

# **Iranian Azerbaijan: A Brewing Hotspot**

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**Svante Cornell\***

Iran’s ethnic Azerbaijani community is seldom in the news, but is gradually becoming an increasingly important factor in the domestic politics of Iran as well as in the regional politics of the so-called Northern Tier of the Middle East, where Iran meets the South Caucasus and Turkey. Both domestic political developments in the Islamic Republic and the larger environment surrounding the region are contributing to making the Azerbaijani community in Iran a potential hotspot. This paper proposes to present the major factors at play that make the issue of Iranian Azerbaijan a transnational issue worthy of international attention. In so doing, it studies the domestic, regional and international aspects of the issue.

## **The Development of Iranian Azerbaijan in the Past Decade**

The area inhabited by Azerbaijani Turks in fact lies not only in what is today the republic of Azerbaijan, but in large tracts of northern Iran. Indeed, the term ‘Azerbaijan’ was the designation of a geographical area on both sides of the river Araxes long before, in the twentieth century, it became the ethnonym of a distinct self-conscious people, referred to variously as the Azeris, Azerbaijanis, or Azerbaijani Turks. Estimates vary regarding the distribution of the Azerbaijanis, but it is beyond doubt that Azerbaijanis in Iran form at least twice the number that exist in the independent state of Azerbaijan. Estimates close to the Iranian government mention a number of 15 million; nationalist Azerbaijani sources talk of close to 30 million. The real number is likely somewhere between these two. The figure of 20 million

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\* Dr. Svante E. Cornell is Executive Director of Cornell Caspian Consulting, LLC. He is also Research Director of the Silk Road Studies Program, Uppsala University, and Deputy Director, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS. He is Editor of the *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* (<http://www.cacianalyst.org>)

often mentioned in the literature is certainly no exaggeration, and the Azerbaijanis are by far the largest minority in Iran, followed by Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens and Baluchis. They are also considered the most well-integrated minority in the country, given their long attachment to Iran and the Shi'a factor common with the Persian population. Conventional wisdom indeed stresses the strength of their Iranian identity, and the weakness of their ethnic Turkic or Azerbaijani identity. To a certain extent, this is true, considering the fact that the representation of ethnic Azeris in the economy, Ulema, and to a lesser extent the political spheres in Iran is high.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is a native of the Khameneh city of the West Azerbaijan province, and is known to be half-Azerbaijani, and to speak Azeri. This illustrates the fact that much like the Kurds in Turkey, Azeris in Iran are not hampered by their ethnic origin, as long as they assume and integrate into the language and culture of the majority population. Large parts of the Tehran Bazaar is in Azerbaijani hands, and Azerbaijanis are numerous in the high ranks of the armed forces. The strength of Iranian identity among Azerbaijanis is derived from the fact that the Safavid dynasty, which ruled Iran from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, was Azerbaijani in origin – visitors to Baku will find Shah Ismail Khatai, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, as an important element of republican Azerbaijani identity.

This said, recent studies have reevaluated the conventional neglect of the distinct identity of the Azerbaijanis in Iran.<sup>1</sup> These studies point to a recurrent political expression of distinct Azerbaijani identity throughout the post-World War II era in Iran. During the revolution, the strong following of the ethnic Azeri Ayatollah Shari'at Madari in Tabriz and other parts of Iranian Azerbaijan has been considered to be linked to a perception among Azerbaijanis of Shari'at Madari as a representative of the interests of the Azerbaijanis.<sup>2</sup> It is reasonably clear that a separate and distinct Azerbaijani identity has been growing among the citizens of north-western Iran. Whereas hardly representing an immediate threat to the regime in 1991, the size, and

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<sup>1</sup> Nasib Nassibli, *Iranda Azérbaycan Mésélési*, Baku: Ay-Ulduz Néhriyatí, 1997; Nassibli, 'The Azerbaijan Question in Iran: A Crucial Question for Iran's Future', *Caspian Crossroads*, Winter 1998; Alireza Ashgarzadeh, *The Rise and Fall of South Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1945-46): A Look at Hegemony, Racism, and Center-Periphery Relations in Contemporary Iran*, Paper presented at a seminar on Race and Racism, University of Toronto, December 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Brenda Shaffer, "The formation of Azerbaijani Collective Identity in Iran", *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 28 no. 3., 2000, pp. 449-478.

