



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BEYNÖLXALQ MÜNASİBƏTLƏRİN TƏHLİLİ MƏRKƏZİ

JULY-2024

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Key Takeaways from Q&A session with President Ilham Aliyev at the Shusha Global Media Forum

The second Shusha Global Media Forum, themed “Unmasking False Narratives: Confronting Disinformation,” commenced on July 20. President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan attended the event and responded to questions. At the second Shusha Global Media Forum, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan offered candid insights into Azerbaijan’s stance on international relations, media representation, and global affairs. In a wide-ranging Q&A session, President Ilham Aliyev addressed wide-ranging topics.

The future of Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process

At the second Shusha Global Media Forum President Ilham Aliyev addressed the ongoing complexities surrounding the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, highlighting the challenges and conditions necessary for a sustainable peace agreement.

President Ilham Aliyev began by reflecting on the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, which ended in November 2020, restoring Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. President Ilham Aliyev recalled that, despite the war’s conclusion, there was an initial vacuum in the peace process. The Minsk Group, a trilateral mediation effort involving France, Russia, and the United States, had become largely irrelevant as Azerbaijan had already achieved most of the conflict’s resolution through its own efforts. Realizing that the conflict’s resolution was incomplete, President Ilham Aliyev proposed initiating work on a peace agreement. This proposal was publicly announced by Azerbaijan, but it was met with hesitation from Armenia.

Over time, Azerbaijan outlined five fundamental principles based on international law as the foundation for the peace agreement. However, negotiations faced significant delays due to Armenia’s insistence on including the issue of Karabakh in the agreement, which Azerbaijan firmly opposed. For Baku, this was an internal matter that should not be part of bilateral

negotiations. The stalemate persisted until Azerbaijan restored its sovereignty over the region in September 2023, effectively removing the disputed issue from the negotiation table.

Following this, real progress in the negotiations began only in December 2023. Since then, negotiations have been limited to meetings between the foreign ministers of both countries. According to President Ilham Aliyev, about 80 to 90 percent of the text of the peace agreement has been agreed upon. However, two critical issues remain unresolved.

The first issue is Armenia’s reluctance to agree to a joint application with Azerbaijan to dissolve the Minsk Group within the OSCE framework. The Minsk Group has become obsolete, particularly because the co-chairing countries are now in conflict with each other, and France has lost its credibility as a mediator. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that Armenia’s unwillingness to dissolve the Minsk Group as a potential indication that it still harbors territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

The second issue is a required change in the Armenian Constitution. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the Armenian Constitution still contains references to the Declaration of Independence, which includes a clause suggesting the unification of the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh” with Armenia. As long as this clause remains a peace agreement is impossible, as the Constitution is the highest legal authority in Armenia and could override any international treaty in the future. This, President Ilham Aliyev underscored, is not an attempt to interfere in Armenia’s internal affairs but a necessary condition for ensuring that the peace agreement is genuine and lasting.

President Ilham Aliyev also expressed concern about recent developments in the peace process. The President noted that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had refused to meet with him in the United Kingdom, despite a proposal from the UK government to facilitate such a meeting. This refusal raises questions about Armenia’s

commitment to the peace process and the sincerity of its intentions.

In conclusion, while significant progress has been made in the negotiations, President Ilham Aliyev remains cautious about the future. President Ilham Aliyev stressed that the two unresolved issues—the dissolution of the Minsk Group and the amendment of the Armenian Constitution—are critical to achieving a durable peace agreement. The path to peace, as President Ilham Aliyev outlined, requires not just diplomatic engagement but also legal and constitutional changes that reflect a genuine commitment to resolving the long-standing conflict.

