
STRATFOR: AZERBAIJAN CHANGING BALANCE IN CAUCASUS

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By Aynur Gasimova - Trend

The balance in the Caucasus is changing, according to an analysis posted on the website of the US-based geopolitical intelligence firm Stratfor.

With Iran emerging from the malaise of sanctions, it is reaching north and becoming more assertive. Russia, too, is changing tack, aligning with Azerbaijan instead of Armenia in the long-running Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, says the article.

In early August, Azerbaijan made a bid to capitalize on these changes by hosting the presidents of Iran and Russia for a summit in Baku. The meeting featured discussions of counterterrorism initiatives and of the negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh and Caspian Sea disputes. But it was regional connectivity – not conflict – that topped the agenda, specifically the North-South Transport Corridor and its railway construction component, reads the article.

The 7,200-kilometer (4,500-mile) North-South Transport Corridor was first discussed in 2008, according to the article. It would involve building railway, road and shipping infrastructure stretching from Iran to Russia through Azerbaijan.

If realized, the North-South Transport Corridor would have a strong effect on the region's geopolitical order. It would connect Iran with Russia's Baltic ports and give Russia rail connectivity to both the Persian Gulf and the Indian rail network, said the article. At least on paper, this would mean that goods could be carried from Mumbai to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and further to Baku. They could then pass over the Russian border into Astrakhan before going on to Moscow and St. Petersburg, then onward into Europe. And the project has been progressing – railway connections between Iran and Azerbaijan are under construction, even connecting into the Russian system.

Kaynak/Source: