

**LEPL - DAVID AGHMASHENEBELI
NATIONAL DEFENCE ACADEMY OF GEORGIA**



**NATO PRIORITIES AND CAUCASUS
- STATUS QUO AND CHANGES**



INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION OF THE PAPERS OF THE SCIENTIFIC-PRACTICAL CONFERENCE

GORI, 2022

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Applying NATO Strategic Communications Principles in Organizational and Business Communication

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Abstract

It is obvious that these days it is not enough to have an idea. You have to communicate it effectively to pass the message across. Therefore, strategic communication plays a significant role and it is important to manage it accordingly. As stated by NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence: "NATO Strategic Communications is coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities to support policies of the Alliance, its operations and activities and advance the aims of NATO".¹ Thus, applying its principles in the field of organizational and business communication will lead to more coordinated outcomes and successful management of the situation, which will in turn promote success.

Keywords:

Strategic communication, Message, Challenge, Principles.

¹ https://stratcomcoe.org/about_us/about-strategic-communications/1

Introduction

Communication is passing the information from one party to another. The sender demonstrates that it intends to convey a meaning. The receiver recognizes and selects the signal respectively depending on availability. Besides, the signal is understood on the basis of a person's understanding and interest to create the meaning. The challenge in effective communication is to anticipate what signal will lead to proper interpretation. Therefore, it is essential to strategize and make sure the meaning is clearly communicated to lead to desired outcomes.

Main part

According to the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence, "NATO Strategic Communications is the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities and advance NATO's aims. The aim of NATO Strategic Communications is to ensure that NATO's audiences, whether in the Nations or in a region where a NATO operation is taking place, either friendly or adversarial, receives truthful, accurate and timely information that will allow them to understand and assess the Alliance's actions and intentions. This will deter aggression and promote NATO's aims and objectives".

As stated in the "NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications", "In accordance with NATO Policy, NATO Strategic Communications is the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (PA), Military Public Affairs, Information Operations (Info Ops) and Psychological Operations (PsyOps), as appropriate - in support of alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims". Besides, NATO strategic communications aims to:

- a. Contribute positively and directly in achieving the successful implementation of NATO operations, missions, and activities by incorporating strategic communications planning into all operational and policy planning;
- b. Build, in close and lasting coordination with NATO nations, public awareness, understanding, and support for specific NATO policies, operations, and other activities in all relevant audiences; and
- c. Contribute to general public awareness and understanding of NATO as part of a broader and on-going public diplomacy effort.

Given the fact that these days we constantly get news, social media is actively used and information is exchanged through various means, we need to think strategically and make sure that the information we send is appropriately perceived by key audiences. As is the case with NATO, in organizational communication, this perception has a direct effect on the success of organizational performance.

It is further stated in the "NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications" that: "An effective strategic communications policy therefore requires clear definitions of a) the main aims of NATO strategic communications; b) the key principles guiding NATO strategic communications; c) interrelationships between the various information disciplines within NATO (Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (civilian), Military Public Affairs, Information Operations and Psychological Operations); and d) the roles and authorities of the actors within NATO with communications responsibilities". In the same manner, organizational and business communication requires employees to clearly state the aims, precisely define the roles and responsibilities and ensure compliance. Besides, it is important to make sure the message achieves its intended purpose.

Additionally, the Concept informs that "The joint force commander will be required to engage adversaries, friends, and others alike. He will be required to engage general populations, governments and a variety of other state and non-state bodies. He will be required to communicate in cooperative, competitive and conflict situations. He will be required to communicate proactively in support of established objectives, in anticipation of uncontrollable events, and in reaction to unforeseen events. He will be required to coordinate a variety of joint capabilities in support of strategic communication goals. He will be required to do any of these things deliberately or rapidly, depending on circumstances."

Therefore, NATO strategic communications aims to coordinate and organize information sharing and interaction so that to ensure successful outcomes.

Generally, strategic communication is based on the following key principles. Firstly, the purpose of the message should be clear and to the point. In other words, the speaker must determine what s/he wants to convey. Then, correct platform should be selected. After that, timing should be calculated appropriately followed by proper selection and analysis of the audience and, lastly, the desired impact should be reached.

It follows from the above stated that strategic communication is a holistic approach to communication, based on values and interests, that involves everything that is done to achieve objectives in the respective environment. It is essential to think about long-term, complex solutions and effective ways of influencing in a competitive environment. At the same time, we have to remain agile and serve our values.

Undoubtedly, communication takes the form of two-way dialogue. This requires having the ability to listen and be influenced and the desire to transmit and influence. A significant part of this effort involves learning about other actors since this information will help to then strategize accordingly.

In military context, when combatant command is transitioned to the subordinate joint task force, strategic communication challenges arise. Obviously, the appropriate course of action depends upon a specific situation. Consistent actions clearly demonstrate that the ally cooperates and supports.

In a similar manner, it is essential in organizational communication to ensure consistency, react timely and communicate key messages. Because of the speed at which information flows and first interpretation of an event, the frame of reference is set for the discussion that follows. Therefore, it is important to possess the skills of quick reaction and feedback which will, in turn, lead to win-win solutions.

Research methodology and obtained results

Research was conducted for two audiences: university staff and bank employees. In both cases the target audience deals with clients and it is extremely crucial to strategically communicate the messages.

A set of in-depth oral interviews was conducted. Questions were open which enabled the incumbents to give efficient replies. Besides, we did not restrict the audience with any pre-determined answers; i.e. open questions allowed them to be freely involved and, by doing so, achieve desired outcomes. Namely, they clearly stated that using NATO strategic communication principles gave the possibility to the employees to provide information quickly, establish good relationships with organizations, produce messages which were culturally adapted and spread them via various forms of media.

It was also interesting to discover that continuous adaptation and interaction in the communication process brought about confidence and positive attitude. Generally, joint force leaders and militaries face complex and dynamic operational situations in which they have to function quickly and efficiently in order to achieve the intended outcome, which, in its turn, promotes confidence and resilience. Therefore, applying this competence in organizational and business communication helps to enhance self-awareness and ensure efficient communication.

This concept applies a heuristic approach. Generally, as explained by technopedia, "heuristics is an approach to problem-solving in which the objective is to produce a working solution within a reasonable time frame".² It follows from this definition that instead of aiming to get a perfect solution, there needs to be a quick solution which will be practical and lead to manageable situations. In practical terms, this implies that each decision is not regarded as a final answer. Simply, it means that if one thing is done, it will lead to another. In its turn, this will require adaptation. In case of strategic communication, adaptation is to ensure useful measures with the view of evaluating actions and making sure that those measures are followed in the long-term perspective.

Conclusion

All-in-all, using principles of strategic communication in organizational and business communication enables all parties to get more joint benefit, control situations, manage conflicts and miscommunication, find best possible positive outcome and by doing so become successful.

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- 3. <https://www.techopedia.com>

² <https://www.techopedia.com/>

Geopolitical Importance of the South Caucasus and NATO as a Regional Security Guarantor

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Abstract

The South Caucasus region is distinguished by its rich historical heritage. However, due to its geopolitical location, it has always been a subject of the interests and influence of superpowers. Even at the modern stage, the geopolitical interests in the region have not changed, only the players have changed. The geopolitical importance of the mentioned region is undeniable since the region is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, with Christian and Islamic civilizations. Due to the geographical proximity, the level of relations between the South Caucasus and the Middle East region is high. In this case, it should be highlighted that even before the Soviet era, the Caucasus was a place where the interests of the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian empires clashed, and there was a struggle for territory and influence, each of these empires at least once appeared to be the ruler of the region. As for the modern period, the region represents the great interests of such contemporary superpowers as Russia and the United States of America. In this case, Turkey and EU and even Iran are no exception since the South Caucasus, as a transit region, significantly falls into the scope of the interests of global players.

Keywords:

Region, Relations, Conflicts, Hegemony, NATO, Russia.

Introduction

Since its creation, the Soviet Union has established firm control over the region, and it was using the geostrategic location of the Caucasus when it tried to influence Iran and Turkey. These two countries have maintained their geopolitical interests in the Caucasus region. However, we have to say that the Caucasus is one of the most difficult and explosive regions for the Russian Federation, since many types of conflict began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for instance, ethno-religious - in the case of Chechnya; ethno-territorial – in the case of Azerbaijanis and Armenians and the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts.

After the attack on the United States of America on September 11, 2001, the Caucasus gained even higher interest in US foreign policy, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became more engaged in geostrategic issues. Georgia and Azerbaijan have become important links in terms of relations with the countries of Central Asia and the East through the South Caucasus. The active participation of the Georgian peacekeeping forces in Iraq and Afghanistan played an important role that helped to create a favorable US-Georgia relationship. The fight against extremism has further strengthened in the context of security between NATO and the countries of the Caucasus region.¹ Recent events in the Middle East, US-Turkey and US-Russia relations, and Ukraine-Russia armed conflict have granted the region a new strategic function, which prompts the US and NATO to become more active in South Caucasus politics. It seems that the region is facing changes in the balance of power that is mainly caused by the existing frozen conflicts.² In terms of security, the countries of the region are quite weak; at the same time, there is a growing threat of escalation of localized conflicts, in which there is a high probability of involvement of external forces that poses a serious threat to the countries of the region. Here we have to point out that the ethnopolitical or interstate conflicts in the Caucasus region have led to the division of the region and created hotbeds of constant tension. At the same time, the foreign political security priorities of all three countries in the region are different.³

NATO-Georgia Relations

NATO, as a military-political union, is one of the main guarantors of security in the modern world, since NATO expresses the interests of the West in the Caucasus region.⁴ Although NATO appeared late in the political life of the South Caucasus, today it tries to act as a full-fledged political player in the region. NATO expresses special interests toward Georgia based on its geographical location, since Georgia is a country in the Black Sea region that is important for NATO.⁵ The interests of NATO in the region and Georgia indeed collide with the interests of Russia; however, the organization expands and increases cooperation with the countries of the Black Sea region, since it believes that the security of the Black Sea region creates a safe and stable environment for the Middle East, the Balkans, and the European region in the long term.⁶

It is worth mentioning that one of the main priorities of Georgia's foreign and security policy is integration with the alliance. Georgia recognizes the role of NATO in strengthening the country's security and stability. It should be noted that the reforms carried out in the country are in full compliance with the requirements for joining NATO. Georgia, for its part, plays an important role in strengthening Euro-Atlantic security.⁷

The year 1992 should be considered the initial stage of NATO-Georgia relations, when Georgia became a member of NATO's North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC); in 1997 it was replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC - EURO-Atlantic Partnership Council) in which Georgia is also actively involved.

The year 2002, the Prague summit, when Georgia officially applied for membership in the alliance, should be seen as the process of Georgia's integration into NATO. In 2008, at the Bucharest Summit, it was announced that Georgia would become a member of NATO, which of course was against Russia's interests - it angered the Kremlin and resulted in an open military conflict against Georgia.⁸

As a result of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, Russia was allowed to impede NATO's expansion to the north,

1 Alaverdov, E. Ilik, G. Ugulava, M., "Social Radicalization in Modern Russia and Its Impact on Human Security". In M, Waseem Bari & E, Alaverdov, *Regulating Human Rights, Social Security, and Socio-Economic Structures in a Global Perspective*, (2022): pp. 11-17. Hershey: IGI Global.

2 Stronski, P, "The Shifting Geography of the South Caucasus. Carnegie Endorsement for International Peace", September 23, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/23/shifting-geography-of-south-caucasus-pub-84814>

3 Chitadze, N, "Geopolitics", (2011). Tbilisi.

4 Pashayeva, G, "Security Challenges and Conflict Resolution Efforts in the South Caucasus. In the South Caucasus between Integration and Fragmentation", *European Policy Center*, (2015): 37-45.

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6 Khelashvili G. & Macfarlane S. Neil, "The Evolution of US Policy towards the Southern Caucasus", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, (2010): 7(26), 105-124.

7 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, "National Security Concept of Georgia", August 30, 2022, <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/NationalSecurityConcept.aspx?lang=en-US>

8 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO-Georgia Commission Declaration at the Brussels Summit", September 5, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156627.htm

while at the same time, by sending troops into the occupied territories, it strengthened its position and directly exposed its military bases to the North Atlantic Alliance.⁹ On July 11-12, 2018, a meeting of heads of NATO member states with Ukraine and Georgia took place within the framework of the Brussels Summit of the Transatlantic Alliance. This was the first time when the negotiations held directly related to the issue of Georgia. The declaration of the NATO-Georgia Commission was adopted at the meeting, in which the unwavering support of NATO in the process of democratic development of the country was unequivocally mentioned. The document also confirmed the proposal made at the Bucharest summit that Georgia would become a member of NATO and that Georgia has all the practical tools to join the alliance. Significant attention was paid to the need to strengthen the security of the Black Sea region, and specific directions were agreed upon, for example, it was decided to deepen the relations between the permanent naval forces of Georgia and NATO.

Today, the open military aggression against Ukraine should be considered the biggest mistake on the part of Russia. The expectations of Russia that the war in Ukraine would end soon and it would seize the power turned out to be just illusions. The Russian aggression in Ukraine once again showed the world how dangerous Russia's open, undisguised, unpredictable geopolitical ambitions are. Thus, integration of Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance should be accelerated even though this certainly does not fall in Russia's interests.¹⁰

At a press conference held on June 29, 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that the assistance would include increasing Georgia's participation in NATO cyber exercises, strengthening secure communications, and helping to develop critical infrastructure protection. At the summit held in Madrid on June 28-30, NATO promised Georgia more support that is necessary for the background of the changing geopolitical landscape in Europe. It was noted at the meeting that the Black Sea region is of strategic importance for NATO, which increases the importance of its security.¹¹

The Possibility of NATO's Involvement in the Karabakh Conflict and the Position of Russia

NATO-Armenia relations date back to 1992 when Armenia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and to 1994 when Armenia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Armenian forces were stationed in NATO's Kosovo Force in 2004, then in Afghanistan and other peacekeeping missions. Then in 2007 in Yerevan, there was an officially opened NATO information center that is currently operating. We have highlighted NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's visit to Armenia in September 2012. Armenia claims that NATO is one of the priority directions for military and military-technical cooperation.¹² So we can see that the country has certain relations with the alliance.

Cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO also began in 1992. Although Azerbaijan participated in several NATO programs, it still avoids active cooperation with NATO in order not to irritate Russia, with which it tries to maintain stable relations. The Karabakh conflict has deep historical roots that continue to this day. NATO's involvement in the Karabakh conflict was not recorded in the 90s. Even later the alliance maintains a neutral position. In the declaration of the 2006 Riga Summit, NATO called on the parties involved in the conflict to resolve the conflict peacefully. It was stated that the alliance regrets the persistence of regional conflicts, in this case, they mean the post-Soviet region, Moldova and South Caucasus, and express their support for every country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.¹³

NATO is still not involved in the negotiations surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Some politicians indeed claimed that Turkey is going to help its younger brother Azerbaijan and send its army to regain its territorial integrity. However, they seem to forget that Turkey is a member of NATO and according to the Doctrine of Russian Foreign Policy, approved on December 1, 2016, Russia aims to ensure its security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Moreover, the federation will do its utmost to be one of the most influential centers of the international system and negatively assumes the expansion of the alliance and its rapprochement to Russia's borders. In this case, it is worth highlighting the fact that Russia also worries about NATO military activity and the deployment of its military equipment near Russian borders. Here we have to highlight the Russia-Turkey pragmatic cooperation in diplomatic and economic fields,¹⁴ and at the same time the changing nature of Turkish-American

9 Hamilton R. "August 2008 and Everything after a Ten-Year Retrospective on the Russia-Georgia War", Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 5, 2022, <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/final-bssp-1-hamilton.pdf>

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relations.¹⁵ Moreover, Turkey has balanced relations with Russia and at the same time with Ukraine even after Russia's invasion: Turkey did not join any sanctions simultaneously supplying Ukraine with armed drone aircraft and humanitarian assistance, and managing Black Sea access, with implications for US-Turkey ties.¹⁶ There is no doubt that Azerbaijan realizes all of Russia's ambitions mentioned above and will try to solve the problems of its territorial integrity with its forces. Here we have to say that Azerbaijan is much stronger than Armenia and does not need to take any risk of NATO's involvement and tease Russia.¹⁷ In this regard, we have to say that after the Velvet Revolution, the direction of Armenia changed dramatically and an anti-Russian wave erupted, making Russia very angry. Thus, Russia will undertake just the role of mediator and observe the situation.