Countering disinformation and Western media biases

At the second Shusha Global Media Forum, President Ilham Aliyev also shed light on a critical issue facing not just Azerbaijan, but the global community at large: the pervasive challenge of disinformation and false narratives in media. For Azerbaijan, a country that has grappled with conflict and occupation for nearly three decades, the battle against misinformation has been particularly arduous. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out sobering reality: sometimes, accurate portrayals of Azerbaijan in international media come as a surprise, so entrenched are the false narratives that have long clouded the nation's image. The roots of this problem run deep. Years of conflict with Armenia mobilized diaspora structures and pro-Armenian politicians to paint Azerbaijan in a distorted light. This campaign of misinformation didn't just tarnish reputations; it had tangible consequences, hampering business potential, deterring investment, and even leading to sanctions against Azerbaijan - a country that was, in fact, the victim of aggression and ethnic cleansing.

President Ilham Aliyev recounted how Azerbaijan, despite facing a humanitarian crisis and the deportation of a million people, found itself sanctioned by the United States in 1992 due to the influence of the Armenian lobby. This stark example underscores the real-world impact of

media manipulation and politically motivated decision-making.

However, Azerbaijan's response to this challenge also offers a lesson in resilience and pragmatism. Rather than simply decrying the unfairness of their portrayal, the country has adopted a strategy of openness and transparency. By inviting international journalists and delegates to witness firsthand the realities on the ground, Azerbaijan aimed to bridge the gap between perception and reality.

The President's observations about the current media landscape highlight that even the world's most powerful nations are not immune to the challenges of media bias and misinformation. As we grapple with the complexities of the modern information age, Azerbaijan's experience serves as a poignant reminder of the media's power to shape narratives and influence global perceptions. It underscores the critical need for media literacy, fact-checking, and a commitment to objective reporting.

In an era where the lines between fact and fiction are increasingly blurred, Azerbaijan's path through the quagmire of media misrepresentation offers valuable insights. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of a more responsible and objective media. Only through such efforts can we hope to build a world where truth prevails over manipulation, and where nations are judged not by the narratives woven about them, but by the realities they embody.

Addressing the persistent challenge of misinformation about Azerbaijan in Western media, President Ilham Aliyev described a journey from initial surprise to current indifference. "At this stage, we are absolutely indifferent," President Ilham Aliyev said, emphasizing that Azerbaijan's focus remains on serving its people rather than catering to external perceptions.

The President extended an invitation to Western media and decision-makers to visit Azerbaijan, believing that firsthand experience would lead to better understanding. "The more people from your part of the world come here and see, I think the

better the understanding of our country will be," President Ilham Aliyev stated, highlighting the impact of media perceptions on international relations. President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan is a nation committed to charting its own course while remaining open to balanced international engagement. It underscored a pragmatic approach to foreign relations, prioritizing national interests while navigating complex global dynamic.

Strategic vision for the South Caucasus

President Ilham Aliyev proudly spoke of Azerbaijan's independent foreign policy path post-Soviet era. "We've chosen the way of independence, de facto and de jure," the President declared, pointing out that this approach protected Azerbaijan from becoming a "satellite, proxy, or vassal" to larger powers. This strategy, while challenging, has allowed Azerbaijan to focus on self-sufficiency and strategic partnerships. President Ilham Aliyev also shared his vision for the country's future and the broader South Caucasus region. Addressing a question about Azerbaijan's national development concept, President Ilham Aliyev offered insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape and the challenges of forging a new national identity post-conflict. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need for a new national concept following Azerbaijan's full restoration of territorial integrity in September of the previous year. The President cautioned against complacency and the temptation to continuously exploit past victories, stating, "We must move forward." The President called for a collective effort in defining this new concept, acknowledging that it should emerge from public debate and reflect the current realities both within Azerbaijan and globally.

Crucially, President Ilham Aliyev contextualized this national re-envisioning within the dramatically changed geopolitical landscape. The President noted significant shifts not only in Azerbaijan but across the South Caucasus region, with each country undergoing "serious political and foreign policy transformations." This evolving regional dynamic, the President suggested, necessitates

careful analysis and comprehension to formulate a vision for the future South Caucasus.

