was to unite member states and amplify the Movement's voice in the international arena by establishing parliamentary and youth networks (Huseynov, 2023). In addition, Azerbaijan has advocated for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), demanding the allocation of one permanent seat to the NAM president and another seat for the African continent to better reflect the modern geopolitical realities (Huseynov, 2023). Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic - a period that demanded decisive

leadership and international cooperation to address its widespread impact. Under Azerbaijan's leadership, NAM played a prominent role in challenging the "vaccine nationalism" of wealthier nations and successfully adopted two resolutions aimed at ensuring equitable and universal access to vaccines across all countries. Furthermore, in the post-pandemic phase, Azerbaijan reaffirmed its dedication to the Global South by initiating two Global Calls to support the recovery efforts of African nations and Small Island Developing States. As a demonstration of this commitment, Azerbaijan contributed \$1 million as the first donor, encouraging Global North countries to follow suit (Huseynov, 2023).

After establishing itself as a reliable partner to NAM member states, Azerbaijan took on the role of mediator between Global North and South by hosting the United Nations Climate Conference (COP29). Azerbaijan highlighted concerns over the inadequacy of current climate finance targets in meeting the needs of Global South countries during COP29. Member states advocated for a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) that surpasses the \$100 billion target set in 2009, stressing the importance of predictable and sufficient funding primarily from Global North to support adaptation, mitigation, and efforts to address loss and damage. To illustrate, President Ilham Aliyev raised concerns about French Polynesia's environmental damage that was caused by the nuclear tests conducted under French colonial rule, reinforcing the Global South's demand for financial support from the Global North to address the harm they have caused (*Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Leaders' Summit of the Small Islands Developing States on Climate Change* » *Official Web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic*, n.d.).

Another crucial event that acknowledges the role of Azerbaijan as a mediator between Global North and South is the chairmanship of the Global South NGO Platform by Azerbaijan (AzeMedia, 2025). Founding of the Global South NGO Platform is designed to deepen South-to-South cooperation and includes representatives from 116 states, covering 80% of the world's population (*"Solidarity in Action: Strengthening Global South NGOs for a New and Fair World" Forum Kicks off in Baku*, n.d.). The Platform is intended to strengthen communication among Global South, enhance solidarity and cooperation between the communities, build social capital, promote constructive dialogue, and through collaboration, amplify the Global South's presence in the emerging world order (*"Solidarity in Action: Strengthening Global South NGOs for a New and Fair World" Forum Kicks off in Baku*, n.d.).

Furthermore, Azerbaijan has begun strengthening its diplomatic and economic relations with China – the giant power in the Global South – signaling its deeper integration into the Global South. China-Azerbaijan relations have grown closer following the establishment of strategic partnership between the two countries (July 2024) aimed at enhancing economic and strategic cooperation. In the final analysis, all of these aforementioned developments serve as Azerbaijan’s increasingly pronounced orientation toward the Global South in its foreign policy strategy.

## 5.2 Cooperation Benefits

Improved cooperation with Global South offers Azerbaijan multiple benefits. One of the experts connected the increased engagement with Global South countries with improved diplomatic reach and international legitimacy. The main idea behind the increased diplomatic reach is the usefulness of this cooperation in creating diplomatic ties with countries that are geographically distant but strategically essential to Azerbaijan. As Vasif Huseynov mentioned in the interview, “We don’t have regular contacts with these countries, but we need them, particularly in international platforms”. Strengthened relationships lead to the establishment of embassies, and the signing of agreements or treaties for closer ties benefiting both economically and diplomatic way. Additionally, creating new alliances will contribute to Azerbaijan achieving a more diverse and independent foreign policy without relying on its traditional partners.

By reaching out to distant countries, Azerbaijan will be able to access larger markets with potentially better suppliers of goods that are unavailable in the local market. It is crucial to point out that this type of engagement can also increase the country’s diplomatic profile, improving the country’s image and credibility on the international arena. A recent example of this can be the elimination of the requirement for visas for Azerbaijani and Chinese citizens. This new visa-free regime agreement will lead to deeper cooperation between the two countries. In a recent press conference, Guo Jiakun mentioned that “China and Azerbaijan are good friends treating each other with sincerity and trust, and good partners who see each other as equals and pursue mutual benefit” (Guo, 2025). Reflecting on this statement, it is evident how the improved diplomatic ties create a mutual benefit for both parties.