Conclusion

The South Caucasus is in the middle of a geopolitical transition. The region is affected by broader global trends. At the same time, the historical, hereditary conflicts facing the region continue to occupy the main place on the agenda of the South Caucasus countries.¹⁸ Also, the political crisis in the countries of the region causes polarization and increases the threat of strengthening democratic values. Here it is worth noting that, since gaining independence the countries of the South Caucasus have undergone a very difficult way. All the countries of the South Caucasus belong to the newly established countries with their domestic developing policies and still unclear foreign policy directions that require a very careful and balanced approach.¹⁹ As for Russia, because of its supra-national ambitions, it does not succeed to sort out relations with the countries of the region. Moreover, due to its politics of hegemony, the entire South Caucasus has been transformed into a politically tense and economically unstable region, where armed conflicts pose a serious threat to the security of the Russian state itself.²⁰

After the events in Ukraine in 2014, President Vladimir Putin made it clear that Moscow is forming a certain doctrine of Russian foreign and security policy, and according to the doctrine, Russia is the guarantor of the protection of the rights of the Russian-speaking population living abroad. Russia's military operations in Georgia and Ukraine have made it clear:

1. First, Russia assumes the use of military force in the post-Soviet space as a legitimate tool of foreign policy.
2. Second, the West has limited resources to deter Russian military action.
3. Third, Moscow can use the "violation of the rights" of the Russian population in any country as a pretext for military action.

As for NATO, it realizes the importance of the changing geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus region and understands it has to maintain the balance of power and ensure equal and integral security in the region.

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New Directions of the Security Orbit in the South Caucasus

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Abstract

The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has been going on for almost 30 years, was resolved in the Second Karabakh War. On September 27, 2020, in response to the intense provocative fire of the Armenian Armed Forces on the frontline, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces launched a quick counterattack operation called "Iron Fist" and destroyed the Armenian army within 44 (forty-four days). This reality led to the formation of a new security orbit in the South Caucasus.

The article analyzes the security strategies of the countries of the South Caucasus, the ways of integration into the international security system, which is one of the basic principles of national security, and the interests and strategies of the countries of the South Caucasus in relation to NATO.

In addition, studies were carried out on the geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic situation of the South Caucasus region, the main factors determining the direction of development of military-political processes in the region, as well as energy security issues, existing cyber threats, improving cyber capabilities in order to eliminate them, and the role of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the system of European security.

Keywords:

National security, National interests, Military-political processes in the South Caucasus, Cyber threats, APT (advanced persistent threat) groups.

Introduction

Geostrategically, South Caucasus countries have to establish strategic partnership relations with any international institutions or regional power centers to ensure their security. However, it is very important to implement a correct foreign policy in order to form a balance between the great powers. In order not to be subjected to serious pressure from any party, the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia should try to defend their interests by conducting a multi-vector and independent foreign policy. This policy is currently considered appropriate in terms of maintaining political stability in the countries because the emergence of any tension in the region is undesirable from the point of view of the safety of various energy projects and National Security in general. In spite of all this, the victory of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh war with the political support of Turkey and the change of this very status quo led to the emergence of a new security orbit in the South Caucasus, which in turn can play a guiding role in future security decision-making processes in the region.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's assessment of the South Caucasus countries as its sphere of influence does not exactly coincide with the national interests of the countries of the region, namely the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia. In modern times, every country is obliged to strengthen their statehood and ensure their national interests by conducting their own independent policy for the sake of the people's welfare. Thus, these countries that gained their independence in the recent past are interested in participating in huge international projects such as energy security of the European Union, which are important for their state building and national interests. Considering that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) were each implemented with the participation of the Republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and are against Russia's energy monopoly in Europe, then it is not difficult to guess the interests of official Moscow in the South Caucasus. Recently, the aggravation of relations between Russia and the EU and NATO against the background of the Ukrainian war creates the basis for further growth of these contradictions. For this reason, it is impossible not to consider the South Caucasus interests of Russia from the point of view of security.

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia tried to establish security cooperation with the South Caucasus and all post-Soviet countries within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. However, at the same time, it should be taken into account that the Collective Security Treaty Organization, established by the post-Soviet states on May 15, 1992, has not justified its activities. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is an international security organization whose current members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The treaty was the first attempt to create a system of collective security in the post-Soviet space. Members of the CSTO cannot enter into military alliances with third countries, as well as participate in actions directed against other countries of the organization [1]. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia became members of this organization in 1994 and left membership five years later at the same time. Among the countries of the South Caucasus, only Armenia is included in the military alliance of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Membership in the same organization deprives Armenia of membership in other international security organizations, as well as creates an obstacle in conducting an independent policy. The organization would have justified itself when both Azerbaijan and Armenia were members of this organization in 1994-1999, and the Karabakh conflict would have been resolved according to the requirements of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's charter. However, this did not happen, on the contrary, by these ways Armenia seeking security guarantees from Russia.

The tradition of Russia's use of conflict zones in the post-Soviet territories within the framework of its political interests has existed since the early 90s. The former Karabakh war, which started immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, is a clear example of this. Despite the fact that Russia is one of the three members of the OSCE Minsk Group, the former Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not resolved in nearly 30 years, and only with the political support of the Republic of Turkey, Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity. In Georgia, after the Rose Revolution in 2003, Russian-Georgian relations gradually deteriorated and reached their peak in 2008. Georgia's stubborn determination to move into the Western sphere of influence has been met by brutal retaliation from Russia. The six-day war in 2008 drew a red line for further NATO expansion. And the subsequent Russian recognition of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia amounted to a partial dismemberment of the Georgian state [2].

The Islamic Republic of Iran also has geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus. However, Iran's exposure to continuous sanctions by Western countries has relatively reduced its influence on regional processes.

The only fair and balancing power in the region is the Republic of Turkey. In recent years, Turkey has succeeded in increasing its influence in the region by making a significant contribution to stability and security in the South Caucasus. Turkey, which has the second Army in NATO, also plays the role of a stabilizing country between Russia and the West. A professor of Russian Studies at Uppsala University, Stefan Hedlund in his article "Winners and losers from the Karabakh war" wrote: "The latest conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has profoundly altered the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus. Turkey has become a serious contender for regional hegemony..., challenging Russia's status as a regional power. And if Yerevan's conflicted relations with Turkey

and Azerbaijan are defused, it will be less dependent on Russian protection, which has so far reduced its scope for independent international ties.” [3]

The fact that the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia have neighborly relations with the country that forms the second major military power in NATO, such as Turkey, creates a great advantage in terms of acquiring the experience of military security planning, increasing military professionalism and ensuring compatibility with the NATO structure. At the same time, joint exercises with the Turkish Army show the possibility of mastering NATO standards without causing jealousy in official Moscow. Historical events have proven that every country must ensure their military security at the expense of the capabilities of their Armed Forces. One of the most important factors in conducting modern wars is the ability to conduct joint operations with allied countries, that is, ensuring adaptability can be decisive. In short, the level of military professionalism and military security planning are of critical importance. The example of the Second Karabakh and Ukrainian wars showed that the tradition of conducting modern wars has changed. In fact, with this, the ideas about the unstoppable combat capabilities inherited from the Soviet Army have collapsed.

Geostrategically, geopolitically and geoeconomically, the interests of the South Caucasus countries, namely Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, coincide with the interests of the Republic of Turkey. There are several reasons for this. The first and most important point is that Turkey is interested in the independence and sovereignty of South Caucasus countries. This is of decisive importance from the point of view of National Security. The second is the need for joint protection of oil and gas pipeline projects implemented through Turkey. The third is that Turkey is a NATO member state and its Armed Forces are at a high level of standards, which creates opportunities to develop the armed forces at a modern level and increase interoperability qualities through joint exercises. Main aspects of Turkey’s Southern Caucasus policy are strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the countries of the region and supporting their integration efforts with Euro-Atlantic structures, while preserving and enhancing regional cooperation and political and economic stability. Turkey has deep-rooted historical and cultural ties with Southern Caucasus, which serves as a bridge linking Turkey to the Central Asia [4]. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of both the Republic of Azerbaijan (on November 9, 1991 [5]) and the Republic of Georgia (on December 16, 1991 [6]). And it was among the first countries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Armenia (on December 16, 1991 [7]). Within 27 years of their independence, Turkey’s relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia have enhanced rapidly and reached its current high level. As a manifestation of Turkey’s close relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSC) mechanisms were established and mutual high level visits take place regularly. Furthermore, together with Azerbaijan, with the participation of other countries in the region, trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation mechanisms were established. In line with Turkey’s aim of establishing a common area of prosperity in South Caucasus region, Turkey attaches importance to regional cooperation and development projects as well. For this purpose, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) became operational [4]. Besides the deals on the establishment of diplomatic, economic and military relations between Turkey and South Caucasus countries - Georgia and Azerbaijan, many agreements have been signed between these countries in different fields. Both Georgian and Azerbaijani citizens were allowed to travel to Turkey without passports, but only with a national identity document.

Summarizing the events taking place in the political arena affecting the South Caucasus, it can be concluded that the following cases must be taken into account in foreign and military policy:

1. Taking into account the fact that the agreement on non-enlargement of the Alliance claimed by official Moscow against the background of the tension in NATO-Russia relations has not been proved by solid facts, it can be concluded that the expansion of NATO is a continuous, dynamic process and there is no compromise in the implementation of this policy and there is no legal barrier. Since strengthening in the South Caucasus is in the interest of the Alliance and Russia considers NATO to be its unequivocal enemy, it is possible that the parties will experience major conflicts in this region. Despite official Moscow’s aggressive stance, the Alliance will expand its geographical boundaries and try to get closer to Russia’s borders. At this time, Russia will try to limit NATO’s access to the South Caucasus by using all possible means, including igniting the sources of conflict.

2. The prospects of cooperation with NATO in the implementation of the national security policy in accordance with the requirements of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On National Security”, the concept of national security of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Military doctrine are very great. An analysis of the operations carried out by the alliance shows that NATO is the only one capable of handling a large-scale multinational combat operation. Thanks to the practical experience gained in its operations, NATO’s requirements in terms of standards, operational forms, opportunities and capabilities are currently playing the role of a kind of “benchmark” for the European defence system as a whole. NATO is a political and military organization, and its influence on the security of its member countries is very great, and its verbal power is very important.

3. The Republic of Azerbaijan has brought its relations with global and regional powers to the level of a systematic foreign policy course based on a concept of national interests. Thanks to the wide maneuverability of the multi-vector foreign policy concept, our country is able to respond adequately to the threats it faces in any security environment. Establishing close relations with NATO and participating in all its events also follows from

this principle. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the multi-vector foreign policy course and the strategy of close cooperation with NATO are not mutually exclusive. Thus, this strategy of the partner countries is not considered an obstacle to cooperation for the Alliance. Second, NATO plays an important role in improving the armed forces of partner countries. Countries that have a policy of limited cooperation with the alliance are forced to conduct a number of exercises at their own expense. Considering that even the CSTO countries strive for cooperation with NATO, there is no reason for Azerbaijan's close cooperation with the Alliance to irritate the neighboring states.

4. Since the Republic of Azerbaijan has chosen the path of democratic development, it is using the experience of modern democracies. Ensuring our country's security and even maintaining its existence depends more on alliances with other states and organizations than on its financial capabilities. Adoption of the standards of NATO, which is the most powerful and effective military-political organization of the last 70 years, as well as adaptation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the globalized world creates favorable conditions for securing its national interests, such as strengthening its independence, ensuring the inviolability of its borders, strengthening its military potential, and modernizing its Armed Forces.

5. The Russia-Ukraine conflict marked the beginning of a new phase in the security system of the Euro-Atlantic area and completely changed the security landscape in Europe. In addition to creating a threat to the sovereignty of Ukraine, the conflict has led to the deepening of distrust and contradictions between Russia and the Western Union. By violating the terms of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 (the memorandum concluded between Ukraine, the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom, which provided for a guarantee of Ukraine's independence and security in return for Ukraine's renunciation of nuclear weapons), Russia once again put the West to a serious test and won this test. The emerging new geopolitical realities require NATO to adequately respond to challenges. In this regard, the 2014 NATO summit in Wales was an important step towards rebalancing priorities in Europe. The most important result of the summit is the adoption of the "Readiness Action Plan" (RAP), which is aimed at countering Russia's tough policy and ensuring the Alliance's response to any security issues. The plan provides a comprehensive package of measures to respond flexibly to changes in the security environment of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as to threats emanating from North Africa and the Middle East. Acceptance of this plan somehow conditions the Alliance to increase its military presence on the eastern borders of Europe.

6. The crisis in Ukraine starting in February 2022 demonstrated the effectiveness of unconventional war ("hybrid war") tactics, and at the same time, the Alliance's traditional principle of "deterrence" has already lost its effectiveness. Therefore, the ongoing instability in Ukraine, Russia's position on NATO in the 2014 Military Doctrine is considered a sufficient reason for the Alliance to reconsider its strategy and further develop cooperation with partner countries. This strategy includes improving military plans, conducting large-scale exercises, deploying new military units on the territory of Eastern European countries that are members of the Alliance, and introducing new partnership mechanisms. One of the main attention-grabbing regions in this direction is the South Caucasus, more precisely, the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Thus, in addition to continuing its activities to include Georgia in its ranks, the Alliance will also increase its attention to the Republic of Azerbaijan in the direction of the work done to eliminate dependence on Russia in the energy sector. Although they have different foreign policy strategies, the Republic of Azerbaijan, like Georgia, can take maximum advantage of all the opportunities offered by the Alliance.

7. The geostrategic position of the South Caucasus countries plays a decisive role in determining the foreign policy course. The location of the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the orbit of West-East tension is the main factor determining the policy of neutrality. This is the most correct choice for the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the near and long term, and thus, the potential cause of a new conflict between Russia and NATO is eliminated. The multi-vector, flexible foreign policy course founded in 1993 is the greatest success of Azerbaijan, and the policy of not joining military organizations aims to maintain neutrality in any large-scale conflict [8].

Accordingly, the most correct choice for the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia is the establishment of alliance relations with Turkey, whose national interests overlap and which acquires a decisive influence in the region. Cooperation with Turkey creates an opportunity for the countries of the region to acquire NATO standards by improving their armed forces and thereby, achieve adaptability, as well as ensure their own energy and national security.

In the 21st century, the next major security challenge all over the world, and especially in the South Caucasus, is related to cyber security. Currently, only five countries in the world have created Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups, and two of them are on the borders of the South Caucasus.

The development and widespread use of information technology in all areas, including the military, requires increased attention to cyber security when planning military security. In the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan, one of the tasks of the Armed Forces and other armed formations only in peacetime is to ensure information security. However, it should be borne in mind that information security from the point of view of cyber security exists not only in peacetime, but also in all three security conditions defined in the Military Doctrine of Azerbaijan Republic, that is, "peacetime", "real threat" and "war (armed conflict)". It can be concluded that in the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan there is a need to consider the adoption of the

concepts of cyberspace and cyber security from the point of view of information security.

There is no doubt that Armenia will not be able to restore its Armed Forces for a long time after the shameful defeat in the Second Karabakh War. However, Armenia will continue to strive for asymmetric warfare and may launch cyber attacks against Azerbaijan. The dynamic development of Azerbaijan in terms of technology and infrastructure creates favorable conditions for cyber attacks. Moreover, Azerbaijan may be subject to cyber attacks not only from the Republic of Armenia, but also in the interests of other state and non-governmental organizations.

Currently, the main threats in cyberspace come from APT (Advanced Persistent Threat) groups. The APT groups are believed to have been formed by Russia (BEAR), North Korea (CHOLLIMA), China (PANDA), Iran (KITTEN) and Vietnam (OCEAN BUFFALO). APT targets typically cover finance, healthcare, manufacturing, telecommunications, energy, aerospace and aviation industries, government agencies, as well as political, scientific and national security spheres. Given that Azerbaijan borders on two countries suspected of cyber attacks (Iran and Russia), and is pursuing reforms in all these areas, the possibility of becoming a cyber target in any area is inevitable.

What is an advanced persistent threat (APT)? An advanced persistent threat (APT) is a sophisticated, sustained cyber attack in which an intruder establishes an undetected presence in a network in order to steal sensitive data over a prolonged period of time. An APT attack is carefully planned and designed to infiltrate a specific organization, evade existing security measures and fly under the radar.

Executing an APT attack requires a higher degree of customization and sophistication than a traditional attack. Adversaries are typically well-funded, experienced teams of cybercriminals that target high-value organizations. They've spent significant time and resources researching and identifying vulnerabilities within the organization.

The goals of APTs fall into four general categories:

- Cyber Espionage, including theft of intellectual property or state secrets.
- E-Crime for financial gain.
- Hacktivism.
- Destruction.