While acknowledging the ideal of a peaceful, conflict-free South Caucasus, President Ilham Aliyev remained pragmatic about the challenges ahead. Expressing regret that the countries of the South Caucasus, unlike the Baltic states, had not been able to achieve greater cooperation in the past, President Ilham Aliyev stated, "[b]ut there is an opportunity now. But in order to take it, again, we need to analyze everything correctly here in Azerbaijan and see all the way to the end how these foreign policy modifications in Georgia and Armenia will conclude, and then we need to take more effective steps. In any case, we believe that long-term peace is possible and, of course, preferable."

President Ilham Aliyev's vision for Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus balances aspirational goals with a realistic assessment of current geopolitical realities, underscoring the need for careful analysis and strategic patience in navigating the path forward. As Azerbaijan continues to define its role in the changing landscape of the South Caucasus, President Ilham Aliyev's perspective offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in fostering regional cooperation and sustainable peace.

Azerbaijan's role in the global energy landscape

President Ilham Aliyev also addressed questions regarding Azerbaijan's role in the global energy landscape. As the host of the upcoming COP29, President Ilham Aliyev provided insight into Azerbaijan's strategy of balancing traditional fossil fuel production with a growing commitment to renewable energy.

President Ilham Aliyev began by emphasizing Azerbaijan's significant advancements in renewable energy. Since the last meeting, Azerbaijan has inaugurated several renewable energy projects, including solar and wind power stations with capacities ranging from 230 to 240 megawatts. Additionally, groundbreaking ceremonies for new projects, such as a one-gigawatt solar and wind power complex, have

taken place. The President highlighted Azerbaijan's vast potential in renewable energy, noting that the country's offshore wind power potential is estimated at 157 gigawatts, while onshore solar and wind capacity is 27 gigawatts.

Azerbaijan is also investing in innovative energy storage solutions, addressing one of the key challenges associated with renewable energy. The country has partnered with ACWA Power to develop a storage facility capable of holding 200 gigawatts of energy, which will help stabilize the grid and save natural gas for export to Europe.

Despite these advancements, President Ilham Aliyev expressed frustration with the mixed signals from European partners. On one hand, Europe has requested increased natural gas supplies from Azerbaijan due to current shortages. On the other hand, European financial institutions like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have largely stopped financing fossil fuel projects. This lack of support complicates Azerbaijan's efforts to expand the Southern Gas Corridor, a vital pipeline system that already operates at full capacity. President Ilham Aliyev pointed out the irony in European demands for more gas while simultaneously planning to reduce reliance on fossil fuels in the near future.

In response to these challenges, President Ilham Aliyev called for an end to hypocrisy in the global energy conversation. President Ilham Aliyev argued that a balanced approach is necessary, acknowledging that while the transition to renewable energy is essential, fossil fuels will remain a critical part of the energy mix for the foreseeable future. President Ilham Aliyev also stressed the importance of international cooperation and coordination to achieve a realistic and sustainable energy future.

Azerbaijan's strategy, as articulated by President Ilham Aliyev, involves not only continuing to produce and export oil and gas but also investing heavily in renewable energy and infrastructure. The country's role as a bridge between the global North and South positions it uniquely to lead by example in managing this energy transition.

President Ilham Aliyev's message to the world is clear: a pragmatic, balanced approach to energy is essential, and cooperation among nations is crucial for achieving a sustainable future.

Preparations for COP29

President Ilham Aliyev discussed the preparations for hosting the upcoming COP29 climate conference in Baku in November. President Ilham Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan faced immediate media scrutiny from Western sources following the announcement of Baku as the COP29 host. The criticisms primarily focused on Azerbaijan's status as an oil and gas-rich nation. However, President Ilham Aliyev underscored that Azerbaijan should be judged not by its fossil fuel resources, but by how it uses its revenues and its efforts in economic diversification and poverty reduction. The President noted that while initial media attacks were intense, they have somewhat subsided as Azerbaijan's COP team has been actively engaging in international meetings and presenting a clear, predictable, and result-oriented agenda.

Highlighting the significance of hosting COP29, President Ilham Aliyev described it as "the number one conference on the international arena" and a unique opportunity for Azerbaijan to elevate its global standing. The President emphasized Azerbaijan's diplomatic advantages, including its recent chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, strategic partnerships with EU members, and membership in various international organizations.