economic as well as strategic significance of the Azerbaijani minority was certainly an issue Iran treated with utmost caution. In this context, the emergence of an independent Azerbaijani state in 1991 could not have been greeted with anything but dismay in the ruling circles in Iran. Whether irredentism would grow strong there or not, the very existence of Azerbaijani statehood was set to act as a magnet for significant numbers of Azerbaijanis in the South, and would in the long term ensure that distinct Azerbaijani identity in Iran would not wither away, but quite to the contrary, gradually increase. To be added to this, the nascent Azerbaijani republic was endowed with relatively large oil resources for a comparatively small population, and thus had the potential of acquiring significant wealth, whereas Iran has been in a state of economic decay due to war, a stagnant economy – and, significantly, U.S.-imposed economic sanctions and international ostracism. Hence much in the same way that Turkey has made it a foreign policy priority to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, Iran would have preferred the continuation of the pattern established with the 1828 Turkmanchai treaty which confirmed the Russian conquest of substantial Azeri-populated areas.

As the war over Karabakh escalated, Iran was domestically torn in devising a policy. Religious and ethnic Azerbaijani forces advocated support to the brethren in Azerbaijan against the Armenian infidel. Meanwhile, the foreign policy establishment saw the weakening of the republic of Azerbaijan as concomitant to Iranian national interest, and therefore pursued a policy of tacit support for Armenia in the conflict. Whereas Iranian vacillation and hesitation in the first years of the 1990s can be ascribed to these internal divisions, the general direction of Tehran's policy soon became clear. With the exception of instances where it became necessary to restore a balance by preventing Armenia from turning the region into chaos (since too much suffering and chaos in Azerbaijan would risk arousing Iranian public opinion) Tehran used the conflict to pressure Baku. Iran served as Armenia's main purveyor of electricity and goods, and after the Armenian conquest of Nagorno-Karabakh, Iranian trucks have been supplying most of the secessionist enclave's needs. The decisive factor tilting Tehran towards Yerevan was nevertheless the policies of the Popular Front government in Baku, which ruled Azerbaijan from mid-1992 until June 1993. Led by President Abulfaz Elçibey,

the Popular Front government oriented Azerbaijan toward Turkey and the west, and gradually developed a vehemently anti-Russian and anti-Iranian policy. Elçibey himself was a convinced secularist, despised Iran's theocracy and openly criticized Iran's denial of cultural rights to the Azerbaijani minority. Worse, Elçibey before ascending to the presidency spoke of Iran as a 'doomed state', and openly flouted the idea of reunification of Azerbaijan. In a sense, Elçibey and his nationalist policies was precisely the Azerbaijani government of Tehran's worst fears, and pushed Iran further toward Armenia. Indeed, Iranian economic support played an important role in keeping Armenia alive at a time of economic embargo from Turkey, and of course, the severing of trade links with Azerbaijan. Should Iran have sided with Azerbaijan and joined the joint embargo on Armenia, the latter would have had to rely only on supplies through Georgia.

After Elçibey's overthrow and Heydar Aliyev's arrival to the presidency, relations improved somewhat, but only on the surface. While refraining from nationalist rhetoric, Aliyev mainly pursued and refined the foreign policy inaugurated by the Popular Front, and tension with Iran has remained. Whereas the Iranian-Armenian cooperation has blossomed in political, economic, scientific and cultural spheres, Baku repeatedly blames Tehran for supporting Armenia against it. Aliyev has personally voiced the offense felt by Azerbaijanis over Iran's close ties with Armenia. As recently as in March 2001, President Aliyev walked out of a meeting with an Iranian minister after the latter informed of Iran's plans to restore a bridge over the Araxes between Iran and Armenian occupied territories in Azerbaijan.<sup>3</sup>

### **Iranian Political Changes and the Azerbaijani Question**

The collective identity of the population of Azerbaijan has undergone significant changes since the early 1990s, and the Iranian government's response has oscillated between repression and conciliation. To begin with, as noted above, the emergence of an independent state of Azerbaijan and the dissolution of the Soviet Union enabled contacts across the Araxes river to develop at much greater speed than before. This led to the spread of cultural and family linkages. Yet trade relations between

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<sup>3</sup> 'Iranian Diplomat's Stance Makes Azeri President Interrupt Meeting', ANS TV, Baku, 29 March 2001.