Modern wars fought with advanced technology increase the importance of cyberspace in battle. Some countries have already adopted the idea of using cyberspace as part of their military strategy. It is no coincidence that cyberspace was also recognized as a field of operations at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit. In particular, cyberspace has become the fifth space for military operations, along with air, sea, land and space. Assigning cyberspace the same status as other domains means that it should be treated in the same way when defining capabilities and strategies for defences and attacks.

Located in a region of geopolitical importance, Azerbaijan must be prepared for cyber threats and adapt its national security strategies to modern cyberspace-focused military doctrines. The possibility of government support for Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups in neighboring countries requires accelerating the process.

The most effective fight against APT groups in Azerbaijan can be developed jointly or separately with the Computer Incident Response Team (CIRT). The first step for this could be the inclusion of cyberspace as a separate area in the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and then the creation of the necessary platform for the management of cyber operations [9].

Conclusion

Summing up, it can be noted that in the 21st century, the security issues of the countries of the South Caucasus, in particular Azerbaijan and Georgia, will primarily depend on ensuring military and economic security, which are the basic principles of national security. In this direction, the national interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia coincide with the state interests of the Republic of Turkey, which has a second army in NATO, that gives an invaluable advantage in army building and therefore it is advisable to further strengthen relations between the states. In addition to focusing on building up their military forces in line with NATO standards, Azerbaijan and Georgia should also pay special attention to the cybersecurity issues raging around the world, aiming consider cybersecurity as the fifth domain of military operations. And, finally, the continuation of a multi-vector policy in terms of not creating tension in the South Caucasus is of decisive importance.

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The Importance of the Caucasus: from European Energy Security to Turkey's Role in Countering Moscow's Influence

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Abstract

On February 24, 2022, the Russian army entered Ukraine illegally.¹ The invasion has significantly changed the course of events, as the Russian threat has reunited the West and especially NATO, which, during the Trump administration and thanks to the strategic repositioning of the USA towards the Pacific, was not going through its best juncture. The response of the Alliance member countries was not long in coming and the Russian Federation has become the object of very heavy economic sanctions. These events have significantly increased the strategic importance of the South Caucasus. The energy supply crisis that hit European NATO members following the sanctions imposed on the Kremlin and the latter's blackmailing energy policies have made it essential to find new suppliers of natural gas and oil that can supply European economies. From this perspective, Azerbaijan and Georgia acquired importance. The former has large reserves of hydrocarbons and is well positioned for a possible trans-Caspian connection with the Central Asia countries. Moreover, there are important energy infrastructures that connect the country to Turkey, via Georgia. For some time now, Turkey has been increasing its influence in the region to Moscow's detriment, to which Armenia alone remains strongly anchored. In Georgia, Russia is perceived as a threat and NATO is seen as the best guarantee for the country's national security. By increasing its influence in the Caucasus - thanks to the signing of a Membership Action Plan with Tbilisi in view of future integration of Georgia into the Alliance - NATO could improve the energy security of its European members, further counteracting Russian influence and indirectly China' on Central Asia. The key player in this process will have to be Turkey, but the presence of frozen conflicts in the region could jeopardize the successful outcome of the strategy.

Keywords:

Energy Supply, Energy Policies, Russian Influence, Energy Security.

¹ International Court of Justice, Order, "Allegations of Genocide under the convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)", 16 March 2022, General List no. 182; <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/182/182-20220316-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>.

Introduction

South Caucasus is of considerable strategic importance by virtue of its geographical position. Being positioned between Europe and Asia, it is located at the crossroads of some important energy supply routes and also commercial ones. Besides, the region borders an important NATO member country, Turkey, it lies on the southern borders of the Russian Federation and borders the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, through which it is connected to Central Asia. The region has long been beyond the reach of the Western world, as it was integrated into the Russian Empire and later into the Soviet Union. Yet, following the USSR dissolution, the countries of the South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, became objects of Western interest. Western engagement in the area has been quite fluctuating over the past 30 years and the region has been unstable ever since the South Caucasian countries declared their independence from Moscow. According to Torosyan and Vardanyan, it is possible to identify three different phases of NATO and, more broadly, Western engagement in South Caucasus, particularly with regard to the destabilizing conflicts that affect the region.² This work will initially focus on the three phases examining the relations of the regional actors with NATO and some of its most important member countries, always taking into account relations with the Russian Federation. Moscow has played the role of regional hegemon throughout the period under consideration while undergoing various downsizing phases in its ability to exert influence.³ The paper focuses on examining the role of external and antagonistic powers of NATO and the West, such as Iran and China. Eventually, in light of the recent developments in Ukraine, the priorities of the Atlantic Alliance in the South Caucasus will be assessed regarding the possible fourth phase of the NATO penetration process in the region.

The first phase of NATO penetration in the South Caucasus: filling the power vacuum

The first of these phases began in the period immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although Russia remained the hegemonic power in the region, during the administration led by Boris Yeltsin the Russian government was more focused on its internal problems and less inclined to deal with its “Near Abroad”. This led to the creation of a power vacuum that allowed a first Western penetration that was articulated along three different lines. While Turkey was willing to play a more important role in the region, it did not have the financial means. Nonetheless, it was during this period that the foundations for the construction of major infrastructure projects were laid, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (1998), which connected Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia. This initiative obtained the US endorsement, as the pipeline route bypassed the territory of the Russian Federation and allowed the beneficiaries of the project to begin to free themselves from Moscow’s influence, at least in the field of energy infrastructure. The second line of Western penetration in the region had NATO as its key player. As of 1994, all three countries of the South Caucasus had joined the program Partnership for Peace (PfP). In the end, the outbreak of the first conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan led to the formation, under the auspices of the OSCE, of the Minsk group, with the aim of achieving a peaceful solution to the territorial dispute. In addition to the Russian Federation, this multilateral format saw the participation of France and the United States. For its part, Moscow managed to maintain its hegemony over the region, also thanks to a good military presence. In Armenia, the Russians could rely on the Gyumri base, headquarters of the 102nd Army, and the Erebuni military airport, not far from Yerevan. In Azerbaijan, the Russians controlled the Gabala Radar Station and in Georgia were stationed in the bases of Vaziani, Akhalkalaki and Batumi. Moreover, following the conflicts that saw the pro-Russian separatists of Abkhazia and South Ossetia confronting the Georgian armed forces, the Russian soldiers were deployed in the secessionist regions, now de facto independent, as peacekeeping forces.⁴ They arrived in South Ossetia in 1992 and in Abkhazia in 1994. This military presence, coupled with Russian concerns over the increased Western influence in the South Caucasus, prevented further NATO engagement in the region. In 1993, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia became members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Russian-led organization born from the ashes of the Soviet Union in order to facilitate relations among the various republics. Furthermore, following its entry into force in 1994, the three Caucasian countries became part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance. It was planned to be renewed after 5 years, but in 1999 Armenia only remained a member of the CSTO, while both Azerbaijan and Georgia did not renew their participation.

The second phase of NATO penetration in the South Caucasus: Winds of war

2 T. Torosyan, A. Vardanyan, “The South Caucasus Conflicts in the Context of Struggle for the Eurasian Heartland”, in *Geopolitics*, 20:3, Routledge, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2015.1050717><https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2015.1050717>

3 M. Güneylüoğlu, “War, Status Quo, and Peace in the South Caucasus: A Power Transition Perspective”, in *Public Integrity*, Routledge, 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2017.1302868>

4 G. Toal, *Near Abroad, Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*, London, Oxford University Press, 2017.

The second phase of NATO penetration coincided with the last vestiges of the US truly unipolar moment, the Global War on Terror and the erosion of US-Russian relations. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the start of military operations in Afghanistan, the South Caucasus became an important supply route for the NATO armed forces engaged in Kabul. Beginning in 2004, some territories of Azerbaijan and Georgia were integrated into the Northern Distribution Network.⁵ Both countries made available their airspace for the conducting of Operation Enduring Freedom and became a source of concern due to the alleged spread of Islamic fundamentalism, especially in some northern regions of Georgia.⁶ Furthermore, both Azerbaijan and Georgia began contributing to NATO missions with their own military contingents. Beginning in 1999, Baku agreed to send a small contingent of 33 men under Turkish command to Kosovo to take part in the KFOR mission. The Azerbaijani soldiers were then withdrawn in 2008, following Pristina unilateral declaration of independence, as Baku, which had to manage the thorny issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, could not legitimize this decision without, at the same time, favoring the Armenian rival.⁷ In addition, in 2002 Baku sent a 21-men contingent to Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The number of Azerbaijani soldiers increased after the withdrawal from Kosovo, signaling the intention not to interrupt the collaboration with NATO. As for Georgia, starting in 2004 a military contingent was sent to Afghanistan. With more than a thousand soldiers mainly engaged in the Helmand Province and Kabul, Tbilisi could boast the largest contingent among non-NATO countries. Furthermore, from 1999 to 2008, Georgian soldiers were engaged alongside NATO forces in Kosovo: the contingent consisted of an infantry platoon under Turkish command and an additional company-size unit under German command.⁸ Lastly, both Georgia and Azerbaijan participated in several exercises with NATO. It is interesting to note that 10 soldiers of the Armenian armed forces also participated in the exercise “Immediate Response 20” held in July 2008.⁹ From the energetic-infrastructure point of view, in 2001 Baku, Tbilisi and Ankara signed the agreement for the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline that runs parallel to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and brings gas from the Azerbaijani field of Sha Deniz to Turkey. The West welcomed the project, as it would help reducing the dependence of European NATO members from Russian supplies. Both the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline began pumping hydrocarbons to Turkey in 2006 increasing the energy security of NATO countries and the influence of the Alliance on the region. Since the days of the USSR, Moscow had a sort of monopoly on the fossil fuel resources in the Caspian basin and on the infrastructure for their transportation. With the completion of the new pipelines, however, different players entered the market as competitors of the Kremlin for the European one. Regarding the infrastructural field, in 2007 the Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey governments signed an agreement for the construction of a railway line connecting Baku to the Turkish city of Kars, passing through Tbilisi. The project was completed in 2017. Nonetheless, the path of the three South Caucasus countries towards the West and NATO began to show substantial differences. Armenia remained strongly anchored to the Russian Federation, which Yerevan regarded as the only bulwark for its own security, given the rivalry with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and the difficult relationship with Ankara whose border with Armenia remained closed since 1993 and, according to some scholars, had never really been open.¹⁰ This prevented the Caucasian country from participating in the dividends deriving from the transit of hydrocarbons: the Armenian territory had been systematically bypassed by the pipeline routes. Commercial traffic to the West too was made difficult by the closure of the Turkish border. Georgia moved rapidly along the democratization path following the 2003 Rose Revolution, which led to the exhaustion of Shevardnadze and the election of Saakashvili. The government led by the latter was pro-Western and had set the country’s entry into NATO as one of its objectives. This openly pro-Atlantic posture strongly annoyed Moscow. Eventually, Azerbaijan had chosen a multivectoral policy that allowed Baku to maintain good relations with the Atlantic Alliance without annoying the Russian Federation. Furthermore, through time, the relationship between Baku and Ankara had definitely deepened, given the common ethnic roots of the inhabitants of the two countries. As for Georgia, Moscow, annoyed by the posture assumed by the new government, became decidedly more assertive. It should not be forgotten that, thanks to the policies of Vladimir Putin and the hydrocarbons’ high price, in the 2000s the Russian Federation had enormously improved its economic condition. This allowed it to focus again on foreign policy issues. In particular, the ambition to be recognized as a great power had placed it in open confrontation with Washington, leading to a gradual but irreversible deterioration of relations between the two countries. In Putin’s vision, the South Caucasus, as part of its “Near Abroad”, is also part of its exclusive sphere of influence. In addition, starting from P-

5 R. Craig Nations, “Russian and the Caucasus”, in *Connections*, 14:2, Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes, 2015.

6 J. Nixey, *The South Caucasus, Drama on Three Stages*, Chatham House Study Group, 2010.

7 P. Antonopoulos, R. Velez, D. Cottle. “NATO’s Push into the Caucasus: Geopolitical Flashpoints and Limits for Expansion”, in *Defence and Security Analysis*, Routledge, 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1379119>

8 The document is available on the website: https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/Deepening_Relations_with_Georgia_EN.pdf

9 P. Antonopoulos, R. Velez, D. Cottle. “NATO’s Push into the Caucasus: Geopolitical Flashpoints and Limits for Expansion”, in *Defence and Security Analysis*, Routledge, 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1379119>

10 V. Ter-Matevosyan, “Deadlocked in History and Geopolitics: Revisiting Armenia-Turkey Relations”, in *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 30:3, Policy Studies Organization, 2021. DOI: 10.1111/dome.12242

tin's second term as president of the Russian Federation, NATO was considered the main threat to the country's national security,¹¹ due to the eastward expansion of the Alliance, which had seen the integration of countries that, during the Cold War, belonged to the Soviet bloc or even the Soviet Union itself. For this reason, in order to punish the Georgian government for its pro-Atlantic posture, the Russian government banned Georgian waters and wines from its markets in 2006, causing serious economic damage to Tbilisi,¹² but the worst was yet to come. During the Bucharest NATO summit in April 2008, the United States supported the idea of proposing the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine, the first step for the integration of the two countries into the Atlantic Alliance. The idea was strongly opposed by France and Germany and a vague promise was reached for future Tbilisi and Kiev integration. This proposal crossed one of the red lines drawn by Moscow as well. At the beginning of August, following several provocations on the borders with the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Saakashvili ordered his armed forces to bring the two territories back under Tbilisi control. While NATO watched, fearful of the consequences of a direct confrontation with Russia, Moscow intervened and in 5 days, the Army reached short distance from Tbilisi. Moreover, the Kremlin officially recognized the independence of the two breakaway regions, which became de facto independent states with a strong Russian military presence. These events led to a strengthening of Russian influence in the South Caucasus, to the detriment of the West. Moscow had lost Georgia forever, but it had increased its military presence. In addition, the Russian intervention and NATO's tepid reaction had further convinced Baku of the correctness of its prudent position.¹³

The third phase of NATO penetration in the South Caucasus: Another war

The third phase of Western engagement in the South Caucasus started with the 2008 global financial crisis and the Barak Obama election. Although it was reasonable to expect a decline in Western interest in the region, given the new US administration's open opposition to the military engagement in Iraq and despite Washington having initiated its withdrawal from Baghdad, NATO maintained its focus on Afghanistan and the Northern Distribution Network did not lose its importance. Furthermore, various and unexpected developments contributed to making the South Caucasus once again central to the interests of the Atlantic Alliance. The normalization process of the relations between Turkey and Armenia began in 2009: it could have improved Yerevan's trade relations with Europe, while increasing Ankara's influence in the South Caucasus. Yet, despite the enormous efforts made (in particular by the Swiss government)¹⁴ and the signing of two protocols, the process was not completed due to the lack of agreement on some fundamental points and relations between the two countries remained rather cold.¹⁵ In addition, the 2006 and 2009 energy crises caused by the contrasts between Moscow and Kiev threatened to leave the European members of the Atlantic Alliance without gas during the winter months. The crises revealed the need to diversify European energy supplies. The Russian Federation proved to be a decidedly unreliable partner and inclined to use hydrocarbons as a weapon. In this context, the Caspian energy reserves were identified as a response to the ongoing crisis. The South Caucasus thus assumed certain importance as a natural transit route for fossil fuels from Azerbaijan and Central Asia. In 2011 Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed on the construction of the gas pipeline TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline) and the construction officially began in 2015. It should have completed the Southern Corridor, connecting the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline with the TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) through Turkish territory.¹⁶ The aforementioned energy deals could only annoy the Kremlin, led at the time by Dmitry Medvedev, but after a period of severe friction due to the war with Georgia in 2008, the US administration launched the "reset" policy to normalize relations with Moscow in 2009. Russia, in the meanwhile, tried to reinvigorate its military presence in the South Caucasus, renewing the lease of the Gyumri base until 2044 and starting negotiations for the renewal of the use of the Gabala Radar Station in Azerbaijan. The talks failed so much that in 2012 the Kremlin permanently abandoned the infrastructure. Among the factors that determined this result was undoubtedly the constant support that Russia provided to Armenia, poorly tolerated in Baku. The tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia were not resolved, given that in 2016 there was a new upsurge of violence. During four days of conflict over 200 soldiers died and in the same period Turkish influence on Azerbaijan furtherly increased. Erdogan, indeed, publicly spoke out in favor of Baku and, although not supported by any evidence, rumors began to spread about Ankara's alleged responsibilities in the outbreak of the brief conflict.¹⁷

11 A. Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2016

12 N. Lomagin, "The Economic Tools of Russian Security Strategy", in R. Kanet, *The Routledge Handbook on Russian Security*, London-New York, Routledge, 2019.

