
Russia Lures Azerbaijan With New Peace And Energy Initiatives

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World Markets Research Centre / Global Insight - 16/9/2008

The president of Azerbaijan is visiting his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow today at the latter's invitation. The conversation will focus on two principal subjects: a peace settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan's energy policy.

Significance: Russia is keen to play a peacemaker role in the protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the pro-Armenian separatist republic on Azerbaijani territory. Azerbaijan has been building up its military muscle recently, and calls for a military solution of the conflict are heard increasingly. Russia, a traditional ally of Armenia, is keen to avoid another military confrontation in the Caucasus, and the situation where it may be forced to support its ally Armenia in the framework of Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Hence, Medvedev is initiating talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, which he has offered to mediate, to broker an eventual peace deal. Russia is equally keen to preclude Azerbaijan's military, political and energy gravitation towards NATO and the Western organisations, and to counterbalance the obvious efforts taken by the U.S. administration recently, including a visit by vice-president Dick Cheney, to draw Azerbaijan into its sphere of influence. Medvedev will be proposing a treaty banning deployment of military forces from outside the region and will also be lobbying Russia's purchases of Azerbaijani gas from the second stage of Shah-Deniz field. The Azerbaijani president faces some rather tough--if ultimately luxury--choices between the wooings of the Western and Russian leadership. Known for his diplomatic skills, Aliyev is likely to seek to navigate the situation without making a clear alliance with either of the contending sides.