Azerbaijan and Iran remain limited. A second factor has been equally, if not more important: that the population of Northern Iran has come into much closer contact with Turkey partly through trade and even more through the effect of Turkish satellite television. Iran's theocratic regime ensures that the state TV programming is of little interest to its population, and furthermore, it is broadcast in Persian. Hence the Azeri population of northern Iran has gravitated toward Turkish culture, given the very limited differences between the Turkish and Azerbaijani dialects. In fact, as in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Azeri language itself has in Iran been subjected to change: a number of Turkish conjugations, words and expressions have entered the language, most clearly in regions of Iran bordering Turkey.

Exposure to Turkish culture has also affected the self-perception of the Iranian Azerbaijanis. Formerly, the dominance of Persian culture and its pejorative attitude towards Turkic culture had an effect of socializing many Azerbaijanis into the Persian culture, perceived as the 'high culture' in Iran. Contact with Turkey has nevertheless shown the far greater level of social and economic development of Turkey compared to Iran, and has boosted a sense of ethnic pride and identity – in many ways erasing the feeling of cultural inferiority that the Persian elite had long sought to impose upon the ethnic minorities of Iran.

The political repercussions of these developments in identity have nevertheless remained limited. A National Liberation Movement of South Azerbaijan has been created, though its political strength appears limited and its political following is unclear. Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran has remained relatively poorly organized, partly as a result of Iranian repression. However, an important impediment to its development has been a lack of consensus on the goals. The politically motivated Azeris are torn between those desiring mainly increased rights within the Iranian state; those seeking political autonomy within Iran; those seeking the creation of an independent state; those seeking unification with the Republic of Azerbaijan; and those seeking a confederation embracing Turkey and both Northern and Southern Azerbaijan.

The increase in political expression of Azerbaijani nationalism is nevertheless unmistakable. The number of violent protests against the Iranian state, and violent repression of the same protests, have increased since the late 1990s. In January 2000,

Iranian forces opened fire on a demonstration in Tabriz.<sup>4</sup> A commemoration of a historical Azeri hero with 8,000 participants was broken up by Iranian authorities in August 2002.<sup>5</sup> Tabriz University has been a focal point of the organization of the protests, including a large protest movement in the Summer of 2003.<sup>6</sup> Following these demonstrations, the Iranian government cracked down on student as well as nationalist organizations. A 19-year old Azeri girl was executed by Iranian authorities in July 2003 for her role in the protests.<sup>7</sup>

Members of the NLMSA are regularly arrested, imprisoned, and occasionally put to death. The non-violent leader of the Azerbaijani community, Dr. Mahmudali Chehregani, was repeatedly prevented from standing for election to parliament. He was arrested, denied medical treatment, and suffered torture resulting in partial paralysis.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Chehregani now lives in the United States, having managed to leave Iran in 2002. In 2002, the UN Commission on Human Rights noted human rights violations against the Azerbaijani minority in Iran.<sup>9</sup> Azeri newspapers are, as is the case for oppositional media in Tehran and elsewhere, repeatedly closed down.<sup>10</sup>

A change in political atmosphere has nevertheless taken place in the country, in parallel with the successive liberalization of Iranian society that took place in the late 1990s under the Khatami regime. This included the easing of restrictions on music and societal activities, and also benefited the Azeri minority. Hence while the government continued to harshly repress any political expressions of Azerbaijani identity, it sought to liberalize cultural rights to simultaneously remove some of the popular base of the protests. A larger number of Azeri language press, courses, and

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<sup>4</sup> "Azeri TV says Iranian police opened fire during rally in Tabriz", *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 January 2000.

<sup>5</sup> "Ethnic Azeri in Iran Gets Prison Sentence Following March to Fort - Azeri Paper", *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 25 August 2002.