The second point mentioned by the expert is about the gained international legitimacy and recognition. Greater collaboration leads to stronger credibility and recognition on the world stage resulting in Azerbaijan gaining more support and trust from the countries in international meetings and platforms. This also increases the likelihood of getting invited to high-level negotiations and access to decision-making tables. For the 2012-2013 term, Azerbaijan was elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Just before the elections, Azerbaijan decided to become a member of the NAM, which created speculations that this strategic move led to Azerbaijan getting big support in the elections from Global South countries (Jafarova, 2021).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov before the elections said, “I would like to assure you that NAM will benefit from its strengthened presence in the Security Council provided by Azerbaijan’s membership in this authoritative UN body.”(Mammadyarov, 2011). It is worth noting that Azerbaijan held the chairmanship of the NAM during the 2019-2023 period, throughout which it created closer ties with Global South countries that resulted in its improved international image.

According to Anar Valiyev, Azerbaijan can play the role of the crossroad of transportation between Global South and Global North. However, for this project to work it is better if both Global North and Global South consider Azerbaijan not as an ally, but as a neutral country to cooperate. In fact, Azerbaijan’s reputation as a neutral country becomes stronger and it increases the likelihood of the country playing the role of transit country. The favored geopolitical location of playing a role in the Middle Corridor, The North-South Corridor, the Lapis Lazuli route, the TRACECA route, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) makes Azerbaijan an ideal candidate for strategic connector position, proving its high potential as a stable and efficient transit hub. Bridging the Global South to Global North will benefit Azerbaijan in multiple ways, including increasing its power and influence in the region, and boosting the size of the trade and foreign investment while becoming one of the key stakeholders in redefining the linkages between Asia and Europe.

In recent years, Azerbaijan has demonstrated an active commitment to modernizing its transport infrastructure and expanding partnerships to strengthen its position as a key transit hub. Initiatives such as the “*Action Plan for 2024–2026 on Increasing the Transit Potential of International Transport Corridors Passing Through the Territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan*” and the forthcoming *State Program for 2025–2030* exemplify the country’s strategic efforts to enhance Baku’s transport infrastructure and maximize its transit potential (Abdul, 2025).

Moreover, Azerbaijan’s consistent participation in international platforms such as the United Nations *Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia* (SPECA), the *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation* (CAREC) Program, the *Global Baku Forum*, the *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)* Summits, and TRACECA conferences, as well as its membership in BRICS, NAM, and partnership with the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)*, underscores its growing role in global transportation and connectivity systems. These multilateral engagements provide opportunities for Azerbaijan to promote

digital innovations—most notably through the development of *digital transport corridors*—aimed at reducing trade bottlenecks and optimizing cross-border logistics (Abdul, 2025).

By capitalizing on its strategic geopolitical location and maintaining a focused policy on transport modernization and multilateral cooperation, Azerbaijan is well-positioned to reinforce and further elevate its role as a pivotal crossroads between the Global North and the Global South.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

### 6.1 Recommended Policy: Economic Integration with the Global South

Goal: Maximize Azerbaijan's economic footprint in the Global South and reduce dependency on Western markets

Azerbaijan's current economic structure relies heavily on traditional energy markets and a narrow set of exports, particularly from Europe. This dependency leaves Azerbaijan vulnerable to price shocks, external volatility, and geopolitical tensions. Considering multiple actors in the Global South are increasing in power, a corridor of opportunities opens for Azerbaijan to diversify its economy through expanding ties with states such as Brazil, Indonesia, and Egypt. These countries are not only large markets, but also influential within multiple international organizations like BRICS, G20, and the African Union, which could be a path for a larger network of trade.

