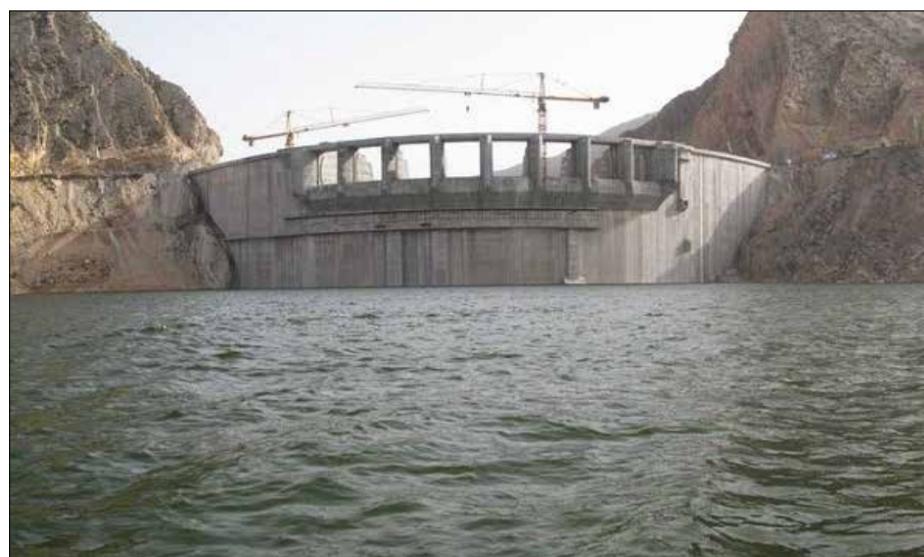




Iran-Azerbaijan to Cooperate on Hydroelectric Power

OE Watch Commentary: In the post 11 September 2001 years, Azerbaijan positioned itself as an ally of the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. This led the Congress to wave Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act which banned most foreign assistance, both civilian and military, to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Turkey, meanwhile, blockaded Armenia which, in the 1988-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh War, occupied not only the former Soviet autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh oblast which international law considers Azerbaijani territory, but also seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts. This blockade forced Armenia to rely on Iran as its main export route for agricultural and manufactured goods. Armenia's close ties to Iran juxtaposed sharply with Azerbaijan's broad antagonism toward the Islamic Republic of Iran and increasingly close strategic ties to the West.



The Khoda-Afarin Dam on the Aras River along the Iran-Azerbaijan Border.
Source: Holy Defense News Agency, https://defapress.ir/files/en/news/2020/12/24/63306_947.jpg

In recent months, however, Azerbaijan and Iran have quietly reconciled. On 14 September 2020, just two weeks before the outbreak of Armenia-Azerbaijan hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Iranian and Azerbaijani transport ministers met to discuss expanding rail and road links between the two countries. Azerbaijan is also the central pivot in a north-south transport corridor linking Iran and Russia.

The excerpted article from Iran's official state news organization, *Islamic Republic News Agency*, highlights a meeting between Azerbaijan's deputy prime minister and Iran's minister of electricity in which the two finalized agreements to upgrade and operate the Khoda Afarin Dam, an earth-fill embankment dam on the Aras River which separates Iran from Azerbaijan. While Iran and Azerbaijan had discussed dam operation in years past, such conversations were largely mooted by the fact that Armenian forces had occupied the border area since 1993. Azerbaijani forces re-established Azeri control over the region in October 2020, however. Such quick agreement on both Khoda Afarin and Qiz Qalehsi, another Aras River hydroelectric project, highlights growing Iranian-Azerbaijani cooperation. That the Islamic Republic largely blockaded Armenia during the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh that ended 10 November further shows the extent of the two Shi'ite countries' cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Azerbaijan pays special attention to the development of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Source: “Zarafiyat-e Jadid Hashiyeh Rud Aras baraye Hamkari Iran va Jomhuri-ye Azerbaijan” (“New capacities along the Aras River for cooperation between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan”), *Islamic Republic News Agency* (Iran's official state news organization), 22 December 2020. <https://www.irna.ir/news/84157981>

On the sidelines of a Tuesday [22 December] meeting at the Ministry of Energy with Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian, [Azerbaijan] Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev told reporters, “New capacities along the Aras River in water, electricity and agriculture sectors has increased cooperation between the two countries.” He continued, “Azerbaijan pays special attention to the development of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and, based on this, I traveled to Iran today with a high-level delegation of Azerbaijani officials to advance and develop the plans of the two countries....” He [Mustafayev] assessed this visit as an important sign of the interest of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the development of relations with neighboring countries, especially Iran.... The Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan continued, “We will cooperate with Iran in the field of synchronization of the electricity network of Iran and the Russian Federation.” He referred to the issue of Iran's electricity exports to the Republic of Azerbaijan and said, “The necessary infrastructure has been provided for it.” “We are cooperating with Iran in other areas as well,” Mustafayev added. “The Khoda Afarin Dam and Qiz Qalehsi project are among these projects.”