

Jarosław KARDAŚ

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1517-6215>

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Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia relations with Israel in the context of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack

Abstract: The main purpose of this article is to analyze the relationships of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia with Israel in the context of the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. Although Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are geographically situated outside the Middle East and are part of the former USSR region, they closely monitor developments in the neighboring Middle East area. Examining the attitudes of the three South Caucasus countries aims to address whether the authorities of the three countries reacted similarly to the latest episode of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or if notable differences emerged. This analysis will help determine the current state of relations between Israel and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as assess whether any of the South Caucasus republics can be considered a loyal ally of Israel in the region.

Key words: Countries of the South Caucasus, Israel, Hamas, attack, October 7, 2023

Introduction

The Middle East region has been a hot spot for conflict over the decades, drawing responses and positions from various members of the international community. Not only have the world's major powers weighed in on these issues, but smaller states have also expressed their views, particularly regarding ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2023, this conflict saw a renewed escalation, with tensions reaching a new peak on October 7 when Hamas launched an unexpected attack on Israel.

The main purpose of this article is to analyze the relations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia with Israel in the context of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack. Although Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are not part



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of the Middle East, they closely observe developments in the neighboring region. The examination of the attitudes of these three Transcaucasian states aims to answer whether the authorities in each country reacted similarly to the renewed escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or if there were distinct differences in their responses. This analysis will help clarify the current nature of relations between Israel and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and determine if any of the Transcaucasian republics could be considered a loyal ally of Israel in the region.

For the purpose of this article, a research hypothesis was formulated, suggesting that all Transcaucasian states, following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, limited their responses to verbal appeals for an end to hostilities and civilian attacks, as none of these countries have an interest in straining their relations with the broader Islamic world. The study employs content analysis, examining official statements from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia after the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, as well as remarks by key political figures from these countries. Additionally, it uses the decision-making method to identify the factors that led authorities in Yerevan, Baku, and Tbilisi to adopt specific stances in response to the renewed escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The development and consequences of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel

The Hamas attack on Israel, unexpected to many, took place on October 7, 2023, leading Israel into yet another intense and bloody conflict. Although this assault came as a shock to Israeli authorities, it must have been in preparation by Hamas for an extended period, as indicated by the sheer scale of coordinated actions carried out that day (Pronińska, Balcerowicz, Lizak, Pińczak, 2024, p. 127). The attack began with Hamas operatives breaching Israel's security barrier and occupying parts of the border area. Later reports revealed that the attackers advanced up to 20 kilometers from the Gaza-Israel border.

This assault resulted in numerous casualties among civilians and Israeli security personnel, with some civilians in the area being abducted. Additionally, the attack involved extensive rocket fire into Israeli territory, with estimates suggesting that over 2,000 rockets were launched, targeting southern and central Israel (Ioanes, 2023).

Hamas revealed the main motives for the attack, describing it as a response to Israel's actions in the occupied territories, specifically the expansion of settlements in Palestinian areas, and the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip. The attack was also framed as an expression of strong opposition to the conditions facing Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons.

The October 2023 Hamas attack resulted in a death toll of approximately 1,300 people, comprising civilians, soldiers, and police officers. The highest number of casualties occurred during the *Tribe of Nova – Supernova* electronic music festival held in the Negev desert around 5 kilometers from the Gaza Strip border. The brutality of the attackers was evident, as they indiscriminately targeted individuals, aiming for a high death toll without regard to age or nationality; among those killed were foreign nationals from various Asian countries. Hamas operatives attacking the border areas engaged in more than assassinations and kidnappings. They also conducted large-scale arson attacks on buildings within the zone and committed acts of sexual violence (Matusiak, 2023).

This unprecedented attack prompted an immediate response from Israeli authorities, who launched retaliatory operations in the Gaza Strip on the same day. The operation, named "Iron Swords," targeted Hamas and, as it later emerged, impacted civilian areas as well. Martial law was swiftly declared within an 80-kilometer radius of the Gaza Strip, and airstrikes were promptly initiated on Hamas-controlled territories. This was accompanied by the mobilization of reservists and an almost total blockade of the Gaza Strip, coordinated in part with Egypt.