<sup>6</sup> "Recent Unrest in Iran Shows Iranian Azerbaijan is Awakening, Azeri Paper", *BBC Monitoring International Report*, 5 July 2003; "Iran Aims to Prevent Ethnic Azeri Politicians from Influencing Protests", *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 25 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> "Ethnic Azeri Student Leader Killed in Iran - Paper", *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 22 July 2002.

<sup>8</sup> "Tehran cracks Down on Azerbaijanis of Iran", *RFE/RL Iran Report*, December 1999.

<sup>9</sup> "UN Rapporteur Points to Serious Rights Abuses of Azeris In Iran - Azeri Report", *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 17 April 2002.

<sup>10</sup> "Head Of Banned Tabriz Weekly Appeals Against Sentence - Azeri Report", *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 19 April 2002; *Yeni Musavat*, 3 April 2003.

academic programs were allowed.<sup>11</sup> This policy does nevertheless not seem to have taken the edge of the rising levels of Azerbaijani nationalism. In fact, it may have contributed to raising the potential of an increase in political activity, reminiscent of the effects of Perestroika and Glasnost' during the late Soviet period. In the late 1990s, the Azerbaijani question was still in many respects a taboo in Tehran.<sup>12</sup> Any expression of Azeri ethnic identity could risk labeling as separatism, and Azeri-speaking Iranian government officials would (except in private) tell visiting foreigners that they had learnt the language in Turkey – in spite of the obvious fact that they spoke in the Azeri dialect and not in the Turkish one.<sup>13</sup> By 2003, the situation had nevertheless changed. Azeri was spoken freely even by government officials to one another; and political activity including scholarly writing on ethnic issues in Iran was tolerated. While it is difficult to determine whether this liberalization has worked as a safety valve, the perception of continuing discrimination in the political, economic and cultural fields by the Azeri minority continues to be palpable. It may very well be that the liberalization has served to galvanize the nationalist movements in the country.

The overtly manipulated parliamentary elections to Iran's parliament in February 2003 are unlikely to improve the situation. Quite to the contrary, the effort to marginalize and exclude the reformist forces in society from decision-making authorities signals an intention on the part of the hardliner forces to reverse the uneasy 'cohabitation' between a hardliner spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei, and a reformist President, Mohammad Khatami. The hardliner forces, partly due to their perception of Iran's geopolitical situation, are seemingly intending to assert a greater degree of control over the state apparatus. This will in all likelihood remove the perception by reformists that they had a possibility to affect the country's politics by participating in the existing institutions. This feeling has already faded due to Khatami's inability to accomplish meaningful change and the utter lack of power in the institution of the presidency. Indeed, Iran had been characterized as the only country in the world where the President is also the leader of the opposition.

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<sup>11</sup> Interviews, Tehran, December 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Experience from discussions in Iran in April 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Author's discussions with Iranian officials, 1998.

What consequence this has for the Azerbaijani minority is unclear. It could mean a joining of forces of all reformist groups irrespective of ethnicity, depending on the relations between ethnic Azerbaijani activists and the rest of the Iranian opposition. In all likelihood, it is also likely to worsen the standoff between the Azeri nationalist movements in Tabriz and elsewhere and the government. This is borne out by the fact that the apparently largest demonstrations in many years took place in Tabriz in summer 2004. Azeri sources reported several hundred thousand people participating in the rally, which was kept under control by over 40,000 Iranian police.<sup>14</sup> Even more recently, protests over the continued rejection of instruction in the Azeri language in schools led to protests and clashes in September 2004, with several people injured as a result and a dozen arrested.<sup>15</sup> The risk is apparent that an increasing hardliner control over Iranian state institutions will lead to larger repression and eventually to a deepening of the polarization of the population on an ethnic basis.