13 K. Iskandarov, G. Simons & P. Gawliczek, "The South Caucasus: Stage for a 'New Great Game' between NATO and Russia?", in *Connections*, 3-4, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.18.3-4.01>

14 The document is available on the website: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-56_-22-april-2009_-press-release-regarding-the-turkish-armenian-relations.en.mfa

15 V. Ter-Matevosyan, "Deadlocked in History and Geopolitics: Revisiting Armenia-Turkey Relations", in *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 30:3, Policy Studies Organization, 2021. DOI: 10.1111/dome.12242

16 R. Craig Nations, "Russian and the Caucasus", in *Connections*, 14:2, Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes, 2015.

17 H. J. Schmidt, "The Four-Day War Has Diminished the Chances of Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh", in *OSCE Yearbook of 2016*,

even if open Turkish support for Azerbaijan had bothered Moscow, the trend was not reversed. In September 2020, Baku launched a large-scale military operation to regain the territories lost during the conflict ended in 1994, managing to bring back under its sovereignty much of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani districts that for 30 years were under Yerevan control. Also on this occasion, Ankara's support proved to be crucial. The Azerbaijani forces had modernized their military apparatus by purchasing Western and especially Turkish armaments: the Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones in particular appear to have played a vital role in enabling Baku to achieve victory in a conflict that ended in early November and had a very high toll in terms of human lives.¹⁸ The result of the war was particularly painful for Yerevan and almost led to Nikol Pashinyan's resignation. The conflict made clear several dynamics going on in the region at that time. Turkey's influence was on the rise, including in Georgia, to the detriment of Moscow. Although the inhabitants were disappointed by the lack of support from Russia and other members of the CSTO with respect to the Azerbaijani aggression, Armenia remained entirely dependent on the Russian Federation for its national security. After all, the Kremlin's influence had become further evident at the turnaround in Yerevan shortly before the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union negotiated in 2013. The Armenian authorities declared their intention to be integrated into the Customs Union (CU) promoted by the Russian Federation and in 2015 they effectively joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), putting an end to the association process with Brussels.¹⁹ Russia remained the hegemonic power in the South Caucasus, as demonstrated by the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia brokered with the Kremlin's contribution only. Furthermore, NATO had already decreased its involvement in the region for some years.²⁰ Trump's America First policy has resulted in a more selective US approach to global issues. It was openly oriented towards pursuing Washington's interests with a particular focus on short-term repercussions on domestic politics.²¹ NATO allies themselves were strongly urged to contribute more to their own defence by complying with their obligations under the Washington Treaty.²² This helped create the impression of an Alliance crisis. Moreover, all countries were grappling with the serious covid-19 epidemic. According to Laurence Broers, the autumn 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan had unequivocally sanctioned the end of the US unipolar moment. It was Moscow that negotiated the ceasefire and the rest of the world, including the West, had limited itself to appeals for a cessation of hostilities.²³ Furthermore, not even the first months of the Biden administration seemed promising for the South Caucasus countries. Although the United States newly elected president had worked to heal the fractures generated during the Trump administration, both with allied and friendly countries, Washington's strategic repositioning towards the Asia-Pacific area due to growing competition with China had by no means stopped.²⁴ A rather evident symptom of the change underway had been the hasty withdrawal of the NATO contingent from Afghanistan in August 2021 that had put an end to the twenty-year Western presence in the country and the democratization process allowing the return of the Taliban. In this context, the South Caucasus had lost relevance, as the Northern Distribution Network would no longer be of any use. The withdrawal of the NATO contingent itself had given the perception of a serious weakening of the Alliance.²⁵ Moreover, according to an interesting survey by the Caucasus Research Resource Center on the preferences of the Georgian people, who had the strongest pro-Atlantic sentiments in the region, it is possible to note a sharp decline in the positive attitude towards NATO. The preference for Tbilisi's entry into the Alliance is predominant but it does not reach the peaks of the past. In 2019, 50% of Georgia's population favorably viewed the country's integration into NATO, but in 2010 that share was 70%.²⁶ Similarly, in 2019 14% of the interviewees said they did not want at all to enter NATO, almost double the 2010 share, which stood at 8%. Among the reasons for this massive decline in consensus, there was undoubtedly a sort of fatigue due to the Western failure to keep the promise of future integration into the Alliance. Moreover, among those who declared themselves opposed to the entry of the country into NATO, 20% had indicated as their main motivation not to annoy Russia. However, both Georgia and

Baden-Baden, 2017.

18 Won-June Hwang, Seung-Hoon Song, "The Extension of Turkish Influence and the Use of Drones", in *Comparative Strategy*, Routledge, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2022.2111907>

19 A. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy, Change and Continuity in National Identity*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019

20 P. Stronski, *The Shifting Geography of the South Caucasus*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021. The document is available on the website: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/23/shifting-geography-of-south-caucasus-pub-84814>

21 President of the United States of America, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2017. The document is available on the website: <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2017/>

22 Ibidem.

23 L. Broers, "Requiem for the Unipolar Moment in Nagorny Karabakh", in *Current History*, 120:828, University of California Press, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2021.120.828.255>

24 President of the United States of America, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, 2021. The document is available on the website: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>

25 J. Hudson, M. Ryan, *Withdrawal from Afghanistan Forces Allies and Adversaries to Reconsider America's Global Role*, The Washington Post, August 17, 2021. The document is available on the website: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/withdrawal-from-afghanistan-forces-allies-and-adversaries-to-reconsider-americas-global-role/2021/08/17/2808ddbc-ff84-11eb-825d-01701f9ded64_story.html

26 The survey is available on the website: <https://crrc.ge/en/article/caucasus-barometer-2019-georgia-now-available/334>

Azerbaijan continued to collaborate with NATO even during this troubled third phase. When ISAF ended, the Azerbaijani military continued to cooperate with the Atlantic Alliance forces in Resolute Support. They were mainly involved in the training of the Afghan National Army, which Baku also helped to financially support.²⁷ According to Antonopoulos, Velez and Cottle, this intense collaborative activity could have allowed Baku to be integrated into the Atlantic Alliance. Yet, in 2010 only 38% of the population had a positive view of NATO.²⁸ In addition, Azerbaijani support for the Afghan security apparatus appeared ambiguous. Baku, by virtue of its geographically strategic position, had never made a secret of wanting to become an important crossroads in the Chinese New Silk Road. The support to the Afghan forces fits perfectly in this context, as the stabilization of Afghanistan was necessary to allow the safe transit of Chinese goods. As we shall see, China's monumental trade initiative could prove problematic for NATO as it would increase Beijing's influence in the South Caucasus region.

Iran and China in the South Caucasus

Given the geographical proximity, since the dissolution of the USSR Iran has tried to increase its influence in the South Caucasus.²⁹ Azerbaijan has undoubtedly always been the country of greatest importance to Teheran. After all, Iran's northern regions are inhabited by over 20 million Azeris and the relations that Baku maintains with some Western countries - Turkey and in recent years, also Israel - have caused quite a few concerns in Teheran. This is also due to the fact that, given its geographical position, Azerbaijan has opened the doors of the Caspian basin to the United States and its allies. Iran has therefore tried to influence Azerbaijan by exploiting various asymmetrical tactics. In the years immediately following the USSR dissolution, concerned that Baku's independence might fuel the irredentism of its Azerbaijani minority, Teheran supported Armenia in the first conflict for controlling Nagorno-Karabakh. This seems quite surprising, considering that Yerevan is a Christian country while Azerbaijan is predominantly Shiite Muslim, like Iran. This support was provided through the supply of Russian weapons to Armenia, facilitating the passage of the latter through its territory. This led to the creation of a privileged relationship, from an economic, military, energy and commercial point of view, with Armenia and, over time, to the attempt to create a Teheran-Yerevan-Moscow axis, which could counterbalance the Washington-Baku-Tel Aviv one.³⁰ The friendly relations between Azerbaijan and the West had developed around the issue of the export of hydrocarbons to Europe. Iran exploited the status of the Caspian Sea which is problematic from the point of view of international law regarding the division of its waters between the coastal states. Teheran wanted to reduce Azerbaijani extraction capacities by challenging Baku's sovereignty over some areas of the Caspian itself and by blocking Baku's various attempts to resolve the age-old question of the status of the sea. This is because 90% of the hydrocarbon reserves that Baku can rely on are offshore.³¹ There were military provocations, such as the frequent Iranian invasions of Azerbaijani airspace, considered intimidating and aimed at preventing the development of the project for the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, strongly opposed by Russia and Iran itself. From 2013 onwards, with the election of Hassan Rouhani, economic relations between Baku and Teheran significantly improved. Azerbaijan became a privileged territory for Iranian products export, considering that Iran suffers the West heavy sanctions. Moreover, being Iran disconnected from the SWIFT system, Azerbaijani banks were also exploited by Teheran. Attempts to influence Azerbaijan's internal politics happened mainly through the support and funding of the anti-Western and anti-Zionist Islamic Party of Azerbaijan and through the diffusion of its own ideology in Azerbaijani mosques.³² Although the Baku authorities did not explicitly mention Teheran, some Azerbaijani personalities believe that the Iranians are behind the outbreak of some public unrest such as those of Nardaran in 2015. As per the relations between Armenia and Iran, they can be described as quite good, despite the religious differences. As mentioned, Teheran supported Yerevan during the first war for controlling Nagorno-Karabakh. Relations between Armenia and Iran have gone through three distinct phases. The first, between 1991 and 2001, was characterized by Teheran's fears of Western penetration into the South Caucasus and by the aforementioned Iranian support to the Armenian cause during the war with Azerbaijan. The second phase, between 2001 and 2008, was characterized by difficulties but the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline brought back Yerevan and Teheran, which opposed the project, to share important common interests. The third phase starts after 2008 and was mainly characterized by the war between Russia and Georgia. The border closure between the two countries precluded Armenia from accessing Russia via Tbilisi. For this reason, Yerevan had to make a reorientation toward Iran in order not to further damage its economy. This helps explaining the thriving trade and energy relations between the two countries. Teheran has also financially sup-

27 P. Antonopoulos, R. Velez, D. Cottle. "NATO's Push into the Caucasus: Geopolitical Flashpoints and Limits for Expansion", in *Defence and Security Analysis*, Routledge, 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1379119>

28 Ibidem.

29 J. Kraus, E. Souleimanov, "A Failed Comeback? Understanding Iranian Policies in the South Caucasus", in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18:5, Routledge, 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2016.1196024>

30 Ibidem.

31 Ibidem.

32 Ibidem.

ported Armenia by significantly increasing its influence in Yerevan.³³ As per Georgia, relations with Teheran have always been rather limited: in some periods of time, the two countries have been competitors with respect to the possibility of the pipeline routes between Azerbaijan and Turkey crossing their territory. The choice fell on Georgia given the strong anti-Iranian posture of Baku's Western partners. In 2010 there was a sudden improvement in the relations between Teheran and Tbilisi due to the elimination of visas for entry into the two countries. NATO negatively assessed the initiative, which was eventually suspended by the Georgian Dream party once it came to power. According to Kraus and Souleimanov, however, this happened not so much for Western concerns, but because the Georgian Orthodox Church - strongly Islamophobic - and a part of the conservative-oriented population did not tolerate the presence of Iranian tourists in the country.³⁴ Moreover, from a Western perspective, the rise of Chinese influence in the South Caucasus region could also be a challenge since it has definitely increased over the past decade. The main reason why the region has awakened Beijing's interest is linked to the strategic position it occupies, as it represents a natural corridor to connect Central Asia, where the Chinese presence is very marked, with the area of the Black Sea and with Eastern and Western Europe. These are the perfect characteristics to make the South Caucasus an important hub of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), connected to the New Silk Road. The South Caucasus should therefore become a transit hub for goods from China to the West. Some infrastructure projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, are already part of the connection between Beijing and Europe. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia are heavily investing in infrastructure improvements in order to increase their respective cargo transit and storage capacities, made possible by generous Chinese funding. In 2017, China Energy purchased 75% of the Georgian Free Industrial Zone (FIZ) of Poti, not far from the port. On the other hand, ChinaPower was strongly interested in joining the consortium for the construction of the Anaklia port, a project interrupted due to corruption allegations.³⁵ Furthermore, China is investing in the development of Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure. Although Armenia is essentially excluded from the trade routes linking China to Europe, Beijing has significantly increased its influence over Yerevan as well. Chinese interests in Armenia are mainly oriented to the country's mineral resources, to the possibility of building infrastructures that improve Yerevan's connections with Iran and to collaboration in the military field.³⁶ In the latter sector, in particular, the collaboration took the form of military and technical-military cooperation agreements, the purchase of Chinese armaments from the Armenian side and the sending of Armenian officers to study in Chinese military academies and universities. This allowed Yerevan to balance its dependence on the Russian Federation by reducing the latter's influence without replacing it. In order not to antagonize Baku, China has started cooperation similar to the one just described with Azerbaijan too. As per Georgia, following the 2008 conflict with Russia, Tbilisi has tried to reduce its dependence from Moscow by diversifying its partners. Beijing, strongly interested in the country's infrastructural development, has therefore become quite important for Georgia. It must not be forgotten that, because of the bilateral agreements in place with Turkey and the CIS countries and the signing of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU, Georgia might allow China access to a market of over 800 million people.³⁷ In addition, in the South Caucasus China is strongly present in the telecommunications field thanks to Huawei and its partnerships with national operators. According to Tracey German, Beijing in the region is not only active in the economic and military fields but also in the "soft power" opening several centers for the study of the Chinese language and culture, such as the Confucius Institutes. If the Russian Federation, the regional hegemon, looks favorably at the Chinese economic penetration, as it is able to balance the Western one (if not to replace it), Moscow appears decidedly more concerned regarding "soft power". Camouflaged by cultural associations, the centers for teaching the Chinese language and traditions are often suspected of carrying on Beijing's propaganda.³⁸ The Kremlin is certainly attentive to this aspect as it is strongly interested in maintaining its ability to direct and to influence the internal politics of some of the countries of the region, as it has done up to now.

The war in Ukraine: a new phase of NATO-South Caucasus relations?

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation Army which had been crammed for some time on the western borders entered Ukraine, starting a bloody conflict that continues to this day. This event meant an epochal turning point in the global geopolitical balance.³⁹ What is happening in Ukraine has profound repercussions also

33 V. Gasimli, Z. Shiriyev, Z. Valyeva, *Iran-Armenia Relations: Geopolitical Reality Versus Political Statements*, Center for Strategic Studies, Baku 2011.

34 J. Kraus, E. Souleimanov, "A Failed Comeback? Understanding Iranian Policies in the South Caucasus", in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18:5, Routledge, 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2016.1196024>

35 B. Kutelia, V. Sikharulidze, *Strategic Connectivity in the Black Sea: A Focus on Georgia*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, 2021.