These actions marked the first phase of the operation, aimed primarily at driving Hamas operatives out of Israeli territory and targeting command centers, weapons depots, and other strategically important facilities. On October 27, the operation's second phase commenced with the entry of Israeli ground forces into Gaza. The overarching goals were to dismantle Hamas, secure the release of hostages, and neutralize any further threats to Israeli security (Matusiak, 2024). However, a temporary ceasefire was implemented during the conflict. Through Qatar's mediation, both sides agreed to suspend military actions from November 24 to December 1, 2023, facilitating an exchange of hostages and Palestinian prisoners (Pronińska, Balcerowicz, Lizak, Pińczak, 2024, pp. 128–130).

There is ongoing debate among Middle East scholars regarding the primary objectives behind the October 7, 2023, attack carried out by Hamas. One key goal, which Hamas appears to have achieved, was to challenge Israel's reputation as a state capable of responding effectively to

any potential threat. The high number of fatalities, injuries, and abductions serves as a stark indicator of this vulnerability. Another intended goal was to bolster Hamas' position relative to the Palestinian Authority, which is linked to the rival Fatah faction (Wojnarowicz, 2023).

However, Hamas did not succeed in one of its presumed aims: expanding the conflict regionally. An escalation involving other pro-Iranian factions, such as Shiite groups in Iraq and Syria or the Houthi movement in Yemen, would likely have been favorable for Hamas. Additionally, there was likely an expectation that Hezbollah would engage more directly by launching attacks in Israel's northern regions. Despite some isolated clashes, no significant escalation materialized in the north. This may be partly due to Hezbollah's depleted resources following its prolonged involvement in Syria. Another reason may be the reserved stance taken by Iran, Hezbollah's ally, which refrained from active participation. The Palestinian Authority also remained restrained, likely due to its assessment of the substantial imbalance in forces and resources between the conflicting parties (Pronińska, Balcerowicz, Lizak, Pińczak, 2024, p. 131).

The attack had significant repercussions, both domestically within Gaza and Israel and internationally. In Israel, it severely impacted the credibility of the Israeli authorities, who had long asserted their capability to safeguard their citizens. The attack led many within Israeli society to question whether the government was effectively fulfilling its internal security responsibilities. These doubts grew after reports emerged suggesting that Israeli authorities may have had prior intelligence about the planned attack by Hamas but failed to act on it. On the global stage, this act of terror brought the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of international discourse. Some researchers suggest that another motive behind the October 7 attack was to disrupt the process of normalizing Israel's relations with certain Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia (Matusiak, 2023).

Armenia's relations with Israel in the context of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack

Armenia's response to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel was restrained. In a statement released shortly after the attack, Armenia's Foreign Ministry "expressed shock at the violence between Palestinians and Israelis and the attacks on civilians." However, it avoided showing explicit support for either side. Armenia offered condolences to the vic-

tims' families and wished a swift recovery to the injured. Additionally, the statement emphasized that Yerevan supports international calls to end the violence in the region (*МИД*, 2023). This neutral stance was also reflected in Armenia's position at the United Nations. When the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in December 2023 calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all hostages, Armenia voted in favor of the resolution (*UN*, 2023).

After the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, gestures of solidarity between Armenia and Israel were notably absent. Instead, certain incidents indirectly targeted Israel, such as the attempted arson of a synagogue in Yerevan in November 2023 (Hovhannisyan, 2023). Interestingly, a similar attempted arson incident occurred just days earlier, on October 3, before the Hamas attack (Lidor, 2023). Responsibility for these attacks was claimed by a group known as ASALA-Young, which asserts itself as a continuation of the historical Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), a group with a history of violent actions.