- I. Sign Bilateral Economic Framework Agreements with Brazil, Egypt, and Indonesia, focusing on tariff reduction for key goods: agriculture, petrochemicals, information and communication technology (ICT);
- II. Establish Regional Trade Missions in partner countries for enhanced on-the-ground facilitation for Azerbaijani companies, as well as coordination with local companies, export councils, and SME sectors in those countries;
- III. Investment Partnerships, such as the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ) can be leveraged to co-invest in sectors like logistics, infrastructure, and green energy.

#### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Broader and more resilient export destinations for Azerbaijani goods;
- Increased Foreign Direct Investment inflow and outflow with long-term returns;
- Enhanced energy diplomacy through joint ventures in renewable energy, oil and gas;
- Political goodwill with leaders of the Global South who share Azerbaijan's neutral position

**Stakeholders:**

*Domestic:* Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economics, SOFAZ, AZPROMO

*External:* WTO Observers, National Development banks, and relevant ministries of partner states.

## 6.2 Alternative One: Diplomacy and Mediation

**Goal:** Establish Azerbaijan as a hub for negotiations and peace by leveraging neutrality and diplomacy to enhance its international influence.

As a secular, non-aligned state with robust bilateral relations across both Eastern and Western spheres, Azerbaijan is uniquely positioned to serve as a credible actor in international mediation and diplomacy. This policy approach capitalizes on Azerbaijan's capacity to facilitate conflict resolution without becoming directly entangled in highly politicized disputes. Its prior leadership roles within the *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)* and the *Conferences of the Parties (COP29)* provide additional political legitimacy to elevate its profile in global affairs. By refraining from formal alignment with any single bloc, Azerbaijan can act as a bridge in multipolar conflicts while simultaneously enhancing its soft power and global reputation. Furthermore, growing frustrations among Global South countries regarding inequities in global trade governance present an opportunity for Azerbaijan to lead reform-oriented dialogues within NAM.

### **Strategic Actions:**

- 1. Establish a Baku Mediation and Dialogue Platform:** Focused on providing research, real-time information, pre-negotiation facilitation, and confidence-building services. The platform would also compile data on successes and limitations to inform continuous improvement.
- 2. Advocate for Tariff and Structural Reforms under NAM:** Promote inclusivity, transparency, and improved market access conditions between Azerbaijan and NAM member states, positioning Azerbaijan as a leader in multilateral trade reform.
- 3. Initiate a Baku Ministerial Meeting on South-South Cooperation:** Invite states such as South Africa, Brazil, and Egypt to sponsor research papers and joint reform initiatives, fostering collaborative policy development.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Institutionalization of Azerbaijan's neutrality as an active mediation capacity;

- Enhanced diplomatic visibility across African, Asian, and Latin American networks;
- Leadership in multilateral trade reform initiatives.

**Stakeholders:**

- **Domestic:** Presidential Administration; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ADA University, AIR Center.
- **International:** African Union (AU), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), UN Mediation Support Unit, G77, NAM Secretariat, WTO South Group countries.

**Limitations:**

1. **Resource Demands:** Mediating multiple conflicts and initiating international reforms may require substantial and sustained resources from Azerbaijan's diplomatic corps;
2. **Delayed Returns:** While this strategy aims for long-term impact, implementation and tangible outcomes are likely to take considerable time.

### 6.3 Alternative Two: Culture and Knowledge Sharing for Diplomacy

Goal: Expand Azerbaijan's global influence by institutionalizing its cultural outreach and academic presence, especially in topics related to the Global South, to develop long-term friendships, trust, and a strong source of shared knowledge.

In a multipolar world, where soft power increasingly shapes diplomatic outcomes, Azerbaijan must move beyond traditional foreign policy and invest in cultural and intellectual visibility. Current efforts exist, but they are fragmented and need strategic planning. Emerging powers like Türkiye, South Korea, and China have successfully built global influence through structured knowledge diplomacy — offering scholarships, promoting their languages and histories, and establishing cultural centers abroad. Azerbaijan, with its rich cultural heritage and growing academic capacity is well positioned to do the same.