36 T. German, "Russia and the South Caucasus: The China Challenge", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2071843>

37 Ibidem.

38 Ibidem.

39 E. Rumer, R. Sokolsky, *Putin's War against Ukraine and the Balance of Power in Europe*, Carnegie Endowment for

in the South Caucasus and its importance to NATO. The West's response to the Russian invasion was surprisingly determined and certainly very harsh. NATO did not intervene militarily to avoid the outbreak of a nuclear conflict, but it has regrouped after several years of difficulties.⁴⁰ The Atlantic Alliance member countries have imposed sanctions on Russia which have been described as "unprecedented" and are intended to completely disrupt the Russian economic apparatus. These sanctions have hit the energy sector too, with heavy repercussions on the European NATO members. Some of them, including Germany and Italy, were heavily dependent on Russia's natural gas supplies and had plans to even increase hydrocarbon imports from Moscow. With the imposition of sanctions - and counter-sanctions decided by the Kremlin - the urgent need to diversify their energy supplies has become clear to the European NATO members. The fact that the South Caucasus possesses substantial hydrocarbon resources, particularly in the Caspian basin, could place the region once again at the center of the Alliance's interests since European NATO members must ensure their own energy security. Furthermore, through the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus is connected to Central Asia, even richer in energy resources. Deeper penetration of the Atlantic Alliance would also serve a strategic-military objective. The containment of the Russian Federation would be even more effective if the Atlantic Alliance managed to maintain a strong presence, including militarily, on the southern borders of the country. With the likely entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO, Moscow would find itself almost entirely locked in an Atlantic buffer, something the Kremlin intended to avert with the Ukraine invasion. Moreover, a renewed Western engagement in the South Caucasus would be consistent with the strong US opposition to Iran and China that are gaining ground in the region. This situation would also have consequences in Central Asia, although it is impossible to place a serious limit on the Teheran and, above all, Beijing influence, given the geographical proximity to the "Dragon". This would be perfectly consistent with Washington's slowed strategic repositioning in an openly anti-Chinese posture. The timing would seem particularly propitious given the setbacks that the Russian army is undergoing in Ukraine: Russia's southern borders could be unguarded considering that even the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been forced to send several armed contingents to replenish the ranks of the now exhausted Russian divisions.⁴¹ It is therefore very likely that Moscow, bothered by the possible increase in Western influence or the increased NATO presence in the South Caucasus, cannot afford at the moment to open a second front to stem the danger of an Atlantic advance in the "Near Abroad", as happened in 2008 in Georgia. Nonetheless, it seems rather difficult that the South Caucasus countries can be fully integrated into the Atlantic Alliance, despite the promises made to Georgia for various reasons. Armenia remains Moscow's closest ally in the region, being part of the Commonwealth of the Independent States, the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union. Yerevan views Russia as the main guarantor of its national security, especially in light of the recent conflict with Azerbaijan over controlling Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia hosts two Russian military bases on its national territory, a deeper collaboration with NATO would be really difficult. Furthermore, unlike other countries in the region, Yerevan does not have friendly relations with Turkey, which has strongly supported Baku in the military dispute between the two countries. In the normalization of relations with Ankara lies the main possibility of counterbalancing the Russian influence on Yerevan. However, this influence will remain predominant and, in any case, the process of stabilization of relations will not be feasible in the short term. The fact that Armenia remains excluded from the major trade and energy routes makes it a minor player in NATO's priorities. Azerbaijan, as previously mentioned, does not seem interested in a full integration into the Atlantic Alliance, preferring to maintain a balanced policy in relations with the West and the Russian Federation. In addition, following the 2020 conflict with Armenia, a Russian military contingent with peacekeeping functions is present in Nagorno-Karabakh, nominally part of the Azerbaijani national territory. It should not be underestimated that, based on Point 6 in Chapter 1 of the "Study on NATO Enlargement", "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance".⁴² For these reasons it is very difficult to think that Baku can be integrated into the Atlantic Alliance. Turkey, which maintains very close relations with the country, could become a fundamental agent for the aspirations of the West and NATO in Azerbaijan regarding the energy security of the European members of the Alliance. The parties, thanks to the Turkish intercession and the good relations established over the years by the NATO countries, could continue in the wake of the military collaboration already started with the sending of Azerbaijani troops to Kosovo and Afghanistan, through the participation of Baku in joint exercises and in future NATO Operations. In addition, given the attempts of Iranian interference in Azerbaijani political life, NATO and the Caucasian countries could collaborate in counterbalancing it, exchanging information and know-how related to the containment of hybrid or asymmetric threats. Eventually, as far as Georgia is concerned, the difficulties are no less, despite the fact that it is the most pro-Western country in the entire region. According to an interesting survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI), in

International Peace, 2022. The document is available on the website: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/11/putin-s-war-against-ukraine-and-balance-of-power-in-europe-pub-86832>

40 M. Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, London, Routledge, 2018.

41 The document is available on the website: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-additional-units-from-georgian-breakaway-regions-join-russian-offensive/>

42 The document is available on the website: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

March 2022 the share of Georgian citizens who favorably viewed the country's entry into NATO had risen again to reach 75% of the population.⁴³ This was probably due to fears triggered by Moscow's renewed assertiveness and the conflict in Ukraine. Yet, although the ruling party in Tbilisi, Georgian Dream, is to be considered pro-Western, it does not appear that the government is inclined to pursue the country's integration into NATO. The fear of annoying Moscow, the desire to peacefully resolve disputes with the separatist movements and the economic-commercial ties that Ivanishvili, leader of Georgian Dream - Deus ex machina of the party, despite being nominally outside politics - has with the Russian Federation could be among the reasons.⁴⁴ There are also other critical issues with respect to the full integration of Georgia into NATO. As for Azerbaijan, the content of Point 6, Chapter 1 of the "Study on NATO Enlargement" also applies to Tbilisi. The long-standing and unresolved territorial disputes with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia represent a relevant obstacle to the completion of the integration process. Furthermore, the Russian Federation has several military bases in the territories considered and, as of 2015, the Ossetian armed forces are partially integrated into the Russian army.⁴⁵ However, NATO should be credited as the cornerstone of Georgian national security through continued military collaboration. The Georgian forces' training, the advising on the security apparatus reform and the participation in military exercises and future Alliance Operations could prove to be fundamental in the process of further rapprochement of the parties. In this case, collaboration in opposing hybrid and asymmetric threats of Russian origin could be important as well as the protection of critical energy infrastructures. Georgia is rather vulnerable given the possible instability of the country due to the breakaway regions and the Russian military presence.

Conclusion

The South Caucasus is a region of considerable strategic importance, especially in the historical moment we are experiencing. Since the dissolution of the USSR, NATO has sought to establish itself as a reliable partner for the countries of the region, filling the void shortly availed by Moscow. The return of Russia to global scenarios, seasoned with certain assertiveness, the identity crisis experienced by the Atlantic Alliance in recent years and the will of Iran and China not to be excluded from the region, have determined a partial rebalancing of the dynamics of the South Caucasus not entirely in favor of NATO interests. Moreover, because of the competition for influence over the Caucasian countries, the area has been a cauldron of instability since the Soviet collapse, often favored by Russia to guarantee its control over it. The Ukraine conflict, however, could have brought the South Caucasus back to the center of NATO priorities, in an anti-Russian posture in order to guarantee the European members' energy security, without forgetting the fight against Chinese influence, consistent with Washington's strategic reorientation. Turkey's role will be crucial given its status of NATO member and the close relations it has in the region, including with Moscow. However, this ambiguous relationship, as well as Ankara's hegemonic ambitions, could prove to be a further issue rather than an advantage and must be carefully monitored.

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⁴⁴ The document is available on the website: <https://transparency.ge/en/post/russian-businesses-bidzina-ivanishvili-and-his-relatives>

⁴⁵ The document is available on the website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170121013703/http://www.eurasianet.org/node/82031>

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Georgian-Russian Bargaining Games of 2008

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Abstract

On August 7 of 2008, after nearly a week of clashes between Georgian troops and separatist forces of South Ossetia, Georgia launched an aerial and ground offensive of the province. In a matter of hours Georgian forces were in control of Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital. Immediately, Russian government protested that its citizens were under attack and responded by throwing its troops into South Ossetia, simultaneously launching aerial raids both in the province and on targets in other parts of Georgia. Within a couple of days, Russia had seized the control of the province.

Russian army was ranked fifth in the world with active military personnel of just over million soldiers and a budget of approximately \$90.7 billion - the third largest military budget in the world. Georgia, on the other hand, counts approximately 40, 000 troops and disposes of military budget of only \$360 million. Disparities in military capabilities among two states are colossal. Given the strategic value of Caucasus, Russia has tried to keep the region under its influence for over two centuries. Yet, Georgian government invaded the province seemingly ignoring the readiness of Russia to fight for its strategic interests. As argued below, Georgia's invasion of South Ossetia was a calculated strategy which aimed to achieve discrete political economic goals and never intended to challenge Russia's vital interests by regaining the control of the province. Primary purpose of Georgian invasion was to use Ossetia as a bargaining chip in pursuit of other national goals.

Keywords:

Georgian-Russian war, Disparities in military capabilities, Calculated strategy, Bargain.

Structure of the paper:

The first part of the paper provides the historical background of the conflict and important developments right before the war. In the second part of the paper, I review the theories of international relations in an attempt to understand the causes of war. Finding them unsatisfactory, in the following section I provide my own explanation by building a bargaining theory of conflict. In part I review the bargaining theory developed by T. Schelling's in his *Strategy of Conflict*. While Schelling pursued goals distinct from mine, with certain modifications his theory can be used to clarify the reasons for the seemingly absurd invasion of South Ossetia by Georgians.

The ultimate goal of the paper is to provide a theoretical contribution to understanding why weak powers will at times pursue counterintuitive policies like limited wars against much superior opponents. I try to show that such policies are not only reasonable but optimal given the goals of conflicting sides. The Georgian-Russian conflict was picked as a case first to show that classical IR theories cannot explain the behavior of Georgia during 2008 Georgian-Russian war, namely a small power challenging an overwhelmingly superior opponent; I suggest that in the bargaining game the disparity of powers is a poor predictor of who pursues more aggressive tactics and who comes out as a winner. And finally, from the methodological standpoint, the case of Georgian-Russian war is the least possible case; that is, the disparity of powers is so paramount that if despite this disparity a weaker power provokes a conflict against the stronger power, then we can rest assured that the conflict is not a result of miscalculation of opponent's power capabilities, and the explanation we offer constitutes a more likely understanding of the problem.

Theoretical breakdown:

Because the study's main goal is to understand why despite huge disparity in power capabilities Georgia challenged Russian influence in Ossetia, it is apropos to start the analysis of the conflict by reviewing scholars who study power capabilities of states to explain conflict among states. Neo-realists argue that systemic distribution of power is decisive in understanding to why wars take place in the anarchic international environment. According to neo-realists main culprit of conflicts and wars is the anarchic system in which states can never be sure of each other's intentions.

Though neo-realists of all stripes share the core assumption of structural impediments to cooperation among states, they have hard time reconciling their differences when it comes to the issue of the stability of unipolar vs. bipolar vs. multipolar worlds. Waltzian bi-polar vision sees the world as more stable than the multi-polar one, and it views the unipolarity as a temporary aberration. In Waltz's bipolar structure there are two major powers and it is very clear who the enemy is. In contrast, in a multipolar structure, who is a danger to whom is often obscure.¹ States have the luxury of devoting all their attention to their only rival and by doing so decreasing considerably the effects of uncertainty and exaggerated threat-perceptions.

Deutsch and Singer, in *Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability* seek to examine the relationship between multipolarity and international stability. They suggest that the more actors there are internationally the more stable is the system. According to them stability is preserved when the environments remains more or less the same, when there is no hegemon, most of its members survive, and there are no world wars. They define arms races as conflicts in which states spent large part of their national resources on military expenditures.² Schweller thinks that what determines conflict in international politics is not balance of power but the existence of revisionist states, that is, states discontent with their status in the international politics. By this logic, there are revisionist states and status quo states. Status quo states join coalition with other similar nations against revisionist states that are dissatisfied with their status in the world politics.

Despite many differences on why states engage in conflict, the authors above share one important characteristic – they explain conflict among great powers. Consequently, their theories cannot explain cases when small powers have challenged overwhelmingly superior opponents, as in the case of Georgian-Russian war. To better explain such scenario we will offer the theory of strategic bargaining. Our work is based on the work of the authors we provide below. After shortly reviewing their work we will offer our own variant of bargaining theory.

Bargaining Theory of conflict:

In his work, *The Causes of War*, Blainey suggests that war occurs not because of balance of power theory as commonly accepted but because of relative bargaining power. He claims that wars happen when sides cannot agree about their power and wars end when sides reach agreement on what their power is.³ So, as it is plain from the argument it is the power itself but the perception of power by leaders that actually shapes their actions, hence war or peace.

Although, Blainey's theory poorly explains Georgian-Russian conflict - in the named conflict, Russian superiority over Georgia was apparent but despite it the weaker side challenged the much stronger one - it nevertheless is an interesting first-cut for the case at hand. In his study, Blainey suggests that states use their power to bargain for specific goals, often independent from security considerations, such as for example political economic changes. Following this logic, it is plausible that Georgia had attacked South Ossetia not because it wanted to challenge Russia and reconquer South Ossetia, but because it was pursuing certain other goals in which Ossetia

1 Waltz, Kenneth (1979) *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House Gilpin, pp. 24

2 Waltz, Kenneth (1979) *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House Gilpin, pp. 25

3 Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed. New York: The Free Press, 1988. Chapter 8, pp.114

could be used as a bargaining chip. However, Blainey's theory sees the relative preponderance of power of the states as directly proportional to their achievement of bargaining outcomes. Thus, it cannot adequately explain why a weaker power would bargain aggressively with a stronger power taking into consideration that relative power would anyway decide the outcome.

Powell, in his *Shadow of Power*, explains how bargaining among statesmen occur. Bargaining is a continual process and it continues until the parties are satisfied or until at least one of the parties loses hope of reaching an agreeable outcome.⁴ According to this logic equilibrium strategies help understand how bargaining can lead to war as a function of the distribution of power. The probability of war is higher if a country is powerful but it receives little benefits in the system of states. It is also important to note that with full information, bargaining will never lead to war, according to this logic, when there is full information - that is states will never fight. In such circumstances if some states are dissatisfied, the satisfied ones will simply redistribute the due resources to the "unhappy" partners.

The states' equilibrium strategies make it possible to calculate the probability that bargaining breaks down in war as a function of the distribution of power between the two states. A weak country is more likely to accept any specific demand, but more will be demanded of it than would be demanded of a stronger state. The probability of war is a function of the disparity between the status quo distribution of benefits and the distribution of power: War is least likely when the existing distribution of benefits reflects the underlying distribution of power. Note that with complete information, bargaining never breaks down in war, and the states never fight in equilibrium--if one of the states is dissatisfied, the satisfied state offers the dissatisfied state control over an amount equivalent in value to its payoff to fighting.

Again, Powell gives conditions such as distribution of benefits relative to distribution of power and asymmetry of information as variables conducive to war. But Powell's prescription falls short of explaining Georgian-Russian conflict. In the named case distribution of benefits was proportional to the power of states, and there was no asymmetry of information on the relative strength of powers - Russia was overwhelmingly superior to Georgia. Yet, Georgia was the initiator of the war.

Schelling develops his tactical approach of bargaining.⁵ Here the logic of distribution works, where good bargains for some mean automatically bad bargains for others. Parties act on their expectation of other's actions. Since both parties expect certain behavior of each other they work out tactics of action. In cases of limited war, where issues of incomplete and asymmetric information are prevalent, tacit bargaining becomes important. Schelling examines some of the concepts and principles that seem to underlie tacit bargaining in situations such as those of limited war. According to Schelling, in such situations the conflicting parties will be able to reach a bargain if there is certain focal point, which has some intrinsic magnetism, enjoys prominence, uniqueness, simplicity, precedent, or some rationale that makes them qualitatively differentiable from the continuum of possible alternatives.⁶ Schelling calls such points focal points. So once, any one of the conflicting parties have reached such a point it would be a clear sign to stop the war and strike a bargain.

Schelling gives an example: if some troops have reached the river in their map, they will expect to be expected to make a stand. This is the spot they can reach without being expected to move further, while if they move further there is no place left where they would be expected to make a determined stand. So the advancing party can expect the other party to retreat to the river without having the advance interpreted as a demand for a larger scale war. There is certain stability at the river.

In Schelling's theory the focal points are the ones which indicate to conflicting parties where to stop the war and negotiate. But Schelling does not consider the possibility that certain parties might start war to occupy focal points and by doing so increase their bargaining position. That occupying focal points might be a calculated maneuver by certain parties to increase the costs of war for their opponents and consequently increase their bargaining advantage. Also, it might be the case that the party that occupies the focal point does not intend to hold to it, and will use it as part of the deal to achieve other political, economic, security or any other goals.

Schelling's understanding of focal points should be modified to better explain the Georgian-Russian War. In his terminology focal point is a position which is along the continuum of qualitatively undifferentiated positions. That is it is just one position among the similar ones. In our theory we suggest, that focal point is actually a position where conflicting parties stop war to negotiate the final deal. It is not a psychic phenomenon that determines the position that parties arrive at through, as Schelling puts it, tacit coordination of expectations. In some cases, it might be a well-calculated point that actor chooses to occupy to increase its bargaining advantage, no matter how weak this party is relative to the other party. Here, the occupying party aims to increase the costs of conflict for the other party and by doing so tilt the bargaining scale in its favor. Thus, one party in the conflict might purposefully occupy the focal point to increase its bargaining advantage by increasing the costs for an opposing party of continuing the conflict, and by doing so to bring the opposing party to the negotiating table.

In the following section I will outline the background of conflict between Russia and Georgia and show how the theory I propose could apply to explain the war Georgia started against the party whose forces almost

4 Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 20

5 Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960, pp. 21

6 *Ibid*, pp. 70

250 times outnumbered its own.

Reasons to why Georgia actively engaged in the war:

In 2006, Russia implemented economic sanctions against Georgia, punishing Georgian government for taking a pro-Western political direction to the detriment of Russia's interests. Russia implemented following sanctions:

1. Embargo on Georgian Agricultural Products
 - Georgia is an agriculture country that exports wine, orange, and water.
 - Wine is the second largest export product of Georgia
 2. Increase of Russian Gas Prices
 - Russia stopped supplying natural gas to Georgia in 2006 and increased the price of natural gas almost two-fold.
 - Increase of energy price caused chronic trade deficit.
- Diplomatic Sanction of Russia
1. Prohibition of remittances of Georgian labor in Russia
 - About 500,000 Georgian labors in Russia send 60-70 million dollars to Georgia per year.
 2. Russia banned Georgians to visit Russia without Russian visa
 - Only Georgia among CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries is required Russian visa.
 3. Russia does not acknowledge Georgian academic degrees.
 4. Deportation of Georgians from Russia
 - Several hundreds of Georgian were exiled by the government of Russia in 2006.