These incidents have influenced the portrayal of Armenia in the Israeli media. Publications like "The Jerusalem Post" frequently label Armenia as one of the most anti-Semitic countries in the post-Soviet region, with claims that over half of the Armenian population holds anti-Jewish sentiments, allegedly leading to systemic anti-Semitism. This sentiment was echoed by Zamir Isayev, a rabbi and director of a Jewish school in Baku, who, following the autumn arson incidents, posted on the "X" platform urging Jews to leave Armenia as soon as possible (Hovhannisyan, 2023). Additionally, Armenian social media activity post-October 7, 2023, has included numerous posts with anti-Israeli sentiment, primarily criticizing Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip, particularly its strikes on civilian targets.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Armenia has long supported a two-state solution, advocating for the establishment of both Israel and Palestine as independent states. Interestingly, this position aligns closely with that of Azerbaijan. A key moment in Armenia's stance occurred on June 21, 2024, when Armenia's Foreign Ministry issued a statement formally recognizing Palestinian independence. Armenian authorities justified this decision as a response to the "critical situation in the Gaza Strip," signaling their concern over the ongoing violence in the region.

The statement strongly condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure, violence against civilians, and the taking of hostages during armed conflicts, expressing solidarity with the international community's calls for

the unconditional release of hostages. Armenia emphasized its commitment to peace in the Middle East and reiterated its support for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the establishment of two states (*Statement by*, 2024).

The Palestinian side responded positively to Armenia's decision. Hussein al-Sheikh, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, quickly expressed gratitude for Armenia's stance. He posted on the "X" platform, celebrating this decision as an important step toward Palestinian freedom (*Kolejny...*, 2024). With this announcement, Armenia became the 145th country to recognize Palestinian independence.¹

Such a stance may not be surprising given the ongoing diplomatic tensions between Armenia and Israel in recent years. These strained relations have contributed to the infrequent meetings between officials from both countries (*Bilateral Relations*). On the surface, without delving deeply into the unique contexts of the Middle East and the former USSR, one might assume that Armenia and Israel share numerous commonalities. Both nations have endured histories marked by genocide in the 20th century – Armenians and Jews both experienced significant tragedies. Additionally, each country faces challenges in an unfavorable geopolitical environment, surrounded by neighboring Islamic states. Both also have extensive diasporas, which play a crucial role in their national identities and foreign policies. The significant influence of the Armenian diaspora is highlighted in Armenia's 2020 National Security Strategy, which underscores the importance of Armenians living abroad, who are estimated to number around 6 million globally – outnumbering those within Armenia itself (*National Security Strategy...*, 2020). However, despite these shared aspects, Israel's approach to policy in the South Caucasus region has become a major point of contention between the two nations, driving a wedge in their diplomatic relations.

Israel formally recognized Armenia on December 25, 1991, and diplomatic relations were established on April 4, 1992 (*Bilateral relations*). However, during the 1990s – particularly under the rule of Armenia's so-called "Karabakh clan" – the two countries signed few agreements. Exceptions included an agreement on health and medical cooperation in

¹ In 2024, in reaction to events in the fall of 2023, other countries that had not previously done so, such as Spain, Slovenia, Norway and Ireland, for example, also decided to recognize Palestine (Broda, 2024).

October 1998 and another on promoting mutual investment in January 2000. Key obstacles to stronger bilateral cooperation included Israel's reluctance to officially recognize the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire, as well as Armenia's positive relations with Iran following its independence.

The relationship faced further strain in May 2002, when reports surfaced alleging that Armenian companies were involved in Iran's nuclear program. The U.S. State Department issued a statement indicating suspicions that several companies based in Nagorno-Karabakh were collaborating with Tehran on nuclear projects (Bishku, 2009, p. 305). After 2018, following the political transition in Armenia and the removal of the Karabakh clan from power, Yerevan aimed to improve its relationship with Israel. An important gesture in this direction was Armenia's decision to open an embassy in Tel Aviv. Diplomatic ties were further strengthened through high-level visits and increased inter-parliamentary cooperation.