President Ilham Aliyev outlined several initiatives Azerbaijan is undertaking in preparation for COP29:

- Launching a program to support Small Island Developing States, including establishing a joint fund with the Commonwealth.
- Working to bridge the gap between the Global South and Global North, leveraging Azerbaijan's unique position in various international forums.

- Engaging with oil-producing countries to explore their potential role in climate finance.
- Declaring 2024 as the "Green World Solidarity Year" in Azerbaijan.

The President expressed hope that Azerbaijan can build on the positive legacy of previous COPs, particularly UAE's COP28, while addressing the mistrust between developed and developing countries on climate issues. By focusing on diplomatic engagement, targeted initiatives, and a commitment to bridge-building, Azerbaijan aims to make COP29 a successful and impactful global event.

Azerbaijan's commitment to decolonization efforts

In a powerful statement at the Shusha Global Media Forum, President Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's strong stance against contemporary colonialism and its commitment to supporting decolonization efforts worldwide.

Responding to a question about Azerbaijan's initiatives on decolonization, President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the country's active role in addressing this issue, particularly during its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement. President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that many countries in the Non-Aligned Movement have suffered greatly from colonialism, with some still under colonial rule today.

President Ilham Aliyev specifically mentioned the case of the Comoro Islands and Mayotte, which remain under French control. The President strongly criticized France's colonial practices, describing them as "unacceptable" and "disgusting." The President pointed out that France humiliated, assimilated, and killed people in its overseas territories, citing recent events in New Caledonia where seven people were killed.

President Ilham Aliyev dismissed accusations of meddling in France's internal affairs, framing Azerbaijan's actions as a response to anti-Azerbaijani acts by France in various international forums. President Ilham Aliyev underscored that

France has "no right to control the rights of people living more than 10,000 kilometers from their territory."

President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the role of the Baku Initiative Group, an NGO created in Azerbaijan, in giving voice to those suffering from colonialism. President Ilham Aliyev acknowledged that many countries are reluctant to criticize powerful nations like France, but asserted that Azerbaijan would not be intimidated by potential media backlash.

The President made a strong commitment to continue supporting all peoples suffering from colonialism, pledging to use all of Azerbaijan's resources in this effort. President Ilham Aliyev expressed solidarity with those fighting for their freedom, heritage, dignity, and language in colonized territories. This stance aligns with Azerbaijan's broader foreign policy objectives of championing the rights of developing nations and challenging perceived injustices in the international system. It also reflects the country's efforts to position itself as a leader among formerly colonized nations and a voice for ongoing decolonization efforts.

President Ilham Aliyev's comments underscore Azerbaijan's objective to play a significant role on the global stage, particularly in advocating for issues that resonate with many countries in the Global South. This approach will strengthen Azerbaijan's diplomatic ties with developing nations while also asserting its independence from traditional power structures.

The issue of Azerbaijanis deported from Western Azerbaijan

President Ilham Aliyev shed light on the complex and often overlooked history of Azerbaijanis displaced from Western Azerbaijan – from the lands which are now part of the present-day Armenia. President Ilham Aliyev began by recounting the historical deportations of Azerbaijanis from these regions, starting in the early 20th century. The first wave occurred in 1918, followed by another tragic displacement after World War II. These deportations were conducted

under the guise of repatriating Armenians from Western countries to Armenia, necessitating the creation of space for them. However, the reality for those displaced was harsh. They were relocated to the Kura-Araz lowland, an area starkly different from their original homes in terms of climate and livability. Many, unable to adapt to the new environment, perished. The suffering continued in the late 1980s with ethnic cleansing, which was the spark that ignited larger conflicts in the region. The President criticized the media, particularly in the West and Russia, for perpetuating a false narrative that obscured the realities of these events, including the barbaric deportation of Azerbaijanis from regions such as Gafan. This erasure of Azerbaijani suffering has contributed to a one-sided understanding of the conflict, fueling tensions that persist today.