### **The Regional Aspect**

The developments taking place in Iran occur against the backdrop of a rapidly changing regional environment. The most dramatic example is the feeling of isolation and American encirclement that the Iranian regime is perceiving since Operation Enduring Freedom and the subsequent Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The direct impact of Operation Enduring Freedom was positive for Iran: it removed a vehemently anti-Iranian and anti-Shia government from neighboring Afghanistan. In fact, Iran and the Taliban had had a tense standoff on their common border in 1998, after the Taliban conquered Mazar-i-Sharif, leading to the killing of several Iranian diplomats. Neighboring the Taliban was also a mantra in Iranian expressions of the precariousness of their geographic location; Iranian representatives illustrated this feeling of vulnerability by arguing that they were ‘sandwiched between the Taliban and Saddam Hussein’. In this sense, OEF removed a government that was also, on an ideological as well as practical level, a threat to Iran. This was true also with the American overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq eighteen months later. In

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<sup>14</sup> “Paper Reports High Turnout in Azeri March in Iran”, *BBC Monitoring International Report*, 4 July 2004

<sup>15</sup> “Five Injured, 10 Arrested as Ethnic Azeris Clash with Police in Iran – TV”, *BBC Monitoring International Report*, 26 September 2004.



both conflicts, Iran showed an ambivalent position, expressing the fact that Tehran had little problem with the overthrow of either the Taliban or Saddam Hussein. However, Iran worried much about what would come afterwards. In particular, Iran was worried of the results of American presence on its doorstep. Having been included in the 'Axis of Evil' by President George W. Bush, Iran increasingly felt a direct threat of American military action against it that has only increased after U.S. operations in Iraq and the ensuing soaring debate about Iran's nuclear program. Secondly, Tehran worried about the impact of the unrest and instability that would result if American intervention did not stabilize these countries – fears that continue to this day, especially in Iraq.

On the whole, the perceived impact of the two American operations on the Islamic Republic has been a negative one, in the form of an acute feeling of encirclement. Prior to OEF, the American military was by no means far from Iranian shores or borders. The U.S. Navy was omnipresent in the Persian Gulf; America also had military installations in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Meanwhile, Turkey was a NATO country with a U.S. air base on the Mediterranean. But the U.S. military was not a factor to the East or North of Iran. OEF changed this. Afghanistan became a de facto American protectorate; Pakistan hosted several, though minor, American troops, including in the province of Baluchistan neighboring Iran; Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan became areas of permanent U.S. bases; in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan saw increased American military assistance while U.S. training forces were deployed in Georgia. With Operation Iraqi Freedom, the encirclement of Iran was completed: American forces now effectively surrounded the Islamic Republic.

This new situation is the one under which Tehran operates, and in which Iranian policy in Central Asia is being formulated. Consequently, Tehran has followed a policy that is best described as a combination of defensive caution and limited containment of the United States on its borders. Iran has strengthened its close relationship with Russia, which has meant the enlisting of Russian diplomatic support for Iran and crucially important nuclear technology and other weaponry – which is partly of Russian origin.<sup>16</sup> This Moscow link has gained increasing importance in

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<sup>16</sup> Robert E. Freedman, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4 no. 2, June 2000.

Tehran as the regime is apparently frantically seeking to achieve nuclear weapons capability, feeling that only such capability would give it a measure of security in an increasingly hostile environment. The cost of this policy has however been in the realm of Iranian policy in the former Soviet sphere. Indeed, it seems to be an unwritten rule that Iran's role in the Caucasus and Central Asia is circumscribed by a deference to Russian domination. In other words, Iran's policy seldom interferes with or contradicts Russian policy in these regions. Its policy of supporting Armenia and counteracting the development of a strong and wealthy Azerbaijan lies in tandem with Moscow's interests, though for clearly different reasons: Moscow seeks to dominate the South Caucasus and secure a monopoly over energy resources there, while Iran is mainly afraid of the possible effect of a wealthy and American-allied Azerbaijan on its sizable and increasingly restive Azeri population. Increasingly close relations between Baku and Washington, however, have aggravated tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan. In fact, rumors in Summer 2003 – predictably emerging from the Russian media – that Azerbaijan would be used as a launching pad for an American invasion of Iran and that Baku had already consented to this – led to thinly veiled Iranian threats of military action and violations of Azerbaijani air space by Iranian jets. Again in 2004, persistent rumors of an impending American military base in Azerbaijan have revitalized Iranian pressure on Azerbaijan, especially after U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Baku twice in the past year.<sup>17</sup>

### **Iranian Azerbaijan and Regional Geopolitics**

The combination of internal and external developments leaves Iranian Azerbaijan in a precarious situation. Several factors contribute to worsening the situation. On the external front, the Azerbaijani republic's close relations with the U.S., Iran's increasingly harsh attitude toward Azerbaijan, and Tehran's determined quest for nuclear capability all point toward increasing tensions. On the internal front, this is compounded by the strengthening hardliner control over the Iranian state, as well as increasing discord and a cycle of protests and violent repression in Iranian Azerbaijan. These array of factors make Iranian Azerbaijan a most central weakness of the Iranian state, especially given the significant population of the region.

