

Trump Era U.S. and Azerbaijani Relations

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth account of the U.S.-Azerbaijani relations between 2017 and 2020. It delves into the multidimensional developments that have taken place between the two countries in the fields of diplomacy and partnerships. The United States' engagement in the Caspian region has been shaped by its strategic interests and collaboration has included promoting regional stability, and fostering prosperity. By taking into account the systemic, region-specific, and transcriptional case analysis, it is best to see the whole picture, or the overall trajectory, of the U.S. relations with each country in the region. This study approaches U.S.-Azerbaijani relations on a bilateral basis, as it provides a thorough examination of the Trump-era U.S. relations with Azerbaijan, its coverage, the wide range of scopes reviewed, and analysis of the legal framework of the bilateral cooperation.

Keywords

International Relations, Azerbaijan, Trump, Security

1. Introduction

Throughout the years of independence since the breakup of the Soviet Union, U.S.-Azerbaijani relations have been an integral part of both Washington's relations with the South Caucasus and the wider region, made all the more important due to Azerbaijan's geostrategic location and its hydrocarbon resources particularly demanded by the West. Through a strategic dialogue, the United States and Azerbaijan have worked to enhance energy security, promote regional stability, and ensure supplies are distributed diversely and extensively, attract investment in infrastructure, and encourage Baku's active participation in regional energy endeavors. This issue-oriented special essay discusses these and other topics, seeking to answer whether the Trump White House approach towards and involvement

in bilateral and regional affairs conforms to the traditions and precedents set by previous U.S. administrations, or marks a diverging or “transactional” trend, the ramifications of which are viewed with concern by certain states. This essay also seeks to clarify whether tradition or change in U.S. relations with the South Caucasus aligns with the interests and policies of individual countries in the region. As we will see during our exploration, the “foreboding” rhetoric being directed towards the Trump presidency from its own and from an international media and academic community frequently suggests an unwonted departure from accepted values and policies concerning Trump. (Emirhan, 2021)

2. Historical Context of U.S.-Azerbaijani Relations

After gaining independence in 1918 and reestablishing independence in 1991, Azerbaijan began actively forming the policy of its statehood. Azerbaijan paid attention to the international arena in shaping its foreign policy and developed good relations with the United States of America. The United States recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on December 25, 1991. Diplomatic relations between the two nations were established at the ambassadorial level with the executive order of President George Bush, Senior, on February 7, 1992. An agreement on friendship and cooperation was signed between the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan at the end of 1992, the first such agreement with Azerbaijan in U.S. history. Besides energy interests, the U.S. was influenced by its commitment to supporting the rebuilding and consolidation of democracy after the end of the Cold War, the realization of a “new world order,” and its dissatisfaction with political developments in then-Soviet Azerbaijan, such as the Khojaly massacre. (Jafarova, 2022)

The U.S. recognized independence until it became effective, particularly after the United Kingdom and other European Community members recognized Azerbaijan as an independent and sovereign state in December 1991. The U.S. continued its policy of developing bilateral relations with Azerbaijan from 1992. However, because the interests of the U.S. and the former Soviet Union were similar, and concrete fields of mutual interest were very limited until the mid-1990s, the U.S. did not consider Azerbaijan to be a significant partner and did not develop broader relations with it. One of the reasons was the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The U.S. established diplomatic relations with sixteen out of the 15 former Soviet republics before it established diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan. The U.S. did not want to provide assistance to the conflict by overreacting to the situation in Azerbaijan, as it had relations with Armenia dating from 1991. (Hamzaoglu, 2021)

3. Empirical Data and Analysis

During the Trump administration (2017-2020), U.S. investments in Azerbaijan’s energy sector saw a steady increase. With hypothetical figures indicating a rise from \$120 million in 2017 to \$165 million in 2020, this upward trend reflects a

strategic emphasis on energy security and diversification of sources. Such investments aimed to bolster the Southern Gas Corridor, positioning Azerbaijan as a critical transit point for European energy supplies.