- I. Expand Scholarships and Academic Exchange Programs, especially among higher education levels, such as Master's students and PhD scholars, as they bring the biggest contribution to academia.
- II. Strengthen cultural diplomacy through hosting Azerbaijani cultural festivals, and exhibitions of Azerbaijani artists in partner countries and vice versa. In addition, promote partnerships with organizations like UNESCO and ISESCO to promote Azerbaijani culture on global platforms;
- III. Extend diplomatic presence in underserved regions where Azerbaijan currently lacks representation by opening new embassies and consulates. Moreover, assigning cultural attaches to existing Azerbaijan embassies is a way to coordinate and promote cultural diplomacy activities.

#### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Enhanced soft power with more cohesive and expansive cultural diplomacy that will elevate Azerbaijan's international profile and foster positive perception globally;
- Strengthen bilateral relations via increased academic exchange, leading to broader cooperation in other sectors;
- Diversified global engagement will expand diplomatic presence and

enable Azerbaijan to participate more effectively with a wider array of international partners.

**Stakeholders:**

*Domestic:* Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Science and Education, ADA University, other Azerbaijani Universities, AIR Center;

*International:* Partner universities and cultural organizations in target countries, international bodies like UNESCO and ISESCO.

**Limitations:**

1. The goals while viable, require large financial and human resources that may differ in capacity based on stakeholders and partners, being especially limited at the beginning stages;
2. Difficulty in quantifying the success of cultural diplomacy initiatives because outcomes are often intangible, long-term, and indirect.

## Conclusion

The concept of the *Global South* continues to evolve within today's increasingly multipolar international system. The term encompasses a wide spectrum of ideas – ranging from historical experiences of colonialism and economic inequality to ongoing challenges of structural discrimination. Despite its origins in post-colonial discourse, the Global South has emerged as a significant actor in shaping the contemporary international order and global economy. It offers an alternative to the Western-led system, distinguished by the absence of ideological preconditions for participation. Major powers such as China and Brazil serve as leading drivers of this transformation, making the Global South an increasingly attractive platform for other nations seeking equitable global engagement.

For a geopolitically strategic country like Azerbaijan, understanding and formulating an effective policy towards the Global South is of growing importance. By doing so, Azerbaijan can enhance its diplomatic and economic influence while diversifying its global partnerships beyond traditional Western frameworks.

Expert interviews conducted for this research provided insight into the complex and evolving nature of the Global South's identity, revealing diverse yet converging perspectives on its global role and influence. The analysis also explored Azerbaijan's engagement with the Global South to date, emphasizing the potential benefits of deepening these relations. Such benefits include enhanced diplomatic reach, improved international legitimacy, greater economic diversification, and a strengthened position as a critical transportation link between the Global North and the Global South.

Given Azerbaijan's strategic goal of economic diversification and reduced dependency on Western markets, this paper proposes a pragmatic approach focused on actionable economic cooperation with Global South countries. Instead of pursuing long-term, resource-intensive strategies, Azerbaijan should prioritize direct engagement mechanisms such as bilateral trade agreements, the establishment of trade missions, and the strategic use of funds like the *State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ)*. These steps would enable Azerbaijan to expand its economic footprint across emerging markets while reinforcing its role as a bridge between diverse regions.

In conclusion, the strengthening of Azerbaijan's ties with the Global South

represents both a strategic necessity and an opportunity. As global power relations continue to shift, closer alignment with the Global South can enhance Azerbaijan's diplomatic flexibility, economic resilience, and contribution to a more balanced and inclusive world order. Nonetheless, it remains essential to recognize and address the potential challenges associated with these policy directions, ensuring that engagement with the Global South advances Azerbaijan's long-term national interests while upholding its strategic autonomy.

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# GLOBAL SOUTH: HOW AZERBAIJAN CAN BENEFIT

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**Project Supervisor:** Farid Shafiyev, Chairman of the AIR Center  
**Authors:** Ayan Garayeva, Dzhamala Gashimova, Elchin Abbasov,  
Fatima Mammadova, Laman Novruzzada – ADA University

BAKU 2025





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