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op-ed: a Jewish-Muslim paradigm for peace

1 message

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To: sjones@mrc.org, cbannister@mrc.org, mchapman@mrc.org

Hi Susan, Craig, and Michael,

How are you? I hope this finds you well. Today I'm reaching out from my new email at Stellar Jay Communications to offer CNSNews.com the latest analysis by [Maayan Hoffman](#), the news editor at The Jerusalem Post and an author whose commentary [last appeared on CNSNews.com in August](#).

Amid the ongoing debate surrounding President Trump's proposed "Deal of the Century" to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Maayan writes that a key ingredient in the deal — Israel's rapprochement with Arab and Muslim countries — was set in motion well before the 21st century began.

"Specifically, one of Israel's first and still one of its most strategically significant Muslim-majority allies is Azerbaijan, which established diplomatic relations with the Israelis in the early 1990s," she writes, calling Israeli-Azerbaijani ties "a crucial model for what broader peace between Israel and the Muslim world — and ultimately, Israeli-Palestinian peace — can look like."

The full text is included below. Please let me know whether you're interested in this submission, and thanks so much for your time and consideration!

A Jewish-Muslim paradigm for peace

By Maayan Hoffman

It was no coincidence that President Donald Trump invited leaders from the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman to [attend the recent unveiling of his Mideast peace plan](#). In order to live up to its name as the "Deal of the Century," the plan needs support from the Muslim world.

On a parallel track, Israel is developing unprecedented ties with [some of the Arab states that are backing the U.S. peace plan](#). Two days before Trump's proposal was introduced, it was revealed that Israel [approved travel to Saudi Arabia](#) under limited circumstances.

Yet this key ingredient in the Deal of the Century — Israel's rapprochement with Arab and Muslim countries — was set in motion well before the 21st century began. Specifically, one of Israel's first and still one of its most strategically significant Muslim-majority allies is Azerbaijan, which established diplomatic relations with the Israelis in the early 1990s.

The latest watershed moment in the storied Jewish-Muslim, Israeli-Azerbaijani relationship came at the World Holocaust Forum on January 23 in Jerusalem. Azerbaijani Parliament Speaker Ogtay Asadov's presence was especially notable among the 47 world leaders who attended the ceremony, which marked the 75th anniversary of the largest and deadliest Nazi concentration camp, Auschwitz. Leaders from only two Muslim-majority nations attended at the ceremony: Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has a slim 51-percent Muslim majority, and Azerbaijan, whose population is more than 90-percent Muslim.

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Asadov's participation received little media attention, in part because he was not originally included on the list of attendees publicized by the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Nonetheless, both the substance and timing of [Asadov's attendance at a Holocaust memorial event in Jerusalem](#) are particularly significant.

Azerbaijan is a key strategic ally for Israel not only because of its Muslim majority, but also the countries which sit on its borders: Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Armenia and most importantly, Iran. Azerbaijan has the world's second-largest Shi'a Muslim population, after Iran. The Azerbaijani Turks living in northwest Iran constitute a significant part of the Iranian population.

Despite the fact that Azerbaijan and Iran have maintained diplomatic relations since 1918, Azerbaijan has pioneered a paradigm for warm Muslim ties with Israel, the nation Tehran repeatedly vows to wipe off the map. In the aftermath of the U.S. assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and amid the ongoing protests in Iran, Israel only stands to benefit from having an ally like Azerbaijan on the border of arguably the Jewish state's fiercest enemy.

Since 1992, Israel and Azerbaijan have collaborated deeply in the diplomatic, economic, cultural and security realms. Israel is the largest buyer of Azerbaijani oil, and Azerbaijan has purchased a vast amount of defense technology from Israel. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Azerbaijan is the [second-largest consumer](#) of Israeli arms.

More striking is that since the 5th Century A.D. until today, Azerbaijani Jews have lived in peace and prosperity with their Muslim neighbors. During the Holocaust, Azerbaijan served as a shelter for European Jews escaping atrocities. And in the Soviet period, Jews played a major role in the intellectual, economic and political life of Azerbaijan. Last November, [Azerbaijan unveiled a statue](#) in its capital of Baku in honor of the nation's Jewish war hero Albert Agarunov, who was also a posthumous recipient of the country's highest honor for military service. Decades after he was killed in battle, Agarunov's legacy remains a powerful symbol of Jewish integration and pride in a Muslim-majority country where Jews report that they experience no antisemitism and freely identify with their faith in public.

Upon visiting Baku in December 2016, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [lauded Israel-Azerbaijan ties](#) as "an example of what relations can be and should be between Muslims and Jews everywhere." Today, the prime minister's message is more relevant than ever. The Israeli-Azerbaijani relationship is a crucial model for what broader peace between Israel and the Muslim world — and ultimately, Israeli-Palestinian peace — can look like.

Maayan Hoffman is news editor and head of online content and strategy at The Jerusalem Post. She has been an American-Israeli international journalist for more than two decades.

Best,
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