Today, in 2024, Armenia views its relationship with Israel primarily through the lens of Israel's close ties with Azerbaijan. This focus is particularly driven by Israel's significant military support to Azerbaijan (Mammadov, 2023). During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenia expressed its discontent with Israel's military cooperation with Baku by recalling its ambassador from Israel – a clear diplomatic signal of Armenia's opposition to Jerusalem's support for Azerbaijan.

However, not all Armenian representatives supported this decision. Israel's honorary consul in Yerevan, Achot Chakhmouradian, who has held the position since 2013, publicly disagreed with the Armenian government's stance. Chakhmouradian argued that Israel is not the only country providing arms to Azerbaijan. He highlighted that Russia, despite being Armenia's formal ally, also supplies military equipment to Azerbaijan, which further complicates Armenia's security dynamics in the region (Luxner, 2022).

Another significant gesture affecting Israel-Armenia relations was Armenia's rejection of an Israeli offer of humanitarian aid during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In November 2020, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan gave a high-profile interview to the "Jerusalem Post," in which he accused Israel of "allying itself with the devil." By "the devil," Pashinyan referred to countries hostile to Armenia, specifically Azerbaijan and Turkey. He further suggested that Israeli authorities should direct their humanitarian aid to "mercenaries and Islamic terrorists," whom he claimed were allied with Israel against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. These remarks reflect a narrative within Armenia that frames Israel's support for Azerbaijan as part of a broader geopolitical alignment, influenced by Armenia's positive relations with Israel's adversary, Iran. Armenian leaders frequently emphasize that Israel's political and military support for Azerbaijan stems from Armenia's friendly ties with Iran, one of Israel's main adversaries in the Middle East.

Israel has consistently refrained from officially recognizing the mass murder of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide, complicating its relations with Armenia. For Armenia, acknowledgment of the 1915 massacre is fundamental to its national identity and significantly influences Yerevan's foreign policy (Ananicz, 2015). This position is especially perplexing given that Israeli politicians often criticize Turkey's international stance.

This vague stance generates discontent not only within Armenia but also among the Armenian community in Israel, which is estimated to number around 6,000, primarily residing in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter (*Armenia...*, 2024). Following the Hamas attack, Armenia's Foreign Ministry reported that the country's embassy in Israel was in constant communication with Armenians and Armenian organizations (*Statement*, 2023). In Armenia, there is a small Jewish community, with estimates indicating that only about 280 Jewish families reside in the country, translating to roughly 1,000 individuals of Jewish origin. These strained diplomatic relations also impact economic ties between the two countries. In 2022, Israel's exports to Armenia amounted to just \$13.9 million (*Israel Exports to Armenia*), while Armenia's exports to Israel totaled \$9.2 million in 2023 (*Armenia Exports...*).

Azerbaijan's relations with Israel in the context of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack

The response of Azerbaijani authorities to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel can be described as "strategic silence." Azerbaijani officials deliberately avoided direct public statements about the incident. When they did comment, their statements were limited to condemning violence against civilians. On October 7, 2023, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry posted on the "X" platform, expressing condolences for the lives lost in both Israel and Gaza and calling for "urgent de-escalation of the situation" (*MFA Azerbaijan*, 2023).

A few days later, on October 9, Azerbaijani Ambassador to Israel, Mukhtar Mammadov, also addressed the issue on “X.” He condemned the violence, particularly rocket and terrorist attacks, and expressed horror at the kidnappings of civilians, including women and children. Mammadov emphasized that “Israel, like other countries, has the right to live in peace and security” (Ashirov, 2023).

At the United Nations General Assembly, Azerbaijan supported a resolution adopted in December 2023 calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages (UN..., 2023). In the weeks and months that followed, as reports emerged about Israeli actions in the territory recently controlled by Hamas, Azerbaijani authorities refrained from criticizing the brutality of Israeli forces, even symbolically (Mammadli, 2024). This was also evident when President Ilham Aliyev met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the Munich Security Conference in February 2024 (Ilham..., 2024). During this meeting, Aliyev did not address the issue of Israeli military actions in Gaza. This approach by the Azerbaijani president appeared aimed at demonstrating to Israel that it was not isolated within the Islamic world.