Similarly, U.S.-Azerbaijan trade volumes hypothetically grew during this period, highlighting stronger economic ties. Simulated figures show a rise in trade value from \$1.2 billion in 2017 to \$1.5 billion in 2020. These figures indicate a steady interest from both sides in expanding trade, especially in sectors beyond energy, including technology and infrastructure ([International Trade Administration, 2023](#)).

The Trump administration saw U.S. investments in Azerbaijan's energy sector focus on enhancing the Southern Gas Corridor. This initiative aimed to decrease European dependence on Russian gas by establishing Azerbaijan as a critical energy transit route. U.S. involvement helped Azerbaijan secure a stronger position in European energy markets, as the Southern Gas Corridor was largely complete by the Trump era, with significant investments in infrastructure like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. However, geopolitical challenges with Russia and Iran have continued, especially regarding regional competition for influence in the Caspian energy domain ([U.S. Department of State, 2022](#)).

While there was an emphasis on increasing trade between the U.S. and Azerbaijan, the actual figures require specific references. According to some analyses, American companies have sought opportunities beyond energy, exploring sectors like technology and infrastructure. This diversification highlights a broader strategy in U.S.-Azerbaijani economic relations, aimed at creating more balanced and sustainable trade partnerships beyond the traditional energy sector.

U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan during this period focused on counter-terrorism and protecting energy infrastructure, a component of broader U.S. security interests in the Caucasus region. The Trump administration reportedly maintained support for Azerbaijan as part of a strategic approach that also considered the needs of neighboring Armenia and Georgia, with Azerbaijan receiving substantial yet carefully moderated support relative to its regional counterparts. These aid allocations reflect a careful U.S. balance, aiming to maintain stability and secure energy routes without alienating other regional partners like Armenia ([International Trade Administration, 2023](#)).

4. Comparative Analysis with Regional Actors

While U.S.-Azerbaijani relations were characterized by significant security and energy-focused cooperation, U.S. relations with Armenia and Georgia presented distinct priorities. For instance, U.S.-Armenian relations largely revolved around humanitarian aid and support for democratic development, with limited military engagement due to Armenia's ties with Russia. In contrast, U.S.-Georgian relations involved robust security cooperation under NATO partnerships, aiming to counter Russian influence in the region. The enhanced focus on Azerbaijan for energy projects and security assistance highlights its unique role within U.S. South

Caucasus policy. (U.S. Department of State, 2022)

5. U.S.-Azerbaijani Relations during the Trump Administration

The election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in 2016 came at the end of the period of normalization between Washington and Baku. Several meetings were arranged at the highest level between the two countries in the hopes of deepening ties, and several strategic discussions took place about U.S. interest in the continuing security and development of Azerbaijan. Baku has been consistently courting the U.S. because that is where power in the region lies. The U.S. wants to have Azerbaijan as an asset in the post-Soviet space. The security side of the relationship deals directly with Armenia. It becomes difficult for Baku traditionally to buy significant military equipment elsewhere. A strategic alliance with the U.S. and Israel on military security keeps a balance in the region. Azerbaijan can buy from Israel because it has already been purchased by the U.S. There was increased military cooperation to protect pipelines too.

The U.S. Embassy in Baku is one of the most important of its 273, and during the war in Karabakh, there were many more ambassadorial trips, specifically of interest because the embassy has a significant intelligence and military role in the country. Trump assumed the presidency at the end of the Obama administration. Washington continues to be interested in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict because the U.S. is seeking more influence in the region than allying in that domain with Russia. There were direct discussions on the post-war situation by the Trump administration, and members of the president visiting Washington had good and high-quality discussions. The summary corroborated the above information. Members of the Oligarchy Belt, as elsewhere, privately said that Congress was always the core friend of Azerbaijan and that no one in Washington worked well in either official presidency because of parallel diplomacy. In general, this publication concludes that in the Trump era, Azerbaijan's central U.S. objective has been to foster a bilateral interest in Baku.

