

## Iran's Threat to Azerbaijan's Critical Energy Infrastructure

By

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Iranian leaders increased their belligerent rhetoric following the October 1 attack in which [the Islamic Republic fired nearly 200 ballistic missiles on Israel](#). Codenamed “True Promise,” the attack was the second direct Iranian action against Israel since April and indicates Tehran's growing aggressiveness, which poses a significant threat in its neighbourhood.

As discussions of retaliation by Israel continue, [the media discuss Iranian oil refineries as possible targets](#) that might be hit. Israeli Defence minister, [Yoav Gallant, stated that retaliation against Iran's missile attacks will be “lethal and surprising.”](#) Meanwhile, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-linked social media accounts are already spreading reports that Tehran warned the United States that actions against Iranian oil refineries will lead [the Islamic Republic to target oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait](#). According to a Reuters report, [Iran also warned the Gulf Arab states](#) that any use of their airspace or military bases to target Iran will be unacceptable and threatened a military response.

### Iran's Strategy

Iran's reference to Azerbaijan as a potential target, should Israel attack Iranian oil refineries, is an indication of the Islamic Republic's growing threat to critical energy infrastructure not only in the Middle East, but also in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea basin region. [Azerbaijan supplies 40 percent of Israel's energy needs](#) and Azerbaijan's oil and gas infrastructure is the backbone of its independence in the geopolitically tense region.

Not only does Azerbaijan meet nearly 40 percent of Israel's demand for crude oil, Azerbaijan's state energy giant [SOCAR, alongside British Petroleum and Israel's NewMed, was awarded a licence](#) to explore an area to the north of Israel's Leviathan gas field in the Eastern Mediterranean. The strong bilateral and multifaceted relations between Israel and Azerbaijan are a primary concern for Iran.

In anticipation of Israeli retaliation against the Iranian ballistic missile attacks, the [Iranian media continues to make unsubstantiated claims](#) about supposed secret Israeli military bases in Azerbaijan with a ridiculous accusation that Azerbaijan is one of the origins of sabotage against the Islamic Republic. Talking about possible Israeli retaliation against Iranian oil facilities, Iranian diplomat Abbas Mousavi falsely claimed in an interview to *Tejarat News* that [Israel deployed many planes to Azerbaijan](#).

In fact, since Hamas launched the brutal terrorist attacks against Israel in October 2023, Iran's main goal is the consolidation of the members of the Organisation of Islamic States to achieve an economic blockade and diplomatic isolation from Israel. Iranian Supreme leader [Ayatollah Khamenei repeatedly called on Arab and Muslim countries to impose an oil embargo](#) on Israel. [Iranian officials frequently repeat similar calls](#) showing Tehran's agenda behind the Hamas attacks, which aimed to disrupt economic, political,

and diplomatic relations between the State of Israel and Muslim-majority nations.

Iran's multidimensional strategy behind the Hamas attacks was based on several ambitious goals, including preventing possible normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia and other Arab states; derailing the Abraham Accords; preventing efforts to improve strained Turkish-Israeli ties; and trying to inflict economic and diplomatic damage on Israel-Azerbaijan strategic ties. Iran's strategy seeks to achieve multiple goals simultaneously in both the Middle East and South Caucasus.

Iranian media outlets launched coordinated [propaganda attacks against Turkey and Azerbaijan](#) for supplying crude oil to Israel via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline since the Hamas terrorist attacks and start of the subsequent war in Gaza. Iran-inspired, pro-Hamas Islamist, and leftist circles in Turkey [staged several demonstrations where they vandalised Azerbaijani oil company, SOCAR, offices](#) in Istanbul in an attempt to halt oil exports.

Considering the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey, the country is a comfortable space for Iranian propaganda and hybrid activities covered by so-called Islamic narratives. Ironically, the fact that [Iran is a major energy supplier to Armenia and supplied the formerly Armenian-occupied Karabakh region](#) received no similar response from Islamists or leftists in Turkey.

## Coercive Actions

Iran's military threats against Azerbaijan increased from the end of the Second Karabakh War, when the balance of power in the South Caucasus shifted in Baku's favor. Iran conducted several military drills near Azerbaijan's border, putting on a show of force against the geopolitical changes in the region. In late September and early October 2021 Iran suddenly conducted military drills near Azerbaijan's borders.

An Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman described the exercises as a "sovereign right," saying, "[Iran will not tolerate the presence of the Zionist regime](#)" near its borders. Iran undertook another military provocation a year later when [Tehran laid pontoon bridges across the Araz River](#) near the Azerbaijani border and crossed the river as part of war games. In March 2023, an [Iranian air force fighter jet violated Azerbaijan's airspace](#). The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry summoned Iran's ambassador, and the Azerbaijani Defence and Foreign Ministries issued a joint statement condemning the incursion.

When Israel liquidated Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, in Damascus in April 2024, [Iranian member of parliament, Jalal Rashidi Kochi, called for strikes on an Israeli embassy in the region](#), preferably in Azerbaijan. Iranian attempts to target the Israeli embassy and ambassadors in Baku were also foiled on many occasions over the years; [the most recent reported attempt involved the arrest of an Afghan national in July 2023](#). Recently [Iran has enhanced its naval capabilities in the Caspian Sea](#) and [increased naval drills](#), including [joint drills with Russia](#).

## Iran's Missile and Cyber Capabilities

Iran possesses numerous capabilities to threaten critical infrastructure including

energy and power in the region. Among them Tehran's ballistic missiles and cyber tools are key. [Iran maintains the largest ballistic and cruise missile force in the Middle East](#), capable of reaching 2,500 kilometres from its borders. Moreover, these capabilities combined with Iran's drone arsenal can overwhelm missile defence systems. [Iran's missile attacks against Saudi oil facilities in 2019 were conducted by a combination of drones and cruise missiles](#).

Iran has improved its offensive cyber capabilities, too, and [is capable of causing localised and temporary disruption to corporate networks](#) for days or weeks. Drilling oil wells, pumping crude oil, and loading fuel are processes where cyberattacks can cause significant disruptions. According to an FBI report released in August 2024, [Iran exploited computer network vulnerabilities](#) to infiltrate and steal sensitive technical data from organisations in Israel and Azerbaijan. In July, cybersecurity firm Check Point reported that an [Iranian hacker group named Muddy Water](#), affiliated with Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, increased its cyber activities against targets in Azerbaijan, Israel, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

## Securing Critical Infrastructure

Overall, considering Azerbaijan's key role in the energy security of vital American allies, such as Europe, Israel, and Turkey, and its significant help in supplying energy to US-friendly states Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the next administration needs to reverse shortsighted Biden State Department policy. The decision not to waive Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, banning US aid to the Azerbaijani government, damages American interests in the South Caucasus. It is in the interest of the US and Azerbaijan to expand their military and technical partnership to secure critical infrastructure in the region.

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