Russian sanctions had a detrimental impact on Georgia's economy. However, Georgian government did not change its pro-Western orientation and continued its aspirations to join NATO and other Western institutions. Moreover, because Russian sanctions had detrimental effect on Georgian economy, Georgian government continued to look for ways to have them removed.

We suggest that Georgia initiated the war against Russia to gain the bargaining leverage against Russia and force them to remove those sanctions. The question remains though – how would a country whose military force was 2500 times smaller than its opponents would make Russia agree to its demands?

The answer lies in Roki Tunnel separating Georgia from Russia. Russia and Georgia are separated from each other by Caucasus mountain chain, which is on average 6 kms high. The only route through which Russia and Georgia are connected is a Roki Tunnel (picture provided below). Georgians hoped to get to the tunnel as promptly as possible after starting the war to be able to control the tunnel, allowing them to stop advancing Russian artillery. By blocking the tunnel, Georgians would gain an important leverage because any advancement of Russian artillery would entail huge casualties for the Russian army, and its superiority in numbers would be neutralized by Georgian bombardment. Thus, if Russians found the advancement too costly they would be more likely to negotiate with Georgians.

Georgians attempted to occupy the focal point, Roki tunnel, to increase their bargaining leverage. As the costs of Russian intervention escalated they would be more likely to negotiate with Georgians. Their sanctions against Georgia had anyway proved ineffective, and to avoid the unnecessary death of their soldiers they would be more likely to negotiate.

But Georgian military forces never made it to the Roki Tunnel. They made a crucial miscalculation. According to New York Times, which based its report on Western Intelligence motorized rifle element was assigned to a garrison just outside South Ossetia, on Russian territory, with the aim of securing the north end of the tunnel, and it may have moved to secure the entire tunnel right before the start of the war. Several American officials confirm the intelligence. Thus, Russians might have already seized the tunnel when Georgians started the attack, and inhibited Georgia from taking over the focal point. It is possible that Georgian plan to attack Ossetia was leaked to Russian intelligence.

Conclusion

This paper tried to show that overwhelming differences in power capabilities can be poor predictors of who initiates and wins in a bargaining game in limited wars. In 2008, Georgia invaded South Ossetia, the region in which Russia had direct strategic interest. Russia is overwhelmingly superior to Georgia, and Georgians could not expect to win in a protracted military confrontation. However, Georgians had hoped that they could timely occupy the focal point, Roki tunnel, and increase its bargaining leverage over Russians. Had Georgians reached the tunnel first, they would make it too costly for Russians to continue with their assault.

They hoped to bring Russia to the negotiating table. Georgians knew well that Russians would not give up their hold on South Ossetia. And it would be suicidal for Georgians to demand that Russians do so. However, Georgians could demand other concessions from Russia, which Russia could afford to give to Georgians, without jeopardizing its vital interests. Georgians could have hoped to pressurize Russians into opening their markets for Georgia's produce and providing other minor concessions.

In larger terms, Georgian-Russian conflict can be an example of how despite huge disparities in power capabilities, the weaker side could initiate a conflict to achieve its goals. In the bargaining game, a weaker actor might be able to get hold of the focal point, and thus increase the costs for the opponent of pursuing their action. Thus, if such points exist, it might be in the interests of weaker actors to seize them, with an intention of negotiating a deal which would benefit it and at the same time not jeopardize the interests of the bigger power.

Thus, in a bargaining game between two opponents the first mover/weaker power can gain an advantage which will allow it to negotiate a better deal for itself, without jeopardizing the vital interests of the stronger opponent. Implications of this finding might be huge. Sometimes an aggression by a minor party is rational and even parreto-improving, given that vital interests of the major party are left intact.

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New Changes in the Caucasus: Essential Aspects of the Confrontation

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Abstract

The emergence of a new geopolitical configuration and realities in the region after the Second Karabakh War makes it necessary to review the foreign and domestic policies of the regional states. It is observed that the continuation of imperialist and expansionist interests, the management of states through conflicts and military force, providing aid in illegal ways, and the reference to non-democratic principles are ineffective. It also seems clear that it has become a serious problem for those states themselves. It weakens the long-standing hegemony and imperialist and expansionist policies of the traditional powers.

In such a situation, Turkey's foreign policy that is considered and conducted without spoiling the relations with the states, gives positive results. When Turkey fulfills its goals of becoming one of the most powerful states in the world, it is important for Azerbaijan to take a place with it, to strengthen military-political-economic cooperation, to ensure the national and military security of the state and to increase its regional influence.

The article analyzes the struggle for geopolitical-geo-economic interests that took place after the Second Karabakh War. The main focus is on the conflict between the West - NATO and Russia for the Caucasus as well as on the geopolitical advantage gained by Turkey. The paper explains the political nature of the alternative role played by the Caucasus-Azerbaijan in ensuring the energy security of the West during the Ukraine-Russia war.

Keywords:

Caucasus, Karabakh War, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, Geopolitical Struggle.

Introduction

Given that the Caucasus is located at the meeting point between the Middle East, Europe and Asia, and has a favorable geopolitical position, it can be characterized as a region of vital importance. Throughout history, hegemonic powers have viewed this region as a base to extend their sphere of influence in the neighboring territories. This strategy used by the Ottoman and Persian empires in ancient times is currently being used by Russia, Iran and the United States. The geopolitical importance of the Caucasus is also related to the presence of important energy resources. The importance of the region has increased after the intention of reducing and eliminating the dependence of the energy consuming states of the West on the energy resources of Russia and the Middle East. Tensions and conflicts between the local, regional and global powers, the existence of separatist regions, and organized crime are the source of instability in the Caucasus that affect the formation of the geopolitical status of the local and regional actors.

From the time of the Ottoman Empire until today, the Caucasus region has always been within Turkey's interests. Therefore, Turkey was one of the active parties in the historical competition and struggle for this region. During the Soviet Union, the Caucasian republics were not independent, and there were no direct political, economic or even cultural relations between Turkey and these republics. Since the collapse of the USSR, Turkey, like other great powers, began to formulate and implement its South Caucasus policy.

Changing Geopolitics After The Second Karabakh War Landscape: Turkey's Geopolitical Advantage

If we look at the views of the future geopolitical situation of the Caucasus, which reflect the interests of various states, we will see that if the United States wants to see the Caucasus as a single western-oriented federation or confederation, Russia opposes the interference of other countries in regional affairs, since it considers the region as its traditional sphere of influence. In addition, Russia is interested in the creation of a single zone consisting of three independent South Caucasian states rather than the United Caucasus. The European Union views the South Caucasus as a transit region for the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. Caspian oil and gas resources are considered as an alternative source of Russian fuel for Europe. Europe is interested in the weakening of Russia's position in the South Caucasus. In the perspective, the South Caucasus countries can become a source of raw materials for the European Union. Iran that is gaining strength in the region excludes the participation of non-regional powers in the processes taking place in the South Caucasus, that is, it considers the "3+3 model", which provides for the representation of only three independent countries - Turkey, Russia and Iran - in the single geostrategic region of the South Caucasus to be appropriate. This proposal was put forward by the leadership of Turkey and Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War. However, despite how attractive these concepts seem, due to some objective reasons (lack of cultural and religious compatibility among the peoples located here, differences in terms of political priority, political views, concepts of statehood, etc.) it seems impossible for them to be realized for the current period.¹

One of the important aspects for the non-realization of the concept is that it was put forward by Turkey that ensured its important advantage through its activities in the region, joint military exercises, moral and political support and open approval of Azerbaijan in the last Karabakh War and in the post-war period. It is understood that Turkey and Azerbaijan are more interested in this regard. This is the reason why other countries are not eager for it. Thus, the different behavior of Russia, Iran and the European countries towards the arrival of the Turkish troops in the region after the war, and the protest-oriented approvals cannot be considered accidental. Considering that Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia by using Turkish-made military equipment and modern weapons made Russia even more angry.² It is undeniable that this will lead to serious economic losses for Russia, considering that most of the military supplies of Armenia and many other countries consist of weapons owned by Russia. Given the fact that the war is the focus of the whole world's attention, there is no doubt that the demand for Russian weapons in the near future will change in favor of Turkish and Israeli weapons (After the Ukraine-Russia war, this process is accelerating even more. The trust and confidence of traditional buyers in Russian weapons is gradually disappearing). Russia promotes the increase of Turkey's global power and military power as well. This situation also plays an important role in the US and European countries accepting Turkey as an international power.

We also know very well that one of the important points that worries Russian political circles is Turkey's attempt to create a joint alliance of Turkic states and a joint army. Russia does not welcome Turkey's desire to implement this intent in a thoughtful way and with moderate steps and to achieve positive results. His declaration that this is impossible, based on his influence on the post-Soviet countries, is both a threat and an expression of

1 Salahov, Fizuli., Mammadov, Ruslan., Huseynov, R. Turkey's Expansion of Geopolitical Dominance in the South Caucasus: Russia's Attempts to Prevent // Republic Scientific-Practical Conference on "Azerbaijan in the Post-War Period: New Approaches and Perspectives in Army Building", Baku, 12-13 May, 2022, - p. 48-50

2 Huseynov, Ramid. "It is inevitable that Russia will come to terms with the new geopolitical reality" // [Electronic resource] URL: <https://editor.az/rusiyenin-yeni-geosiyasi-realliq-la-barismasi-qacilmazdir>.

concern. But it seems that the new world order, new geopolitical processes, changing values, and new challenges make the emergence of the new powers inevitable. The hegemony and imperialist and expansionist policies of the traditional powers that have been going on for years are gradually weakening.³

But we must not forget that Turkey's growing geopolitical power and strengthened positions are worrying not only Russia and Iran, but also the United States and other NATO countries allied with it. Contrary to what they want to see in their own thinking, they are irritated by the fact that Turkey is behaving like a new international power at the current stage and that it has emerged as the main actor in their solution by interfering in the international geopolitical processes. Although they went against it in many cases, in the end they agreed and made compromises.

There is no doubt that in 2021, US President Joe Biden's scandalous thoughts about the events of 1915 can be explained by the strengthening of Turkey's geopolitical positions and the irritation caused by its growing power in the West. It is possible to think that this behavior of Biden - trying to influence his ally through the Armenians, calling a false event "genocide" without clarifying the facts, serves this purpose.

But it would not be right to think that Turkey-US relations will change in a serious way just because of the word "genocide". Despite Biden's step, which spoiled the relations between the two countries and polluted the political atmosphere, the common interests of both sides, military-political relations, and their alliance within the framework of NATO indicated that this tension would soon be resolved.

It would not be right to hope that Turkey will reconsider its strategic course, cut ties with the United States, and look for new allies by moving away from NATO. Staying in the same military alliance allows Turkey to increase its military power and neutralize the effects of geopolitical forces against it. Even the United States does not wish to lose its ally like Turkey. It is understandable from this point of view that the recent Turkish-Russian rapprochement and military cooperation has greatly worried the United States.⁴

It seems that the USA is interested in the presence of Turkey in the fight against Russia and Iran in the Caucasus politics. The meetings of the leaders of the United States and Turkey at the NATO summit in 2021, and their endorsements reflecting the importance of strengthening mutual relations, demonstrated their need for each other. It's just that the United States does not want its ally to show itself as a new geopolitical power at the world level and to have the power to influence processes.⁵

Conclusion

As can be seen from the analysis carried out in the article, the Second Karabakh War as well as the war between Ukraine and Russia have a certain share in the change of the geopolitical landscape of the world. Especially in the Caucasus region, it is showing its influence in the positional war of geopolitical powers and the emergence of the new realities. In the post-war period, Turkey's struggle for geopolitical supremacy, attempts to unify Turkish states, and the desire to expand transport and communication lines over Azerbaijan are worrying other geopolitical powers. Russia-Turkey friendship, which appears on the surface, shows that interests are in conflict in reality. In addition, Russia does not wish for the Muslim state to advance further in NATO, which supports Turkey in the war of position against it. The European Union's policy of strengthening its geopolitical position in the region and maintaining its geo-economic interests by carrying out the mediation mission between Armenia and Azerbaijan is not accidental in this regard.

In other words, Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon reserves, which are of great importance in securing energy interests, including those used as an alternative to Russia, increase the influence of the West on the region. At the same time, it is not clear when the Ukrainian-Russian war will end.

But despite all this, the recent activity of Turkey in the international arena attracts the attention of analysts. Opinions are put forward that official Ankara has set new goals in foreign policy and is beginning to demonstrate sufficient activity to achieve them. At the same time, a number of circles that has an insincere attitude towards Turkey is trying to formulate theses without arguments that it cannot succeed. It seems that Ankara has literally managed to change the geopolitical cards in many regions and they can no longer approach it at the previous level.

In the post-war period, Turkey is taking serious steps to expand its geopolitical advantage in the region. The deepening and strengthening of Azerbaijan-Turkey relations and the restoration of relations between other regional states are already being observed. This situation undoubtedly weakens Russia's influence and chances to intensify the processes. In particular, the Ukrainian-Russian war plays its role here.

3 Huseynov, Ramid. "Turkey's strengthening in the South Caucasus worries Russia" // [Electronic resource] URL: <https://sherg.az/siyaset/159455>

4 Huseynov, Ramid. "The expression of genocide, which makes Armenians happy, will actually create serious problems for them" // [Electronic resource] URL: <https://editor.az/ramid-huseynov-ermenileri-sevindiren-soyqirim-ifadesi-eslinde-onlar-ucun-ciddi-problemler-yaradacaq>

5 Huseynov, Ramid. "In the background of such tensions and pressures, the visit of the Turkish leader to our country was very important" // [Electronic resource] URL: <https://demokrat.az/az/news/79796/politoloq-bele-bir-geosiyasi-gerginliyin-tezyiqlerin-fonunda-turkiye-liderinin-olkemize-seferi-olduqca-vacib-idi>

But we must not forget that the expansion of Turkey's geopolitical superiority will not lead to the withdrawal of Russia from the region in a short time. The fact that Russia has a sufficiently large military-political base in the regional states will not allow this. Therefore, Russia's attempts to resist and prevent Turkey and other geopolitical powers from gaining full advantage in the region will continue in the coming years.

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Military Aspects of The Second Karabakh War

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Abstract

The counter-offensive operation launched by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020 has been the largest military campaign in the South Caucasus region since the 1990s.

The factors that led to the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War – enshrined in the military history of Azerbaijan as a Patriotic War or “Operation Iron Fist” – have been clarified on the basis of retrospective analysis. The military-political processes that took place during the 44-day war have been studied, their characteristic features have been presented, and the contributions of “Operation Iron Fist” to world’s military art have been theoretically substantiated.

The paper examines the views and ideas of various military experts and researchers on the war. The Second Karabakh War has been presented as a sample of the new generation warfare. The author endeavored to substantiate the importance of the Second Karabakh War in the world’s military history by a variety of conclusive facts. Having considered the uniqueness of this war, a number of important lessons have been introduced in order to understand the nature of future wars.

Keywords:

Second Karabakh War, “Operation Iron Fist”, Patriotic War, 44-Day War, Victory, Defeat.

Introduction

The counter-offensive operation launched by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020 has been the largest military campaign in the South Caucasus region since the 1990s. The Second Karabakh War attracted the attention of many foreign researchers and experts, both in terms of the modernity of the technology used and the specificity of combat tactics. Even in some military institutions and organizations, various aspects of this war have been studied and it has been decided to teach the results in special military educational institutions. An extraordinary and secret meeting organized by NATO in Berlin to analyze the experience of the 44-day war, as well as the fact that high-ranking Pentagon officials attended the meeting online via secure Internet channels, proves this once again (Piriyev et al., 2021).

Austrian expert Gustav Gressel states that Europe must learn a military lesson from this war. The researcher claims that the armies of most European countries (except France and Germany) may find themselves in the miserable situation in which the Armenian army was mired. Paul Iddon states that it may take some years of retrospective analysis to conclusively determine that Azerbaijan may have been among the first to demonstrate how small nations can increasingly deploy such advanced weapons systems to compensate for their size and decisively prevail against equal or even more powerful opponents. Uzi Rubin notes that this war gave a brief idea of the future battlefields, which will be dominated by UAVs and electronic warfare systems. According to the researcher, in this war, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces paralyzed the traditional land forces of the enemy through air defence systems, ensuring the advance of their troops and the capture of strategic positions. Military expert Sergei Sovetkin noted that from the beginning of the war, the goal of the Azerbaijani Army was to limit the military capabilities of the Armenian armed forces by depriving them of weapons, equipment and other military resources. According to the expert, after the destruction of weapons and equipment, the effectiveness of the activities of personnel is already low. To achieve this goal, the Azerbaijani Army used strike UAVs, in particular, very skillfully. The main targets were tanks, missile defence systems, artillery, command posts, ammunition depots, weapons and equipment columns (Piriyev et al., 2021).