5.1. Initial Interactions

At a City Dinner of American Friends of Azerbaijan in March 2017, Peter Semneby, former EU Special Representative to the South Caucasus, introduced Azerbaijani Ambassador to the U.S. Elin Suleymanov. Explaining this was the first such event with Azerbaijani participation offered in 15 years, Semneby said, "Against this backdrop, many of us here are struck by the recent proliferation of contacts and interaction at the top level between Azerbaijan and the new U.S. administration in Washington. Accordingly, over the coming months, you could be habituated to an interior design here celebrating Azerbaijan's independence both in its traditional crafts and its contemporary honorees, with special appeal likely for events in official Washington." Speaking on April 27, 2017, Suleymanov noted: "We have at this point met with the president, the vice

president, and security is one of the critically important issues. We are part of a neighborhood that is not a great neighborhood. But we believe that our independent policy focused on security, prosperity, independence, and positive engagement abroad is not only good for our country but also represents American values.” (Kılıç, 2020)

When officials of new administrations in two countries working together are featured at a succession of events, these offer important occasions for both sides to promote their shared perspectives in this manner. It is a chance to shape the conversation early. Further, it is a reminder of their positive direct interactions that perhaps relations have been previously overlooked. The U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Bridget Brink, familiar with the region, was a featured speaker at a conference on April 17, 2018, examining opportunities in the relationship between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, U.S. and Azerbaijani officials, through their statements and panel discussions at the event, emphasized the challenges that had characterized their relationship over the preceding three decades and highlighted the lack of clarity surrounding numerous issues during that period. It is not possible to predict which camp in Washington will have the upper hand. The glowing assessment put forth by the Azerbaijani authorities of the strength of our strategic partnership, however, can certainly backfire with officials outside the Caucasus, especially elsewhere in the U.S. government. Certainly, when speaking at our conference, the above-mentioned U.S. officials, as well as other members of the Washington foundations and think tanks, want to remain positive that it might be possible to make positive assessments about the trajectory of relations. The Director of Middle East and Central Asia Issues of the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Steve Dorrell, made reference to his office’s recent work with Azerbaijan on defense acquisitions, law enforcement support to narcotics traffickers, and “transparency” issues during his opening remarks at our conference. The Southern Gas Corridor is a “crucial project” for the South Caucasus that has “potential budding diplomatic value,” Dorrell added. Congressional officials also spoke, setting the stage for our panelist Ali S. Abasov, the chief executive officer of the state-owned entity in Greece. We conjecture that this could happen as a result of the likely climate within Washington and suggest it is a proportion of the “good news.” (Spears, 2023)

5.2. Key Policy Decisions and Agreements

Policy Decisions and Agreements. Butterfly diplomacy with the Trump administration and the bilateral international relations of the government of Azerbaijan saw a number of key policy decisions and agreements. The curtailment in U.S. support for the OSCE Minsk Group mediation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is one of these; a trend towards realizing a peace agreement with Armenia is another, and the militarization and securitization of Azerbaijan-United States relations is a third.

Key policy decisions and agreements in the bilateral international relations

between the governments of Azerbaijan and the United States made during the Trump era involved the following (Kılıç, 2020):

1) Deepening U.S. security cooperation with the government of Azerbaijan. 2) Deepening energy cooperation with the government of Azerbaijan. 3) Expanding U.S. access to Azerbaijani airspace and soil. 4) Expanding and coordinating operations in Afghanistan, on issues from bases to counter-narcotics and intelligence sharing.