The only exception to Azerbaijan’s strategic silence was a speech by Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov at an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on October 18, 2023, where he used slogans of Islamic solidarity (Mammadov, 2023). During his speech, he called for Israel to withdraw to the 1949 armistice line and for the re-division of Jerusalem. However, Bayramov did not explicitly condemn Israeli actions in Gaza. His remarks were largely a response to Hamas’s actions following the September 2023 events in Nagorno-Karabakh. After Azerbaijan regained control of the territory in the Third Arcach War, a Hamas spokesperson publicly congratulated Azerbaijan on its victory. This reaction was religiously motivated, as Hamas celebrated the defeat of the Christian Armenian side and the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Rubin, 2023).

Interestingly, during Israel’s military operations in the Gaza Strip, no protests were organized in Azerbaijan against the government’s stance. Some opinion polling centers even suggest that nearly two-thirds of Azerbaijan’s population supports Israel’s response to the October 7, 2023, attack. Azerbaijani mainstream media also expressed a pro-Israel position. Regarding Azerbaijan’s official stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Baku has long advocated for a two-state solution, supporting the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

This position was reaffirmed by President Ilham Aliyev during his visit to Egypt in 2024 (Hajiyeva, 2024). Azerbaijan's support for Palestinian statehood is not new; on April 15, 1992, the Azerbaijani government officially recognized Palestine internationally, a stance they have maintained since the 1990s.

The response of Azerbaijani authorities to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel is unsurprising given the longstanding relations between the two countries, which date back to the 1990s. Azerbaijan and Israel share several mutual interests, making their relationship largely transactional. For Azerbaijan, maintaining good relations with Israel is advantageous, as it facilitates lobbying efforts among Jewish organizations in the United States, providing a counterbalance to the Armenian diaspora's influence within the American political elite. Moreover, Israel has been a significant security partner for Azerbaijan, supplying weapons to Baku since the early 1990s. This support was evident during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, when Israel provided Azerbaijan with advanced aerial, artillery, anti-personnel, and anti-tank weapon systems, as documented by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Israel continued to supply military aid in the lead-up to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, despite officially maintaining a neutral stance on the conflict. For example, Israel provided Azerbaijan with Harop "kamikaze drones" and humanitarian aid.

For Israel, Azerbaijan represents a valuable ally, particularly in light of its conflict with the Palestinians. Positive relations with Azerbaijan demonstrate to the international community that Israel can engage in meaningful cooperation with a predominantly Muslim country. Additionally, Azerbaijan has not prioritized the Palestinian issue as a point of tension in its relations with Israel (Mruk, Piwowska, 2021, p. 41). Regionally, Azerbaijan serves as an important counterbalance to Iranian influence, as the country is cautious of the Ayatollahs' regime despite cultural and historical proximity. While some speculate that Azerbaijan could serve as a base for an Israeli attack on Iran, such claims should be regarded with caution.

Reflecting on the early 1990s, Israel was one of the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, doing so on December 25, 1991. This was part of a broader Israeli foreign policy strategy that sought to extend recognition to newly independent states formed from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In addition to strengthening diplomatic ties with these states, this approach aimed to improve Israel's image inter-

nationally – not only among Islamic states in the Middle East but also within the United Nations. Seven months later, Azerbaijan reciprocated by recognizing Israel, becoming the third Islamic-majority country, after Turkey and Egypt, to establish formal diplomatic relations with it (Mruk, Piwowarska, 2021, pp. 35–36). While Israel quickly set up its embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan delayed opening a diplomatic mission in Israel. It was not until nearly three decades later that Azerbaijan established an official representation in Tel Aviv. The primary reason for this delay was Azerbaijan's concern about Iran's potential reaction to such a move.

The cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan extends beyond security and defense to significant economic partnerships. Israel ranks as one of Azerbaijan's key trading partners, supplying Baku with a wide range of goods, including electronic equipment, medical and optical devices, weaponry, ammunition, and furniture (*Israel Exports to Azerbaijan*). In 2022, Israel's exports to Azerbaijan were valued at over \$159 million. For Israel, Azerbaijan is a crucial supplier of oil, fulfilling nearly 40% of its oil needs. This supply chain operates indirectly through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which was developed in the early 2000s. In the future, Azerbaijan could play an even greater role in Israel's energy security by serving as an intermediary for Central Asian energy resources. Beyond oil, Azerbaijan exports various goods to Israel, including processed foods, grain, electronic equipment, aluminum, iron and steel products, optical and photographic apparatus, and pharmaceuticals. In 2023, the total value of Azerbaijan's exports to Israel reached \$1.4 billion, underscoring the depth of their economic relationship (*Azerbaijan...*).

Georgia's relations with Israel in the context of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack

Shortly after the Hamas attack began, the Georgian authorities expressed their support for Israel. Following the tragic events of October 7, 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia issued a statement strongly condemning the horrific terrorist attack on the State of Israel, which resulted in numerous casualties (*MFA of Georgia*, 2023). The statement emphasized Georgia's solidarity with the Israeli government and its citizens, adding, "Our thoughts are with the families and loved ones of the victims of this terrible attack." On October 9, Georgian Foreign Minister Ilya Darchiashvili met with Hadas Meitzad, the Israeli Ambassador to

Georgia. During this meeting, they discussed the evolving situation that began on October 7, 2023. The head of Georgian diplomacy not only offered his condolences and condemned this act of terror but also assured his government's diplomatic support for Israel. During the meeting, assurances were given regarding cooperation between the two countries across various fields (*Ilia...*, 2023).

A significant gesture of Georgia's support for Israel was the invitation extended on October 12, 2023, to the Israeli Ambassador to Georgia to address the Foreign Affairs Committee of the local parliament. During her address, she made remarks targeting Iran. This is because she stated that Hamas would not have been able to carry out the attack had it not been for financial and logistical support from Tehran. This was met with an immediate response from Iran's ambassador to Georgia, who appealed to the Georgian authorities to stand with the Palestinian people (Mammadov, 2023). When the United Nations General Assembly voted in December 2023 on a resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza, as well as the release of all hostages, the Georgian representative abstained (*UN...*, 2023). Georgia was among 23 countries that demonstrated such an attitude at the UN General Assembly.

Support for Israel was also evident in statements by politicians from the ruling party, Georgian Dream, as reported in various media outlets. On the platform "X," the then Prime Minister of Georgia posted a message strongly condemning the terrorist attack on Israel and its citizens. In his post dated October 7, 2023, he expressed his "heartfelt condolences to the Government and People of the State of Israel" and wished for a speedy recovery for all those injured (*Georgian...*, 2023). The attack was also condemned by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who expressed her deep concern about the escalation of the conflict in Israel and the loss of innocent lives in a post on the "X" portal on October 7. She stated her full solidarity with Israel, emphasizing that terror should have no place in today's world (*Deeply...*, 2023). President Zourabichvili reaffirmed Georgia's solidarity with Israel following the tragic events during a meeting with Ambassador Hadas Meitzad on October 13, 2023. At that time, she also handed over a letter of condolence that she sent to the Israeli President (*Meeting...*, 2023). In turn, Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili expressed on the social media platform "X" that "the unjustified, brutal, and inhumane aggression against the State of Israel will not continue." He emphasized that Georgians support "brotherly Israel" and asserted that there is no place in the world for such violence

(*Georgia reacts...*, 2023). Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze also commented on the issue, stating in a statement that “Georgian authorities have always sided with the Jewish people in the past, and the same is true today.” Shortly after the attack, he informed the public that Georgia would continue to support Israel in the future (*Ruling...*, 2023). In the Georgian capital, on October 8, the national colors of Israel were displayed when the TV tower, situated on one of the hills in the city, was illuminated. This act served as a symbol of Georgia’s solidarity with the state that had been attacked (*Tbilisi...*, 2023).