Moving to the present, President Ilham Aliyev expressed a strong belief in the possibility of reconciliation and coexistence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, but the President emphasized that this requires political will from the Armenian leadership. President Ilham Aliyev cited Azerbaijan's efforts to engage with the Armenian population in Karabakh, including multiple invitations to dialogue, which were repeatedly rebuffed by the separatist regime at the time. Despite these setbacks, Azerbaijan laid out a detailed reintegration plan, offering Armenian residents of Karabakh a path to citizenship, work, and residence permits. However, these offers were also rejected.

President Ilham Aliyev called on the Armenian government to make a clear commitment to facilitating the return of Azerbaijanis to their historical lands in present-day Armenia. He pointed out that many of these areas, once vibrant Azerbaijani villages, are now deserted or reduced to ruins. President Ilham Aliyev dismissed accusations from some quarters of the international community that Azerbaijan's intentions are aggressive, clarifying that Azerbaijan seeks peaceful reintegration, symbolized by his statement, "we will not go there in tanks, we will go there in cars."

President Ilham Aliyev also urged the international community, particularly those in Western capitals like Paris, to support Azerbaijan's efforts. President Ilham Aliyev called for the protection of ethnic minorities, their languages, histories, and cultures—a principle which is fundamental to European values. President Ilham Aliyev highlighted the importance of international media and non-governmental organizations in raising awareness of the plight of the millions of Azerbaijanis displaced from Western Azerbaijan and their descendants.

President Ilham Aliyev's remarks reflect a deep conviction that the day will come when Azerbaijanis will return to their historical lands. The President envisions a future where these communities can live in peace and prosperity, in alignment with democratic principles and the rule of law. However, achieving this goal requires not only Azerbaijan's efforts but also a commitment from the Armenian leadership and the broader international community to support and uphold the rights of displaced populations.

II. Armenia's arms spree is a dangerous game of escalation

In recent months, Armenia has embarked on a military spending spree that should set alarm bells ringing across the South Caucasus. Under the guise of "diversifying" its partnerships, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government is amassing an arsenal that goes far beyond mere self-defense. This provocative arms buildup threatens to destabilize the fragile peace with Azerbaijan and risks plunging the region back into conflict.

Let's be clear: the weapons flowing into Armenia are not just defensive tools. The French-made Caesar howitzers, with a range exceeding 50 kilometers, are offensive weapons by any reasonable standard. The same goes for the Indian-supplied Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems. These are not the purchases of a country interested only in protecting its borders; they are

the acquisitions of a nation potentially preparing for aggressive action.

The scale of these purchases is equally troubling. A \$600 million arms deal with India, 36 howitzers from France, and a rumored \$500 million secret agreement with Iran for drones and air defense systems – these are not minor upgrades to an aging military. They represent a significant and rapid escalation of Armenia's military capabilities.

What makes this buildup particularly concerning is the context in which it's occurring. Revanchist voices within Armenia are growing louder, calling for the military recapture of territories lost in recent conflicts. When prominent Armenian figures openly discuss using force to retake Karabakh, how can Azerbaijan view these arms purchases as anything but a threat?

The international community's role in this dangerous game is equally troubling. The United States and European Union, in their eagerness to pull Armenia away from Russia's influence, are turning a blind eye to the destabilizing effect of these arms deals. The EU's direct military aid to Armenia, while modest in comparison, sends a worrying signal about priorities in the region. Transparency and confidence-building measures would do far more to ensure Armenia's security than this provocative arms race. What's needed now is not an arms race, but dialogue. Instead of pouring weapons into the region, the international community should be focusing on confidence-building measures between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Those measures would do far more to ensure lasting peace than any number of howitzers or missile systems.

The path Armenia is on leads not to greater security, but to increased tensions and the very real risk of renewed conflict. It's time for Pashinyan's government to step back from this dangerous brink. Instead of pouring money into weapons that threaten its neighbors, Armenia should focus on diplomatic solutions and economic cooperation. Only then can lasting peace and security be achieved in this troubled region.