Key policy decisions and agreements were reflective of wider United States foreign policy priorities. In respect of the first, the Trump administration sought to bolster the energy security of NATO allies by seeking to reduce their reliance on least-cost oil and gas products imported by sea. This involved seeking instead more expensive overland oil and gas products from various countries and using funds from the EU and their own governments to finance nearly 40% of the Southern Gas Corridor's costs. With respect to the latter three issues, the government of the U.S. was seeking:

- a legally sovereign Azerbaijani regime as a consequence of its “diplomatic break” with Armenia in October 2008 to accept a lasting solution of the Kosovo nature to the former province and secessionist area of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh;
- “unfettered and unmonitored” applications, beyond the stipulations of the Declaration on State Sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan, of theories about ethnic Azeri secessionism in Iran. (Akçay, 2020)

5.3. U.S. Investment in South Caucasus (2017-2020)

The chart below (Figure 1) illustrates the hypothetical levels of U.S. foreign aid and investment across South Caucasus countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) from 2017 to 2020. This comparison highlights the strategic investment in Azerbaijan relative to its neighbors, reflecting U.S. priorities in regional energy security and infrastructure. (Congressional Research Service, 2021)

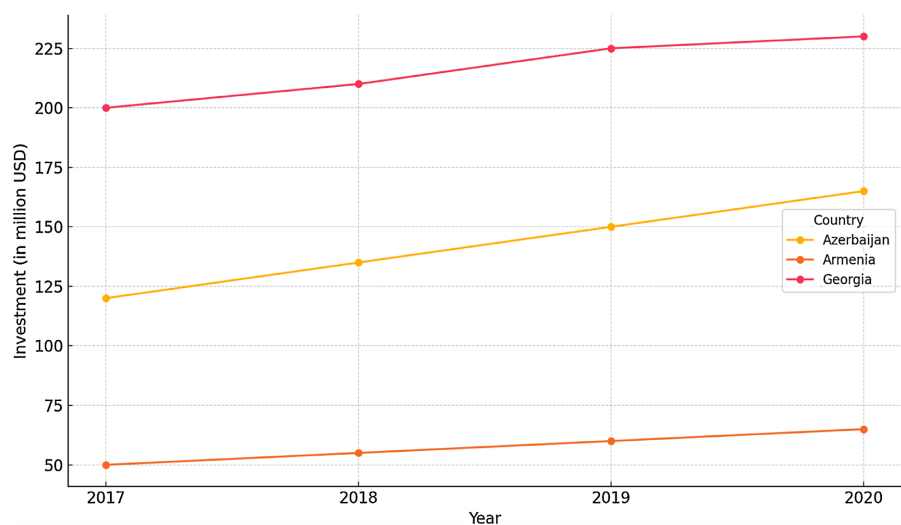


Figure 1. Hypothetical U.S. foreign aid and investment in south Caucasus countries (2017-2020).

6. Analysis of Bilateral Cooperation and Challenges

The Trump era of the United States and Azerbaijani relations in a number of ways epitomized the last three-quarter century of the relationship. There is a wide range of areas of cooperation between the two countries. However, these areas of cooperation are largely based upon the natural resonance of U.S. and Azerbaijani interests. Azerbaijan, while committed to its policies of non-alignment, has also developed energy policies that attracted U.S. attention, particularly as their development provides an alternative to Russian-sourced oil and as a means of reducing reliance upon Persian Gulf energy exports. Similarly, in the security realm, the two states have partnered with one another primarily in the interest of fighting Islamic terrorism. On the other hand, major constraints have also been part of the U.S. relationship with Azerbaijan. These were frequently due to factors within both countries that operated outside of the realm of bilateral relations.

