



Jacob Kamaras &lt;jacob@stellarjaypr.com&gt;

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**from Jacob to Fern: op-ed submission on Israel, Azerbaijan, and coronavirus**

1 message

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**Jacob Kamaras** <jacob@stellarjaypr.com>  
To: Fern Sidman <editor@jewishvoiceny.com>

Fri, Mar 13, 2020 at 8:40 AM

Hi Fern,

How are you? I've attached the op-ed submission that we spoke about yesterday, regarding how Israel and Azerbaijan can find common ground in the fight against coronavirus. The full text is also included below.

Let me know if The Jewish Voice is interested in publishing this online. I think it's a timely and creative angle — and Maayan is a highly respected author on Israel and Middle East issues.

Shabbat Shalom and all the best! Please stay safe!  
Jacob

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**Could fighting coronavirus be the latest frontier in the Israel-Azerbaijan relationship?**

By Maayan Hoffman

With countries around the world shuttering borders and calling on citizens to self-isolate over coronavirus, a normally interconnected world is now suddenly finding itself disconnected.

On March 9, Israel took the sweeping step to require all visitors and returning citizens to self-quarantine for 14 days. For a country that is already largely isolated from its neighbors due to conflict, this measure on international arrivals will likely cause serious short-term economic damage. At the same time, one of Israel's key nontraditional alliances provides a potential strategic partner in efforts to battle coronavirus.

During the recent AIPAC Policy Conference, the Muslim-majority country of Azerbaijan made history by [sending a government minister to the gathering](#).

“Cooperation with Israel is not limited to oil supply; we are interested in widening cooperation in defense and the transfer of technology,” Samir Sharifov, Azerbaijan's finance minister, said at the conference.

Sharifov also read remarks from Mehriban Aliyeva, the first vice president of Azerbaijan, who had written in a letter to AIPAC, “It is gratifying that our former compatriots of Jewish origin, living nowadays in the United States and Israel, have maintained close ties with Azerbaijan and contribute to the strengthening of our relations with these countries. We are much grateful to them.”

Such ties are becoming increasingly indispensable in a world facing the common danger of a virus that knows no geographic human borders or human differences.

On the same day that Israel issued its quarantine orders, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [reached out](#) to several other close allies in Europe, including Italy — which has issued a nationwide shutdown due to coronavirus — to call for the pooling of technological and health resources to combat the virus.

Azerbaijan is similarly being forced to make tough decisions regarding coronavirus in order to protect its citizens. In late February, the country [closed its border](#) with Iran, which is facing one of the largest and most deadly outbreaks of the virus. While coronavirus cases in Azerbaijan still remain low and are largely tied to the outbreak in Iran, the country shares Israel's understanding that taking proactive steps is crucial in limiting the spread of the virus.

World Health Organization experts are expected to visit Azerbaijan to learn about how the nation is preparing for the virus, much like they have done in many other countries.

Azerbaijan's population is just under 10 million — slightly larger than Israel's population. The country has reported nine cases of the virus and one death as of March 12. As of March 5, it had around 500 people in quarantine. On March 12, Israel had 126 cases.

This coronavirus mitigation is a major feat for Azerbaijan considering that it borders Iran, which has more than 11,300 cases of the virus and over 500 deaths.

Azerbaijan has set quarantine centers throughout the country — allowing for faster reaction to a possible outbreak, especially near the border with Iran. Baku has also imported medical technology to prepare for coronavirus treatment and prevention.

Could fighting coronavirus represent the latest frontier in the Israeli-Azerbaijani relationship as both countries work to implement like-minded restrictions to keep their people safe?

The Azerbaijani-Israeli partnership is already known for pioneering the concept of warm Jewish-Muslim ties. The foundation for an expanded relationship is there. In his [first interview with Azerbaijani media](#), Israel's Ambassador to Azerbaijan George Deek recently spoke about the growing importance of ties between the two countries not only in the fields of energy and agriculture, but also in technology.

“Right now, Israel is a start-up nation. We have the largest number of start-up companies per capita in the world. We are the second biggest center after the Silicon Valley for innovation technology and start-ups,” Deek said.

He continued, “Azerbaijan is investing a lot in developing the innovation field. The government has opened an innovation agency, you have more and more funds being allocated to innovation, to bringing a higher degree of technology to the country. I think Israel is a natural partner in that sense.”

At a time when the world is facing a pandemic, international cooperation and innovation is more essential than ever. While Israel and Azerbaijan are taking their own steps to protect their citizens from coronavirus, they may soon need to rely on each other to get through this crisis.

*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.*

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Jacob Kamaras  
Founder  
Stellar Jay Communications  
646-338-5946

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