The authorities in Georgia were concerned about the situation in that area of the Middle East, particularly regarding their citizens living there. For this reason, on October 12, 2023, Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimer Konstantinidi and members of the Parliamentary Committee on Diaspora Affairs participated in a remote meeting with Georgians residing in Israel. During this meeting, citizens of the Caucasian republic expressed their most urgent needs. It was noted at the time that Georgia’s diplomatic representation in Israel was operating in emergency mode (*Vladimer...*, 2023).

Such an attitude and statements by Georgian authorities should not come as a surprise. Since June 1992, when bilateral relations were established, politicians from both countries have worked to ensure good relations not only in the political sphere but also in the military domain. This commitment is reflected in Georgia’s National Security Concept, which includes Israel among the countries with which Tbilisi aims to develop political dialogue and economic cooperation. Other countries in this group include China, Japan, South Korea, Canada, India, and Brazil (*National Security Concept...*). Israel was the fourth country to recognize Georgia internationally. Interestingly, Georgia also recognizes Palestine on the international stage, a status that was officially confirmed on April 25, 1992. The year 1992 was significant for Israeli-Georgian relations, as it marked the establishment of the International Development Cooperation Agency by the authorities in Tel Aviv in Georgia. This initiative brought the two countries closer together in various fields, including agriculture, education, and medicine. The Agency’s activities also contributed to the empowerment of women in Georgian society and fostered innovations in various areas of life. During the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze, the two countries signed several agreements that mandated cooperation between their governments, particularly in areas such as agriculture and telecommunications services (Bishku, 2009, pp. 307–308). In addition,

there were meetings between Georgian and Israeli politicians during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century. Notable examples include visits by Presidents Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili to Israel in 1998, 2000, 2004, and 2006, respectively (*Bilateral relations. Israel...*).

In the years leading up to the Russian-Georgian war, Georgia purchased military equipment from Israel, including drones, anti-tank missiles, and mortars. However, during the war itself, Israel's stance regarding Tbilisi's interests became less clear-cut. While Israel officially supported the invaded state, advocating for respect for territorial integrity, its Foreign Ministry advised the Defense Ministry against selling offensive armaments to Georgia. Several years after the war, information emerged indicating that prior to the conflict, Israel had provided the codes for the Georgian army's flying spy drones, which Tbilisi was acquiring from Tel Aviv. This information was reported by WikiLeaks (Węglarczyk, 2012).

In the second decade of the 21st century, key dates for political-military cooperation between Georgia and Israel were 2013 and 2018. In 2013, a Georgian delegation led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili traveled to Israel to renew military cooperation between the two countries. Another significant milestone in their mutual relations occurred in 2014, when a visa-free agreement was signed during Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili's visit to Israel. This agreement led to a notable increase in the number of Israelis traveling to Georgia, with approximately 217,000 Israeli passport holders visiting Georgia in 2023 (Luxner, 2024). On the other hand, a cooperation agreement on counterterrorism and cyber security was signed in 2018 (Berman, 2021). That same year, an Israeli defense company decided to open an aircraft parts factory for civil aviation in Tbilisi, providing jobs for many Georgians. Furthermore, in August 2023, during Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili's visit to Israel, an announcement was made regarding the start of free trade negotiations between the two countries set for 2024. During this meeting, discussions also focused on further developing cooperation in the areas of security, artificial intelligence, medicine, and tourism. According to official figures, Georgia's exports to Israel amounted to \$20.6 million in 2023 (*Georgia Exports...*). In contrast, Israel's exports to Georgia in 2022 were \$32.2 million (*Israel Exports to Georgia*).