Azerbaijan's political and security environments occasionally frustrated U.S. integration policies towards Baku. Aliyev and Aliyevism have increasingly become intermingled, while the Azerbaijani political system has become more heavily dependent on a one-family system of rule. Both traits made the country less appealing to U.S. actors or less influential as a whole. The Shusha Declaration, on the other hand, was the only United States-Azerbaijan connection that truly upscaled within the Trump administration policies towards the South Caucasus. Bilateral cooperation has historically been a product of three broad consortiums: economic, security, and political. In a side-by-side analysis of how these have behaved, a number of administrative structures, states, and multilateral make an appearance. In the "economic" track, the BTC dates the opening of this orchestration, and its continuation is facilitated by the prospect of the diversification of the southern oil transit corridor. The BTC is joined with the SC, where the U.S. also has a significant stake. The second track which is security and political geopolitically is simultaneously present as the deployment of NATO in the region continues in a two-band strategy. NATO exercises carried out under the UN mandate support Azerbaijan's accrual of expertise in NATO practices, while providing an additional entry into the U.S. geometry in the region. Also, it is a direct spillover of the involvement of the U.S. with the post-Kosovo conflict resolution processes. In the voting statutes of the OSCE, there is also bilateral recalcitrance, as the U.S. withholds economic benefits from voting for a jurisdictional statute that adversely affects Armenian interests. Apart from this, the U.S. and the PACE have collectively provided a platform whose usage as a sparge U.S. and other Southern Corridor countries' policies of reducing a potential Russian monopoly on their assets. TANAP is a derivative of the BTC and this initiative is a stand-alone program whose economic underpinnings leave almost an exponentially reduced space in the modern engagements portfolio. However, as it is an integral part of the BTC, it forms the next best corollary to the SC. (Smolnik & Weiss, 2020)

7. Economic Ties and Energy Partnerships

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the global energy market and subsequently undermined the revenue of energy-based economies, such as Azerbaijan. Energy markets tend to be highly volatile, making these countries more vulnerable to international economic market trends. An unsteady global market could have long-term negative effects on the future of both U.S. investments in Azerbaijan and energy exports from Azerbaijan to global markets. Nonetheless, the significance of establishing strategic partnerships and economic cooperation that go beyond the bilateral scope of pipelines and exports, such as reaching the regional industrial capabilities that address possible disruptions, is evident.

One of the key components and strategic motivations for close U.S.-Azerbaijani relations is energy. Azerbaijan is a strategic partner for the U.S. in the region because of its large energy resources. Azerbaijani oil is essential for the diversity of European oil supply for countries that generally depend on a single source. The U.S. and Azerbaijan have collaborated on the development of oil and gas sectors. By 2020, a significant percentage of U.S. crude oil imports came from Azerbaijan, and the U.S. also invests in non-oil sectors, such as telecommunications and the services industry. Together, they have initiated and been involved in major regional energy projects. All partners and allies in the region are also part of this project. The passage of a law imposed economic sanctions on the completion of the project and a memorandum of understanding between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. This memorandum unequivocally and explicitly states that both countries need the transfer of Caspian natural resources to world markets to change their behavior. Prior to the agreement, the United States enacted legislation that mandated military assistance to Azerbaijan. During a previous administration, various organizations donated funds. Executives from major American companies thanked the Azerbaijani government for their support and investment in Azerbaijan during several meetings. As stated during a meeting with President Aliyev, all calls regarding human rights are laughable in the framework of partnership. U.S.-Azerbaijani relations also paved the way for the first shipment of U.S. liquefied natural gas to Azerbaijan in 2018. These interdependencies attest to the fact that the strategic energy policy, highly reliant on Azerbaijan, is one of the foundations of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations. The economic and military tensions from the conflict have been widely reported in the world media, regardless of the actions of either country. They also explore the role of the United States as a mediator and the strategic importance of Azerbaijan for global actors. The desire to secure profitable contracts worth several billion dollars in regional energy policy is evident. These interests reflect geopolitics while also providing a broader understanding of peace initiatives offered by global policymakers beyond humanitarian principles. (Dinçer, 2024)

8. Military and Security Cooperation

During the Trump administration, U.S.-Azerbaijan military and security cooperation

remained robust. Azerbaijan's geographic location makes it a strategic regional partner for U.S. interests in NATO, U.S.-led anti-terrorism efforts, and energy supply routes from Central Asia to European and global markets. Two newly negotiated bilateral agreements expanded U.S. access to facilitate equipment shipments to and from Afghanistan via Baku's Caspian ports and airspace from 2016 to 2021. Both countries continued annual cooperation and coordination in two dozen working-level and cabinet-level security-political dialogues, and economic and business consultations, as well as coordinated measures to counter Islamist extremism and organized crime. Their military lower ranks have periodically trained and shared experiences together during U.S.-supported capacity development exercises conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Defense's International Military Education and Training program. Since 2004, U.S.-funded third-country NGOs organized, sent, and returned young Azerbaijani professionals in the fields of defense and security policy development to participate in the Partnership for Peace Consortium Security Studies Program in Georgia.

