
Turkey Israel pipeline could shift Middle East power balance.

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Today.Az

22/3/ 2007

Although regional pipelines rarely are recognized as progenitors of global power balance, the prospective agreement between Turkey and Israel to construct such a strategic connection may accomplish a seismic economic shift.

Since Russia, the world's leading oil producer and global runner up energy exporter to Saudi Arabia, is asserting its energy muscle, this circumvention of Russia's monopoly also carries geopolitical overtones.

With Russia in the process of exerting an energy stranglehold over much of the trans-Caucasian and Eastern European areas, a new pipeline could become a counterweight to Moscow's increasing expansionism.

This pipeline now is being considered for extension from oil center Azerbaijan's Baku on the Caspian Sea through Georgia to Turkey's Mediterranean seaport of Ceyhan, all of which avoid impinging on any Russian territory.

Although oil and natural gas flowing through these pipelines originally was targeted for large tankers headed for Europe and elsewhere, such shiploads coming out of the Black Sea and through the Turkish Dardanelles already are overloaded.

Such a glut of tanker volume rapidly has become a gigantic bottleneck, delaying badly needed deliveries for increasingly longer time periods.

Now comes news that Turkey and Israel have reached a memo of understanding calling for a \$4 billion pipeline linking the Turkish port of Ceyhan and Israel's Ashkelon seaport, also on the Mediterranean coast. From there, oil and even badly needed water and electric power for Israel could be piped to Elath, Israel's port on the Gulf of Aqaba leading to the Red Sea.

Continuing on, such varied utilities and others flowing through this multi-task pipeline could be transshipped to Asian markets.

With a \$40 million feasibility study already under way to determine how best to implement such a titanic project in the shortest time possible, what is most remarkable is that this giant project represents a realignment of geopolitical power as well as a circumvention of Russian hegemony.

Emanating from the oil-rich Caspian Sea, this contemplated multinational pipeline avoids encroaching on Russian territory, thereby eliminating any attempted Moscow interference with its free flow. With energy drawn from the Caspian Seas's Azerbaijan-controlled sector, Russia's influence and interference effectively is withheld.

It also reinforces the long-standing Turkish-Israeli military and economic alliance, which seemed to weaken under the current pro-Islamist Ankara regime. Although never verbalized, this Turkish-Israeli joint venture is sure to resolidify the two nations' political and economic ties.

It also could influence internal Turkish politics, which is split between pro-Islamist prime minister Erdogan and the secular president and Army chief of staff.

The successful implementation of the multifaceted pipeline also would represent a victory for American policy, which favors a strengthening of the Turkish-Israeli alliance, while breaking the Russian monopoly over energy suppliers from the Caspian Sea. That source potentially could generate oil and natural gas volume reducing the overwhelming dependence of energy from the militarily vulnerable Persian Gulf area.

The successful completion of such a gigantic undertaking also could add Turkey's considerable power as a bulwark against the rapid spread of radical Islam.

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