The primary objective of the operation was to dismantle the air defence systems of the Armenian Army because these systems played an important role in the detection and shooting of Azerbaijan's fighter jets and UAVs. However, as former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Matthew Bryza noted, "It was not easy to dismantle these systems by drone or missile."

Prior to the operation, the enemy had a strong and durable missile defence system. On the enemy's front line, the missile defence system consisted, in particular, of the modernized OSA and the latest Tor-M2k anti-aircraft missile systems. The enemy was fully convinced that the aircraft of the Azerbaijani Air Force (Attack Aviation, Fighters and Army Aviation) would be used in Soviet-era tactics, would operate at low altitudes and would be destroyed when entering the air defence-firing zone. If this tactic was applied, the aircraft would suffer heavy losses on the second day of the war. That is why one of the most important tasks was to invent new methods and tricks in activities against the enemy.

From this point of view, the Azerbaijani Army demonstrated a very high level of skill in that situation. It should be noted that the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan used a unique method in order to locate enemy's air defence systems and surprised the military experts worldwide. The 1947 former soviet AN-2 aircrafts used in agriculture were flown unmanned with special equipment in their cockpits and the enemy having discovered and considered them modern UAVs, immediately tried to hit them with air defence systems, thus revealing their position.

Dylan Malyasov notes that the Azerbaijani Armed Forces had more than 50 such AN-2 drones at Yevlakh Airport.¹ In addition, when the launch of enemy air defence units during air strikes and the use of UAVs was detected by passive reconnaissance, aircraft and UAVs were immediately removed from the enemy's destruction zones, while active radio interference was placed on the enemy by radioelectronic means. The location of the discovered enemy anti-aircraft guns was then determined and their destruction was planned (Iskandarov and Gawliczek, 2021).

As a result, Azerbaijani drones destroyed enemy's air defence systems on the spot. It should be noted that only in the first two weeks of the war, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan destroyed 60 anti-aircraft systems (mainly 9K33 OSA and 9K35 Strela) belonging to the Armenian army.

After that, the UAVs of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces began to fly more safely in the airspace of Karabakh and destroy the enemy's armored vehicles and artillery.

On the third day of the Second Karabakh War, the commander of the US Marine Corps, General David Berger, said that the strategy implemented in Karabakh was taken into account in various training scenarios a year ago. Commenting on the opinion of some researchers that "tanks are no longer needed", the general said: "The Marine Corps doesn't find tanks to be obsolete, but in 2019 it decided to stop investing in the heavy armor after a series of wargames concluded that they were at a strategic disadvantage against precision strikes like the one supposedly carried out in the fight for Karabakh". In fact, although not directly, General Berger acknowledged

¹ Iskandarov, Kh., Gawliczek, P. Characteristic Features of the Second Karabakh War // Journal of Scientific Papers «Social Development and Security», 2021. 11(3), p.33

that tanks had lost their importance, emphasizing their vulnerability to UAVs.

Along with the new technological capabilities, the military tactics applied by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan also attracted the attention of military experts and researchers due to their uniqueness. The attack of the Azerbaijani Army was based on detailed reconnaissance, artillery and UAV strikes. Although this tactic was similar to the tactics used by the Turkish Armed Forces in 2018 in the Syrian city of Afrin and Idlib province, it differed significantly in scale, form of relief and military potential of the enemy. Because the war in Karabakh was fought on a front of about 200 km, the relief was extremely complicated.

Land forces play an important role in capturing and consolidating the territory, which is considered a fundamental condition of war. In short, a place where a soldier's foot does not touch is not considered captured. The Second Karabakh War showed that against the background of the growing demand for anti-aircraft guns, other weapons (equipment) and highly trained troops play an exceptional role in destroying the enemy in modern wars.

The Second Karabakh War lasted two weeks longer than military experts estimated because foreign supporters covertly backed up Armenia with weapons and equipment and, therefore, the war lasted relatively long.

At this point, the analysis of the number of military equipment belonging to the Armenian armed forces is also important. The number of enemy equipment destroyed in the Second Karabakh War proved that the Republic of Armenia, with the support of foreign patrons, had become a serious security threat in the region, grossly violating the requirements of international conventions.

Having analyzed the uniqueness of the Second Karabakh War, the following very important lessons can be taken to understand the nature of future wars:

1. Destroying enemy's air defence and electronic warfare systems at the first stage of war is of utmost importance. As it was mentioned, an immediate destruction of enemy's air defence systems enabled secure flying of our aviation and functioning of reconnaissance, surveillance systems, unmanned reconnaissance & strike aircrafts² (Piriyev et al., 2022).

2. The traditional ground forces are in trouble without adequate sensors, electronic warfare cover and counter-drone weaponry. The Second Karabakh War proved the vulnerability of traditional ground forces (armored and mechanized) to advanced drone weapons. In total, during the 44-day war, about 1,500 enemy air defence and artillery systems, armored and other vehicles were destroyed where drone activity was of particular importance. Ben Ho, a researcher at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, notes that the experience of the Second Karabakh War suggests that Singapore's air defence forces must learn three important lessons: 1) an integrated missile defence system is very important; 2) The role of Radio Electronic Means should be emphasized; 3) The human factor is the main condition, and without this factor it is impossible to imagine the first two factors. The combined use of UAVs for detecting the targets and striking them, as well as the mass use of drones, are key elements in distinguishing this war (Piriyev et al., 2022).

3. In modern wars, integration of land-based fire-support and drones is very important. In many of the clashes, including the night battles of the Second Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani Army's artillery and missile systems operated in coordination with drones. As a result, we witnessed a growing trend of combining artillery fire with UAVs in modern wars. This use of UAVs is a key feature of modern warfare. At the same time, high-precision artillery weapons (Polonez, Gasirga, LORA and Spike) fully provided the firepower of the Azerbaijani Army in the war. The targets considered inadequate for drone strikes were destroyed by artillery fire due to their coordinates provided by the UAVs, thus integrating fire support with drone activities (Iskandarov and Gawliczek, 2021).

4. Intra-war deterrence gain importance. It should be taken into account that the Armenian side, overwhelmed by the successful counter-offensive operation of the Azerbaijani Army, targeted the densely populated cities and settlements of Azerbaijan, as well as the national infrastructure with ballistic missiles. This behavior, which is legally considered a war crime, necessitates the concept of "intra-war deterrence". The bombing of the city of Ganja by rocket and artillery strikes a day after the ceasefire agreement reached in Moscow on October 10, 2020 demonstrated the seriousness of the threat. According to Peter Tese, a US political scientist and professor at the University of Wisconsin, Armenia's move was tantamount to the 1939 bombing of Warsaw by Hitler's army. Professor warned the EU countries, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe and the US State Department about the direct effects and geopolitical consequences of the terrorist acts carried out by the leadership of Yerevan: "It is an even stronger reason for the liberation of every inch of the Armenian-occupied sovereign territories". Therefore, during the war, Azerbaijan's destruction of missile systems on the territory of Armenia by means of drones was, in fact, an element of the concept of "intra-war deterrence". The goal was to prevent the tension from escalating to the next level. In general, the Second Karabakh War showed that "intra-war deterrence" and strategic weapons systems related to this concept would dominate the battlefield in the coming years (Piriyev et al., 2022).

5. Drones play an important role in detecting and destroying small and medium-range missile defence systems. According to Vasily Kashin, a researcher at the Middle East Institute of the Russian National Academy of Sciences, Azerbaijan's spending on armaments was more logical and its planning was more careful. The funds had

2 Piriyev, H., Tahirov, R., İskəndərov, X. 44-günlük Vətən Müharibəsi. Hərbi-siyasi təhlil // Milli təhlükəsizlik və hərbi elmlər, 2021. No. 1. s. 7-14.

not been wasted, the latest military developments had been taken into account and the experience of the war in the Middle East had been studied. They had prepared for this war in an exemplary manner and this preparation covered not only the military aspects, but also the political, economic and propaganda issues. In fact, Armenia had been preparing for this war for decades. Along with the development of strong fortifications, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Armenia's imports of weapons, equipment and military supplies in 2014-2019 was 3.5 times higher than it was in 2009-2014. Ridvan Ucrosta, a Polish researcher who compared the UAVs of both sides, said: "Compared to the Harop, Orbiter-3, Orbiter-2, SkyStriker, Hermes-900, Thunder-B, Orbiter-2M, Aerostar, Hermes-450 and Heron-1 used by Azerbaijan on the battlefield, Armenian Krunk or Crane drones are three times less effective". The Bayraktar TB-2, which proved its effectiveness on the battlefield in Syria and Libya against the Russian-made short and medium-range Pantsir systems, was also successfully used by the Azerbaijani Army in the fight against Armenia's missile defence systems. Azerbaijan, which has considerably diversified with regard to its weaponry, used Israeli-made UAVs successfully. In terms of destroying enemy's weapons depots, the Harop – a loitering munition was at the forefront of these UAVs. In particular, these drones were successfully used in the destruction of S-300 missile systems. The Bayraktar TB-2, a product of the Turkish defence industry, had an undeniable role in deciding the fate of the war in favor of Azerbaijan. Thus, Azerbaijan, which was able to diversify its arms trade, reduced its dependence on the Russian arms industry, which has become a tradition in many former Soviet countries. German military expert Ulrike Franke said: "The Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the first war won by drones. Armenia used traditional artillery in the battle. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, made a breakthrough by using drones against them. Of course, Armenia did not expect this. Imagine you are assembling artillery and suddenly a drone appears above your head as you prepare to attack. One shot destroys all equipment and personnel" (Iskandarov and Gawliczek, 2021).

6. Despite the age of technology, traditional tactics and weapons have not lost their relevance. Although the technological superiority of the Azerbaijani Army and the successful use of drones played an indispensable role in the victory, the units used traditional tactics and weapons to clear the liberated lands. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated critical positions, took full control of the border with Iran and began to move towards the Lachin corridor, which is of special strategic importance. The Azerbaijani soldier, who skillfully used traditional tactics and weapons, was able to surprise the experts worldwide. Military expert Michael Kofman writes: "There was considerable lag between the degradation of Armenian forces and Azerbaijani territorial advances, but momentum quickly shifted two weeks into the conflict. Early on, Azerbaijan appeared unable to translate tactical success into significant gains, which explains in part the surprise (including my own) at how quickly they were able to put Armenian forces into a precarious and untenable position a few weeks into the war". In fact, Kofman's point was related to the fortifications built by the Armenian armed forces for nearly 30 years and the minefields in the occupied territories because a lot of energy and resources were spent on breaching these barriers. According to Alexander Iskandaryan, an Armenian political scientist, the successful attack of the Azerbaijani Army from the south had already determined the fate of the war.

7. Despite the drone age, military-geostrategic calculus still matters. Despite the fact that the South Caucasus occupies a very small place on the world map, the interest in it is much greater than the geographical size of the region. In this regard, it is very important that not only the parties to the conflict, but also a number of foreign powers should demonstrate a constructive position in resolving the conflicts in the region. While paying special attention to the professionalism of the Azerbaijani Army, President Ilham Aliyev also took very serious strategic steps to increase Azerbaijan's prestige in the international arena. Thus, President Ilham Aliyev, who neutralized the forces that Armenia expected direct support from in the Second Karabakh War, shortened the duration of the war by achieving the goals set at the outset. This proves the perfection of the military-political strategy in the war. Commenting on President Ilham Aliyev's statement that "Armenian soldiers have only two choices: either to leave Azerbaijani lands or they will definitely die", Sergei Sovetkin said: "In fact, it was a tactic. During Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi soldiers were exhausted by coalition forces and lost their ability to resist. In this regard, many units surrendered without a fight. The Armenian army suffered the same fate. In short, the Armenian army is the army of the twentieth century, while the Azerbaijani Army demonstrated the elements of the twenty-first century. From this point of view, the difference in tactics was obvious".

8. Due to the non-contact nature of wars, mass groupings of ground forces, equipment and weapons of the battlefield is no longer necessary (Piriyev et al., 2022). The Special Forces of Azerbaijan were able to engrave their names in the world's military history by carrying out operations that were considered impossible. Analyzing the images of the fighting spread on social media, Can Kasapoglu said that Azerbaijan had also learned from the tactics used by the US coalition against the Taliban in the mountains of Afghanistan since the end of 2001. In those operations, thousands of NATO troops were not present at the same time, typical of the wars of the twentieth century. Within Afghanistan and along the 3,300-kilometer border with Pakistan, US Special Forces were sent to the areas controlled by Taliban in small groups to carry out "find and destroy" missions. As soon as Armenia's line of defence was breached in the south-eastern part of Karabakh, Azerbaijani Special Forces seized the heights around towns and villages, cut off roads to cities and forced the enemy to flee. A political scientist from Kazakhstan Askhat Kasengali praised the exceptional role of Azerbaijani Special Forces in the Second Karabakh War: "The

role of Special Forces in the liberation of Karabakh should be emphasized. Special Forces had become a nightmare for the Armenian soldiers. Their high level of training and special tactics allowed them to repeatedly strike at enemy".³ Touching upon the training process of Special Forces, the political scientist said that, only four or five out of 100 people in Azerbaijan successfully complete the Special Forces course; Special Forces do not differ only in physical characteristics, but also in terms of knowing several languages (Iskandarov and Gawliczek, 2021).

Conclusion

Thus, in the 44-day war, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces liberated the vast majority of our occupied territories (5 cities, 4 settlements and 286 villages) with counter-offensive operations, as a result of which the defeated enemy army was forced to withdraw from other territories.

10 S-300s and their tactical-combat vehicles, 366 tanks, 352 different caliber cannons, 22 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, 5 Su-25 planes, 50 Tor, Osa, Kub, Krug anti-aircraft missile complexes, 97 Grad, 4 Smerch, 2 Hurricanes, 1 Tos firearm, 1 Yars, Tochka-U, ballistic missiles, Elbrus missile complexes belonging to the enemy were destroyed by the Azerbaijani Army. Armenia's combat capability has been completely destroyed by the destruction of radar stations and equipment, special combat headquarters and ammunition depots, which are important for special defence capabilities.

The number of enemy equipment destroyed in the Second Karabakh War proved that the Republic of Armenia, with the support of foreign patrons, had become a serious security threat in the region, grossly violating the requirements of international conventions. Thus, when distributing the existing quota of the USSR under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which came into force on November 9, 1992, Armenia was allowed to have 220 tanks, 220 armored combat vehicles, 285 artillery pieces, 100 fighter jets and 50 attack helicopters. However, the Republic of Armenia not only violated this quota, but also even during Pashinyan's rule did not hesitate to demonstrate it. The 44-day Patriotic War, enshrined in golden letters in our military history, demonstrated the will of the political leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the military strength of the Armed Forces in the international arena. Operation Iron Fist, which is remembered for its many specific features, will be the subject of many research in the foreseeable future and even in the long run, attracting the attention of researchers and experts in security and military sciences.

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³ Iskandarov, Kh., Gawliczek, P. The Second Karabakh War as a War of New Generation // Journal of Scientific Papers «Social Development and Security», 2021. Volume 11, No. 2, – p. 93.

Post-War Achievements of Azerbaijan's Diplomacy

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Abstract

Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War created a new geopolitical reality in the South Caucasus and the Caspian region. The victory also clearly showed that the "old" view of the region is no longer valid [11, p. 4]. After that war, the possibilities of external influence on the region increased and the activity of some old alliances was disrupted. The rules of the game have also been updated. The destructive consequences of the long-term military confrontation are evolving to be replaced by the constructive nature and benefits of transport and communication diversification. If it is possible to say so, the geopolitical security environment of the South Caucasus is being renewed and the tectonic shift of regional-level military-political games towards wider spaces is taking place. In the near future, the South Caucasus is likely to become an important space where geostrategic games for Eurasia, multilateral combination and diplomacy, military-political expansion, and various strategies and tactics will be concentrated.

Azerbaijan, as the architect of the new geopolitical change, is preparing important recipes for the transformation of the geography and nature of regional games. Military promotion and diplomatic activity support the more effective and prompt provision of our country's national interests, adaptation of opposing behaviors to our national interests, and reconciliation with our positions and views. It is possible to reconcile the priorities of our new foreign policy strategy, which is based on "maximum profit, minimum risk", aimed at designing a favorable future, with the following trends:

1. Shifting from geopolitical balance to multipolarity;
2. The leader of the region and the gateway to "Heartland";
3. Neutralization of possible competitors;
4. Turning the peacemaker into a military ally and continuing the military reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh;
5. The export (expansion) of Turkish identity and the Eastern locomotive of Atlanticism;
6. The South Caucasus trap of the "Ukrainian swamp".