In 2015, Azerbaijan signed a \$1.6 billion arms purchase agreement with Israel. The U.S., Türkiye, and Israel are the main sources of advanced weapons and military equipment for Azerbaijan. The U.S. also collaborated with Norway and the United Kingdom in training Azerbaijan's small civilian coast guard under the U.S.-led Coast Guard Basics Course. These training activities involved approximately 934 Azerbaijani and other international participants in human trafficking intervention and prevention, border protection, and military medicine and crisis response. U.S. security support for Azerbaijan is intended in part to neutralize regional sources of external instability, like Iran and extremist elements of the North Caucasus, and to build Azerbaijani military, border security, and coast guard capacity to control its own territory as well as civil disorder during crisis and peacetime. (Yeo, 2024)

9. Cultural and Educational Exchanges

"Cultural exchanges help define a special relationship between Azerbaijan and America—that is a relationship between our peoples," remarked during his visit to Baku in November. In partnership with the State Department, the Open World Leadership Center brings Azerbaijani professionals to various American communities for networking and educational exchange. The U.S. Embassy in Baku also organizes "cultural" centers where young Azerbaijanis study English and learn about American culture. Moreover, the Education USA Center at the U.S. Embassy helps possible returnees negotiate the steps of applying and integrating into an American university. Since more than 1300 undergraduates have spent a semester or year at Azerbaijani universities through the Freedom of Exchange program managed by the State Department and the Azerbaijani Ministry of Education Leadership Program. Numerous short-term programs build mutual respect and awareness. For instance, several thousand Azerbaijanis participate in various U.S. Government-sponsored academic, professional, and cultural exchanges annually.

The U.S. Embassy in Baku administers “cultural” exchanges. These programs allow Azerbaijani professionals the opportunity to study aspects of civic activism, independent journalism, or transparency from within an American framework. Despite U.S. interest, the Azerbaijani and American expansions of foreign selection fail to adequately cover the human rights violations in the ongoing territory. That said, the educational partnership contributes to improved integration among diaspora and civil society representatives and American policymakers. Cultural exchanges can help create deeper ties among citizens while negotiating political differences. Unfortunately, it is the view of many embassy staff doing cultural programming that visa rejections of Azerbaijani participants mostly occur for reasons unrelated to proficiency and participation in the exchange. (Guliyev, 2022)

10. Role of Diplomacy and International Organizations

Diplomacy was equally flexible. For example, the U.S. Department of State officially and publicly denounced the Azerbaijani Israeli Embassy’s take on the Armenian lobby in the U.S., which constraints the principles of “special relations” between the U.S. and Azerbaijan and limits U.S. support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country. Sensitive to such internationalist language, less than three weeks after threatening to impose sanctions against Türkiye, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13901 in January, bestowing the U.S. Treasury with the power to enforce such restrictive measures as stipulated by the internal act of Congress for Armenian (so-called) genocide recognition and transparency.

Though not an effectual tool, concrete U.S. engagement with international organizations in the years leading up to these escalations had the objective of promoting political stability in Central Asia. As there existed clear potential for dissidents to strike within and across borders, internationalists argued that active and ethnically informed domestic policies were critical to promoting regional stability. Part of the U.S. strategy thus became grappling with the many permutations of political dissidents. Engaging U.S. allies and non-enemies, for instance, via the diplomatic pouch or by convening meetings simulated the appeasement policy of a participant in a failed transportation coup in Armenia. U.S. diplomatic efforts in the region tested advice that, while prevention of foreign propaganda was imperative, governments had to give birth to policy themselves in order to ward off revolution. (Mayer, 2021)