The international community, too, must reassess its approach. Supporting Armenia should not come at the cost of regional stability. It's time for all parties to prioritize peace over provocative arms deals before it's too late. The path Armenia chooses in the coming months will have profound implications for the entire region. Will it be a path toward genuine independence and regional cooperation, or one that leads back to conflict and instability? The choice is Armenia's to make, but the consequences will be felt by all.

III. The Azerbaijan-Pakistan-Türkiye trilateral partnership is rapidly evolving

The recent state visit of President Ilham Aliyev to Islamabad on July 11 and 12 and the first-ever trilateral summit between the leaders of Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Türkiye on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit on July 3 in Astana mark a significant evolution in regional geopolitics. This emerging alliance represents a strategic pivot that aims to reshape power dynamics across Eurasia, from the South Caucasus to South Asia.

At its core, this partnership is built on mutual political support for each nation's key interests. Pakistan and Türkiye have consistently backed Azerbaijan's position on Karabakh, while Azerbaijan and Türkiye have supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, advocating for an agreement based on past UN Security Council resolutions. This reciprocal backing has laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation across multiple sectors.

The economic dimension of this alliance is rapidly expanding. “We will build a strong partnership not only on a political level, which we already have but also on an economic level—trade, investments,” President Ilham Aliyev noted in a press conference with Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. In a significant move to bolster economic ties, Azerbaijan has granted Pakistan a unique trade concession. On November 22, 2022, the

Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers decided to eliminate customs duties on Pakistani rice imports until the end of 2027. This preferential treatment has not gone unnoticed, with Prime Minister Sharif expressing gratitude during his meeting with President Aliyev. Sharif highlighted the exceptional nature of this arrangement, stating, "No other country has done this, except Azerbaijan. That is why we feel so good about this unique relationship."

Trade between Azerbaijan and Pakistan has surged from \$13.28 million in 2020 to over \$100 million in 2023, driven largely by energy agreements. In a significant development for energy cooperation, Azerbaijan and Pakistan struck a pivotal deal during Prime Minister Sharif's Baku visit in June 2023. The agreement allows Azerbaijan's SOCAR to provide liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Pakistan LNG (PLL) at reduced rates for a 12-month period. This arrangement offers Pakistan considerable flexibility, permitting monthly LNG purchases with the option to forgo shipments without financial penalties.

The partnership quickly yielded results, with the initial LNG cargo reportedly arriving in Pakistan by December 2023. Momentum continued to build, as Azerbaijani media, citing an official source, reported in January 2024 that SOCAR could potentially supply up to 700,000 tons of LNG to Pakistan over the course of the year.

Interestingly, this deal highlights Azerbaijan's evolving role in the global energy landscape. Although not an LNG producer itself, SOCAR is orchestrating these deliveries through collaborations with third-party LNG suppliers, including industry giants like Royal Dutch Shell. This strategic approach positions Azerbaijan as an important facilitator in regional energy trade, leveraging its partnerships to benefit allies like Pakistan.

The signing of Transit Trade and Preferential Trade Agreements, along with plans for a \$2 billion joint investment portfolio, indicate a serious commitment to economic integration. Prime

Minister Sharif noted that the agreements on these projects will be ready to be signed by November during his visit to Baku to attend the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29). "We identified at the initial stage nine positions where we have a preferential trade format, but this is only the beginning," President Ilham Aliyev noted.

Perhaps most significantly, the trilateral partnership is increasingly focusing on defense cooperation. The emphasis on joint military exercises and defense production suggests an alliance that is preparing to project power and influence across a vast geographic expanse. Military cooperation has emerged as a cornerstone of the Azerbaijan-Pakistan-Türkiye trilateral partnership. At their July summit, the three nations emphasized the critical role of regular joint military drills in bolstering their collective defense capabilities. The leaders pointed to the successful "Three Brothers" exercises conducted in 2021 as a blueprint for future collaborative efforts.

These joint maneuvers serve multiple strategic purposes. Beyond enhancing combat readiness, they foster deeper understanding and improve interoperability among the three countries' armed forces. This increased cohesion could prove crucial in potential future joint operations or crisis responses.