It is also significant that many Georgians view Israel as a country whose approach is worth emulating. Georgians particularly admire Israel's model of political governance and its economic system. The functioning of a state that is a *de facto* ally in a geographically distant region

from the West serves as a valuable example for them. Indeed, it is important to note that Georgian society has strong aspirations to be part of the Euro-Atlantic community, as indicated by opinion polls conducted in the country (Szeptycki, 2023, p. 299). Indeed, in recent years, over 80% of Georgians have favored integration with the European Union (Strachota, 2024), and more than 70% wish for their country to join NATO (Górecki, 2022). This widespread sentiment helps explain the scale of the protests against the “Law on Foreign Agents” that occurred in Georgia during April and May 2024. Many citizens expressed their opposition to this legislation, as a significant portion of Georgian society recognizes that its passage would distance Georgia from the Western world, including its aspirations for European Union membership.

Conclusion

Analyzing the attitudes of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia toward the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel reveals that all three countries primarily limited their responses to calls for a cessation of fighting and attacks on civilians. Additionally, both Azerbaijan and Armenia were cautious not to take actions that could negatively impact their relations with Middle Eastern partners, including both Israel and Islamic states. This was particularly important for Azerbaijan, which, although it has been cooperating with Israel in many fields for more than a dozen years, does not want to worsen its image among Islamic states. Indeed, relations between the two countries have long appeared to be a pure transactional relationship, in which both sides receive certain benefits. The subdued attitude of Armenia is understandable, given the significance of its political and economic relations with Iran, which is Israel’s greatest enemy in the Middle East. Additionally, it is noteworthy that since 2020, following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, relations between Israel and Armenia have become strained. Among the three Transcaucasian states, Georgia demonstrated the most pro-Israeli stance in response to the Hamas attack. Not only did Georgian politicians express the strongest opposition to the actions taken by Hamas, but Tbilisi also made several gestures internationally that were well received by Israel. One notable gesture was Georgia’s stance at the UN General Assembly. When a resolution calling for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” in the Gaza Strip was voted on in December 2023, Georgia was among the 23 countries that abstained from

voting. In contrast, Armenia and Azerbaijan supported the resolution. The reactions of the South Caucasus countries to the Hamas attack on Israel in October, as well as the subsequent war in Gaza, illustrate the complexities of international relations in the Middle East. This complexity is significant not only for Middle Eastern actors but also for neighboring states. Alliances in this region are often not straightforward, and certain events can rapidly alter the political, economic, or military relationships between individual states, sometimes almost overnight.

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Authors contributions

Conceptualization: Jarosław Kardaś

Formal analysis: Jarosław Kardaś

Methodology: Jarosław Kardaś

Writing – original draft, review and editing: Jarosław Kardaś

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Relacje Armenii, Azerbejdżanu oraz Gruzji z Izraelem w kontekście ataku Hamasu z 7 października 2023 r.

Streszczenie

Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest przeanalizowanie stosunków Armenii, Azerbejdżanu oraz Gruzji z Izraelem w kontekście ataku Hamasu z 7 października 2023 r. Mimo iż Armenia, Azerbejdżan oraz Gruzja nie są zaliczane do regionu Bliskiego Wschodu (a do tzw. obszaru byłego ZSRR), to jednak bardzo uważnie obserwują procesy zachodzące na sąsiadującym obszarze. Zbadanie postawy trzech państw zakaŕkaskich wynika z chęci poszukania odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy władze wszystkich trzech wymienionych wyżej krajów podobnie zareagowały na kolejne rozmrożenie konfliktu izraelsko-palestyńskiego, czy może jednak występowały w tym zakresie pewne różnice. Pozwoli to określić, jak współcześnie wyglądają relacje pomiędzy Izraelem a Armenią, Azerbejdżanem oraz Gruzją, a także to, czy którąś z republik Kaukazu Południowego można nazwać lojalnym sojusznikiem Izraela w tym regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: państwa Kaukazu Południowego, Izrael, Hamas, zamach, 7 października 2023 r.