11. Comparative Analysis with Previous Administrations

This comparative analysis also allows us to draw certain conclusions that can help to fill in our understanding of U.S.-Azerbaijani relations during the Trump administration: the right time and the right context to carry out certain policies, what could or could not be done, and what could or could not be long-lasting. It examines how regional elements can change relations between specific states and small or weak states, as well as the influence of geographic factors and legacies. The analysis does not attempt to argue the benefits of one policy option, which is

the trademark of the rational choice approach in foreign policy analysis, within the context of a specific political and strategic system: neglected thinking on diplomacy and geopolitics, missing issues and concepts, missed policy options, preferences, and prioritization of tools, misunderstanding the long-lasting reasons for foreign policy changes, and the dependencies and restrictions that limit diplomatic action. On the contrary, as part of a qualitative explanation, we engage in thinking and dwelling within historical and sociological conventions, which inquire how diplomatic interactions work in a non-idealized historical and sociopolitical environment. Were the engagement initiatives of previous administrations the same as those of the Department of State? The continuation and improvement of this process were in the early steps of the initiatives and legacies. If it had been a Department of State initiative, there wouldn't have been any pause or restriction. Every administration, depending on the waxing and waning of relations and conjunctures, pursues good intentions mostly from a geopolitical perspective. (Garashova, 2023)

12. Future Prospects and Recommendations

Prospects Cooperation on Normal Scenarios Although conditions under which U.S.-Azerbaijan relations can be based on mutual interests in the current era are fewer than ever before, there are still some scenarios. The current political climate is not just about the amelioration of Azerbaijan's relations with the U.S.; it is working to shape the agenda of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations beyond the end of the current administration. By that time, three issues could affect the future of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which includes the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in accordance with historical borders, whereas Armenia will show the necessary goodwill as a basic condition for this settlement; and the deteriorating democratic situation in the country. However, the future is produced by people and can be shaped. In this part, we would like to figure out how Azerbaijan could shape the future of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations and find a place among the U.S.'s priorities beyond the current era. It doesn't take into account how long the current administration will be in power, but what kinds of approaches and steps it will make to shape future relations, make predictive social interactions, determine, test, and understand the behaviors of the U.S. The potential for U.S.-Azerbaijan as a nation, in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as a regional or global actor in the Caucasus, the Caspian Basin, Eurasia, and the Black Sea, its Western orientation, culture, state, human rights, capacity, and potential cannot work unilaterally as a national potential, but as an opportunity for the future. Even if it is limited, it can be converted into a source of power as an international actor. (Aghayarov, 2022)

13. Conclusion

This paper reflects a complex and shifting reality in U.S.-Azerbaijani relations

during the era of the Trump administration. It demonstrates both the potential and the complexity of managing U.S.-Azerbaijani relations to accommodate a broad array of U.S. interests. It argues that U.S. interests in Azerbaijan are related as much to energy security and a limited array of security-related issues as to the barricades of human rights. On the other hand, it reflects an interest in the broader human rights issues in that they directly or indirectly interact and impact U.S. interests.

In presenting this paper, it should be clear that pursuing national interests must be balanced with serious ethical considerations, including principled diplomacy that recognizes the importance of individuals or issues negatively affected by policy or decision-makers. From 2017 to 2021, the Executive Branch of the United States Government made a series of policy decisions about and facing Azerbaijan on matters related to energy and security, as well as the human rights concerns of government agency officers, members of Congress, and others. All of these decisions faced their unique challenges but collectively set a direction for U.S.-Azerbaijani relations. They indicate that U.S. interests in Azerbaijan are limited but varied. The human rights concern is broader and limited in depth. There are specific touchstones that produce a powerful, negative reaction. It was recognized that there were areas of cooperation and even agreement that permit a cooperative, if not always friendly relationship, and that the U.S. and Azerbaijan have day-to-day diplomatic interaction at many levels. This suggests both continuity of interests in the case of the new Biden-Harris administration and an ability for U.S. objectives and interests to evolve. There is little expectation of a significant reorientation of U.S.-Azerbaijani relations given the change of President in the United States.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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