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<sup>17</sup> Fariz Ismailzade, "Azerbaijan Under Iranian and Russian Pressure on Relations To U.S.", *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 3 November 2004.

The Iranian Azerbaijani community is not yet strongly politically organized. Suspicions have been voiced that the United States may provide support, either overtly or covertly, for Iranian Azerbaijani organizations, allegations of which increased after Dr. Chehregani was received in Washington. At present, there is nevertheless no indication that such support is being considered. However, the impending standoff over Iran's quest for nuclear capability is a source of concern for the stability of the region. The hopes that existed in 2001 for an improvement of U.S.-Iranian relations presently seem very distant. Indeed, with the election cycle in Washington over, confrontation between the U.S. and Iran over the nuclear issue is likely to deepen with the possibility of a military strike on Iranian nuclear installations not to be discounted. Moreover, the discussions on Iraq's future have a direct bearing on Iran. A federalization of Iraq into Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish areas would pose a precedent for ethnic communities in Iran, not least the Kurds, but also the Azeris. There is no direct link between the U.S.-Iranian confrontation and the Azerbaijani question in Iran. However, it just so happens that developments inside Iran and the changes in the regional environment result in the simultaneous worsening of both situations. The feeling of encirclement of Iran's ruling regime has already led to a worsening of the cycle of internal protest and repression, which has been concentrated in the Azerbaijani areas of Iran. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that the Iranian leadership fears external meddling in its ethnic relations, and could see the increasingly close U.S. military interest in the South Caucasus as related to its internal unrest. This will in turn likely exacerbate the counter-productive repressive policies of the Iranian government in Iranian Azerbaijan. In this sense, the internal developments in Iran, especially as they concern the Azerbaijani community, cannot be dissociated from the regional politics of Iran's neighborhood – despite the fact that the troubles in Iranian Azerbaijan are entirely homegrown. Azeri nationalists have so far received precious little support from either Turkey, Azerbaijan or the United States, limited to fringe nationalist groups in the two former countries and a part of the neo-conservative faction in the latter.

It should nevertheless be clear that the development of the Azerbaijani question is of paramount importance to Iran's security, and therefore an increasingly important factor in the regional security of the Middle East as well as the Caucasus. The Iranian

government's own policies currently serve to worsen the prospects of defusing the brewing crisis in its northwestern provinces, instead fueling a spiral of violence. Iranian Azerbaijan is therefore in the process of becoming an potential zone of conflict, with potentially disastrous consequences for regional security. Protracted unrest or conflict in Iranian Azerbaijan would make it very difficult for either Azerbaijan or Turkey to remain on the sidelines; and with the current unrest in Iraq, the last thing that the region needs is internal unrest in Iran.

## **Conclusions**

The developments in Iranian Azerbaijan are regularly overshadowed by other, more acute, developments in the region. Yet the processes taking place there do not bode well for the future. The Iranian government is pursuing policies that exacerbate tensions between itself and the Azerbaijani community. Given the volatility of the wider region, the risk of conflict in Iranian Azerbaijan cannot be discounted, although it is by no means unavoidable. The recent strengthening of hardliner forces in Iran is therefore a clear threat to the country's internal stability, which is worsened by Iran's persistence in seeking nuclear weapons capabilities.

While there is time, it is important for the international community to seek to defuse tensions in Iranian Azerbaijan. The road toward this goal goes squarely through Iran's liberalization and democratization. Increasing international support for democratic forces in Iran and greater attention to the repressive policies of the Iranian regime are therefore crucial elements of policy that European countries should follow.

Unfortunately, the increasing siege mentality in the Iranian leadership makes it doubtful whether international efforts will have much impact on the regime in Tehran. In this case, the possibility exists that the issue of Iranian Azerbaijan will one day be a much more prominent item in the news than it is today.