Perhaps most significantly, the summit discussions ventured into the realm of joint defense production. This ambitious initiative signals a collective push towards greater self-sufficiency in arms manufacturing. By pooling their resources and expertise, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Türkiye aim to reduce reliance on external suppliers while potentially creating a new hub for defense technology in the region.

This deepening military cooperation adds a potent dimension to the trilateral relationship. It not only strengthens each country's individual defense posture but also creates a formidable alliance that could reshape regional security dynamics. As this military partnership evolves, it will likely draw

increased attention from neighboring powers and the international community.

The strategic implications of this partnership extend beyond the immediate region. By integrating Pakistan into key transport corridors like the Middle Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor, the alliance aims to control crucial economic arteries. As this trilateral partnership continues to evolve, it will undoubtedly reshape the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia.

IV. Azerbaijan and China upgrade bilateral relations to strategic partnership

On July 3, President Ilham Aliyev and President Xi Jinping signed a Joint Declaration on the establishment of a strategic partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China. The Joint Declaration was signed on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana, Kazakhstan. This declaration opens a new chapter in a strategic partnership between the two nations, reflecting both countries' commitment to deepening ties across political, economic, and cultural domains. The move signals Azerbaijan's growing importance on the global stage. Economically, the partnership promises to bring substantial benefits to both nations. The declaration outlines a roadmap for enhanced trade and investment cooperation, with a focus on sectors ranging from energy and infrastructure to green technology and the digital economy. Azerbaijan's strategic location as a transit hub, particularly through the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, offers China a gateway for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's support for Azerbaijan's participation in key global trade fairs and exhibitions opens new avenues for Azerbaijani products and services in one of the world's largest markets.

At the core of this partnership is a mutual recognition of each nation's sovereignty and

territorial integrity. Azerbaijan's support for the "One China" policy, coupled with China's backing of Azerbaijan's peace agenda, highlights the strategic overlap between the two countries. This overlap is particularly notable in a global context where territorial disputes pose ongoing challenges. By reaffirming their stance against terrorism and extremism, Azerbaijan and China signal a shared commitment to regional stability and security.

The cultural and educational exchanges envisioned in the declaration also deserve attention. By promoting language learning and academic collaboration, both nations aim to foster deeper mutual understanding and goodwill among their peoples. The emphasis on tourism, with Azerbaijan introducing a visa-free regime for Chinese citizens, further underscores the importance of people-to-people connections in strengthening bilateral ties.

At its core, this strategic partnership represents a convergence of interests between Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Baku's goal of further economic diversification and enhanced global standing. For China, Azerbaijan offers a crucial link in its vision of a trans-Eurasian trade network, providing access to European markets while bypassing traditional routes through Russia. The emphasis on developing the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, or "Middle Corridor," underscores the strategic importance of Azerbaijan in China's strategy.

Economically, the partnership promises significant benefits for both nations. With bilateral trade already reaching \$3 billion and poised for further growth, sectors such as energy, green technology, and digital infrastructure stand to gain substantially. The \$60 million investment by Chinese automotive giant BYD in electric bus production in Azerbaijan is just one example of the potential for industrial cooperation and technology transfer.

Environmentally, the collaboration on green technologies and China's support for Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29 indicate a joint commitment to addressing climate change. This alignment on

global issues could enhance both nations' soft power and influence in international forums.

The Azerbaijan-China strategic partnership marks a pivotal moment in Eurasian geopolitics. It provides insights into how smaller nations like Azerbaijan are navigating the complexities of a multipolar world. The Azerbaijan-China joint declaration is more than just a formal agreement; it is a strategic blueprint for the future. As both nations navigate the complexities of an evolving global and regional dynamics, this partnership offers them a platform to advance their national interests while contributing to regional and global stability. For Azerbaijan, the deepening of ties with China represents an opportunity to diversify its economic partnerships and enhance its geopolitical standing. For China, Azerbaijan offers a vital link in its broader vision of connectivity and cooperation across Eurasia. The success of this partnership could translate into tangible outcomes that benefit not only Azerbaijan and China but also the wider region.