Keywords:

Patriotic War, Heartland, Reintegration, Turkish Identity, Military Ally.

Introduction

1. Shifting from geopolitical balance to multipolarity. US National Defence University expert J. Mankoff evaluates the post-war period of the South Caucasus as follows: “Local conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh trigger global problems” [12]. According to the British Laurence Broers, “The show of force in the South Caucasus is seen as a symptom of a global shift towards a more multipolar order” [6]. There is no doubt that transregional forces have appeared in the South Caucasus along with traditional players during the year since the Patriotic War. Israel, Great Britain, and the European Union can be mentioned among them. However, traditional regional players should not be forgotten. Traditional players - Russia, Turkey and Iran approach the new geopolitical conditions from different positions. While Russia and Turkey closed the victory of the Patriotic War with their future ambitious plans, it can be said that the pressure against Iran has increased even more. If it is possible to say so, the results of the military conflicts that took place in Central Asia, the Middle East and the South Caucasus in the last few years have seriously weakened the political positions of official Tehran in those neighboring regions. According to the military and political results of the 44-day war, the establishment of a Russian-Turkish condominium in the South Caucasus, and the heavy defeat of Armenia, put official Tehran in a desperate situation and left it practically without allies.

The exclusion of the USA and France from the process of influencing the course and resolution of that war cannot mean that the position of the West in the region as a whole is weakened. The West does not reconcile with such a development of events and does not plan to leave the region [7, p.35]. On the contrary, it is looking for ways to restore the positions lost in the 44-day war. If France tries to recover its geopolitical loss at the hands of the European Union, the United States approaches it from a broader perspective. It seeks to curb the expansion of Russia, China, and Iran, which are interested in countering the establishment of American control in the South Caucasus region and Central Asia by creating “controlled chaos” on Russia’s southern borders. The increase in the role of Israel and Great Britain in the region indirectly serves the fulfillment of the instructions of the United States and the convergence of Turkey with the Turkish ethno-area of Central Asia (the idea of Turanism). Azerbaijan’s diplomacy is turning the South Caucasus into a field of geopolitical pluralism by taking it out of the local war zone and Russia’s unipolar management system.

2. The leader of the region and the gateway to “Heartland”. Azerbaijan is the largest country in the region. This status is due to its size of territory and population, rich natural resources, strong military and its ability to conduct state-of-the-art warfare (as witnessed by the world in the 44-day war), which is carefully studied in most military headquarters around the world.

Azerbaijan is a country among the countries of the South Caucasus that has freed its land from occupation and does not have a foreign military base in its territory, and has a stable and independent foreign policy. Azerbaijan is considered one of the suppliers of the European energy industry. It is predicted that Azerbaijan’s role in Europe’s energy security will increase against the background of deepening conflicts between Russia and the old continent, especially the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Zbigniew Brzezinski rightly noted that Azerbaijan’s independence is a claw opening to the West for Central Asia. The strengthening of our country ensures access to the world market of the rich oil and gas resources of Central Asia without the control of Russia. On the other hand, the launch of the Zangezur corridor will create a foundation for the strengthening of Turkish identity in the political, military, economic and cultural-humanitarian fields. In such a case, the possibility of opening Azerbaijan as a springboard from the Caspian-Central Asia region to Heartland expands and opens an unobstructed path for the advancement of Turanism to the East.

American researcher Luke Coffey also values that “due to economic, cultural, commercial, historical and transit reasons, despite the fact that Azerbaijan is not a Central Asian country, it is a gateway to the region for the transatlantic union. Azerbaijan also maintains close relations with many Central Asian republics, especially with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan that can be very important in meeting Europe’s energy needs” [11, p.4].

Among our neighbors, Armenia is a defeated, unstable and deprived country of independent politics. This country, which is an outpost of Russia, offers the same service to the West after the 44-day war.

Georgia, on the other hand, suffers from ethno-regional separatism, and the fact that it has serious disagreements with Russia does not allow for its safe development, and it is trying to neutralize Moscow’s pressure by deepening the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Although it has made a bet on the West, the question of its membership in NATO remains uncertain.

3. Neutralization of possible competitors. The brilliant victory in the Patriotic War gave a serious impetus to the settlement of some problems that have not been resolved for a long time, and created a reliable basis for the creation of an environment of trust in the Caspian-Black Sea region. If it is possible to say so, Azerbaijani diplomacy is spending the glorious victory won by our Armed Forces in the 44-day war for regional development and cooperative security issues. So, approximately two months after the end of the Patriotic War, on January 21, 2021, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of Turkmenistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the joint exploration, development and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the “Dostluq” field in the Caspian Sea in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan [3].

The noted "Dostluq" deposit has quite large energy resources. According to preliminary estimates, there are approximately 60 million tons of oil and 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves in the field. The importance of the mentioned document for our countries can be evaluated as follows:

- Transportation of the energy products to be produced from the "Dostluq" field to the world markets via transit through Azerbaijan (the Trans Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which currently forms the Azerbaijan Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and the Trans Adriatic Gas Pipeline, which was put into operation in early 2021 (supplies natural gas to Turkish and European markets through TAP). Taking all this into account, in the near future the transportation of Turkmenistan's gas and oil to Europe through international oil and gas pipelines will be realized.

- Turkmenistan that has been exporting its energy resources through Russia, Iran and China until now, will get such an alternative and economically profitable export route;

- Along with Turkmenistan, other Central Asian states, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, are very important for the diversification of their energy exports;

- Azerbaijan should further strengthen its geopolitical position by increasing its importance as a transport-transit country and bring the implementation of the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline back to the agenda in order to ensure access to the European market of the energy resources of Central Asia.

The mentioned document promises great prospects for the future development not only of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, but of the region in general.

One of the important events that led to the creation of an environment of trust in the region is the replacement of the tensions that arose in our relations with Iran after the Patriotic War with constructive cooperation. It is known that during and after the 44-day Patriotic War, the unpleasant relationship between the two countries caused tension. It should be noted that businessmen and drivers who are citizens of Iran have been operating illegally in the territory of Azerbaijan and illegally used the Gafan-Gorus highway. In response to Azerbaijan's serious measures against that illegality, official Tehran threatened our country with military exercises held in the border areas. The meeting of the presidents of Azerbaijan and Iran within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization Summit in Ashgabat on November 28 last year removed the coldness in relations. At that meeting, a tripartite agreement on gas exchange between Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan was signed. According to the agreement, up to 1.5-2 billion cubic meters of gas will be sent from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan via Iran. In this way, the natural gas needs of 5 provinces of Iran will be met [2]. This agreement can stimulate the development of energy cooperation between the two countries. At the same time, issues of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Iran within the framework of the "North-South" transport corridor and the Zangezur corridor were also discussed. As a result of the realization of the Zangezur Corridor, Iran will also benefit from it and the possibilities of using this transport hub have been highlighted.

Following this, the Iranian Gulf - Black Sea transport corridor, which connects Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia and access to the West through the Black Sea, and the corridor from Eastern Zangezur to Nakhchivan, which will be opened through Iran in December, will not only lead to the development of mutual relations between our countries, but also Armenia's new transport and communication resulted in his games being offside. The new segments of the North-South transport corridor became rich precisely without the participation of Armenia. The development of events in this direction strengthens Armenia's transport and communication dependence on Azerbaijan, even in the current conditions. Iran's recent transition from aggressive rhetoric to constructive cooperation with Azerbaijan should be an example for Armenia.

4. Turning the peacemaker into a military ally and continuing the military reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh. Another logical course of Azerbaijani diplomacy was to turn Russia from a peacekeeping force into a military ally. Although there are documents of various levels and directions in the military field between our countries, no official opinions have been expressed about the military alliance. The occurrence of such a level of cooperation after the victory in the Patriotic War is connected with some goals. First, by signing a document of military alliance with Russia, Azerbaijan undermined Moscow's official military alliance with Armenia. Russia will no longer be able to unilaterally support Armenia against the interests of Azerbaijan, and this means the disintegration of the Moscow-Yerevan alliance against our country.

Secondly, that document will not allow all disruptive activities of Armenia against our country, especially separatism, either in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which remained under the control of Russian peacekeepers, or in Russia itself.

Thirdly, that document gives Azerbaijan a serious basis for the reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh. On the one hand, this makes it possible to remove illegal armed Armenian units from our lands from the territories under the control of Russian peacekeepers, and on the other hand, to prevent Russian peacekeepers from patronizing Armenian provocations. An example of this can be the incident that happened around the Farrukh Height. Thus, in the statements of the Ministry of Defence of Russia regarding that incident, the violation of the ceasefire by Azerbaijan and the use of the phrase Nagorno-Karabakh put official Moscow in front of the facts. The Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan considered this statement of the Ministry of Defence of Russia to be "contrary" to the essence of our bilateral relations and the Declaration on mutual cooperation of the alliance signed in February of this year, and in the 18th paragraph of that Declaration, Russia and Azerbaijan "joined their efforts in the fight

against separatist threats and their neutralization” [1]. In addition, the Ministry of Defence, which stated that Azerbaijan is committed to the tripartite statement of November 10, 2020 and has not violated any of its provisions, stated that according to paragraph 4 of that statement, the remnants of the Armenian army and illegal Armenian armed groups “have not yet been fully removed from the territory of Azerbaijan”, thus demonstrating his displeasure.

Fourth, it can also make a positive contribution to ensuring the safety of the Azerbaijani diaspora living in Russia.

By turning Russia from a peacekeeping force into a military ally, Azerbaijan can succeed in blocking its activities with Armenia and Iran against our country, sharing power in the region with Turkey, a member of NATO, and depending on the international atmosphere, it can prepare the ground for ending Moscow’s peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh on time.

5. The export (expansion) of Turkish identity and the Eastern locomotive of Atlanticism. The glorious victory of Azerbaijan in the Patriotic War will give impetus to the unity, rise and development of the entire Turkic world. The Zangezur Corridor has become a geopolitical and spiritual destruction that will bind the Turkish world together with tight wires. It was after that victory that the enemies of the Turkic world began to declare that the “Turanian army” would be formed and expressions such as pan-Turkism would be revived.

Even the achieved historical advantage was recognized in the decision to present the Supreme Order of the Turkic World to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the VIII Summit Meeting of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States held in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, as “an important contributor to Turkish unity and a way to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region” that was evaluated as an opening historical victory [4].

That victory made Azerbaijan a strong leading country of the South Caucasus, Turkish states of Central Asia to Europe, and Turkey to direct access to those states.

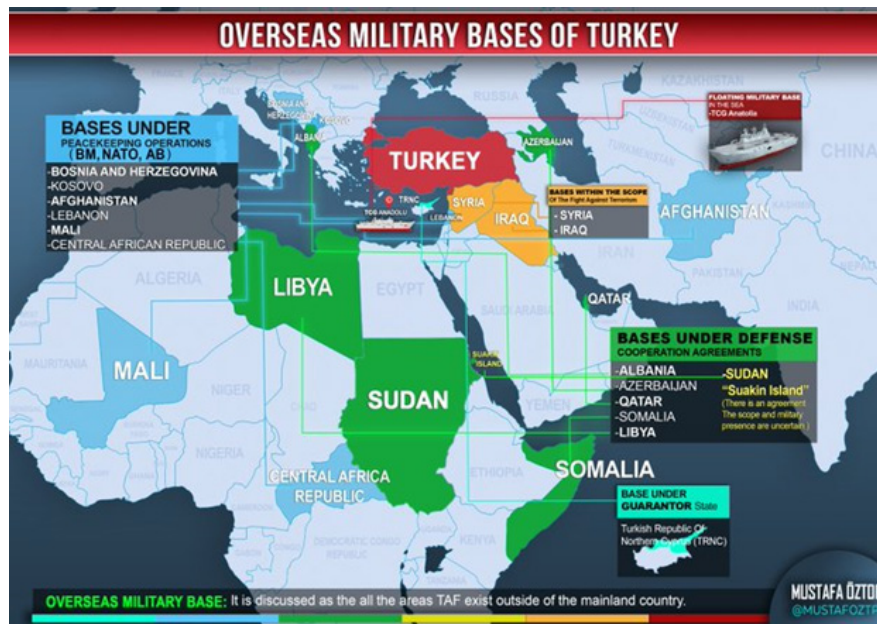
Undoubtedly, that victory increased Turkey’s geostrategic opportunities in Eurasia. This gave a green light to the brotherly country’s desire to unite the Turkic world and turn it into an independent pole of power. Azerbaijan and Turkey are considered to be the main inspirers and movers of the integrative and expansive spirit of Turkish identity.

Turkey’s geopolitical strategy and foreign policy doctrine are based on three pillars (new Ottomanism, panislamism and panturanism) [10]. The idea of new Ottomanism tries to revive the “great Turkey” by modernizing the classical civilizational model of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey is an integral part of the Islamic world and the Middle East region, where many Muslim countries exist. After the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, Turkey began to implement a course of establishing close relations with the Islamic world. Activity in the Near and Middle East increased. In order to protect the interests of the Islamic world, he did not even hesitate to sacrifice close cooperation with Israel. The transformation that took place in the Arab world under the name of “Arab Spring” increased Turkey’s chance to strengthen its regional influence and become a model of democracy for the new Arab countries.

Turanism, which is the next vector, aims to bring together “the Turkic world from the sea to the sea”, “from the Urals to the Adriatic”. Such a geopolitical course of Turkey in the future serves to unite all Turkic peoples of South Caucasus, Central Asia, Volga, Siberia, Crimea, and North Caucasus around the Turkish identity. Ankara is already taking specific steps in this direction. Turkey’s military power is growing and its geopolitical influence is expanding accordingly. Today, Turkey has armed forces in more than ten countries of three continents, including Europe, Asia and Africa [8, p.105]. Fig. 1 (see below).

Azerbaijan’s glorious victory with Turkey’s serious political support in the Patriotic War was also measured by the strengthening of the Turkic world. To implement this project, Ankara is primarily working on the formation of Turkish identity in these countries with the help of “soft power” geopolitics. Turkey’s soft power in Central Asia is primarily based on the development of cultural, humanitarian and economic relations through education institutions, business structures and international organizations (Turkish Council and TURKSOY). In addition to mainly humanitarian programs, Turkey still invests in providing economic and, more recently, important (which brings it into competition with Russia) military-technical assistance. For example, Turkey provides grants to students from Central Asia, offers military equipment to the countries of the region, and conducts free training for military personnel and law enforcement officers. To date, up to 40 projects and programs have been developed within the Turkish Council with the participation of Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. By 2026-2028, it is planned to form a common market for goods, investment, labor and services [10].



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The United States, Great Britain and even Israel, who are well aware of the ethnolinguistic influence of Turanism in Eurasia, especially in the areas near Heartland, are trying to take advantage of it for their own interests. These states are currently concerned about controlling geostrategic communications, fighting China’s transcontinental initiatives trying to establish “soft” control over Eurasia, including the implementation of the “One Belt, One Road” project. On the other hand, considering the threat of Turanism to Russia and Iran, the above-mentioned states silently welcome Turkey’s military-political expansion from the Adriatic to the Urals and try to use the factor for their future plans [5]. Such an opinion of Zbigniew Brzezinski is appropriate here: “Great Turan” can be built only at the expense of Russia, on the ruins of Russia.” Turkey’s advance towards Central Asia and its attempt to achieve this through “soft power” make it the locomotive of Atlanticism’s expansion to the East.

Luke Coffey considers it important for the United States to take advantage of Azerbaijan’s growing influence in South Caucasus-Caspian-Central Asia in order to protect its interests in Eurasia. His recommendation shows that for the successful interaction of the United States with Central Asia, Azerbaijan needs economic, cultural, commercial, historical and transit reasons. This is a multilateral format for establishing deep connections and that format should be converted to C5+2 [11, p. 5-6]. In my opinion, in order for that format to be more successful, it would be more appropriate to transform that format into C5+3, based on the historical, religious, ethnic and linguistic identities of Turkey with Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries, in the economic, energy and transport-communication fields. It can be done.

6. The South Caucasus trap of the “Ukrainian swamp”. The Russia-Ukraine war is part of the ongoing conflict between Russia and the West. The West wants to exhaust Russia by plunging it into a new “swamp”, and official Moscow is trying to block NATO’s entry into the CIS space by all means, especially through military force. The West is deliberately implementing its plans against Russia. In May 2019, the Rand Corporation, a “think tank” of the US military-industrial complex, announced that it was working on six options for this:

- Arming of Ukraine;
- Strengthening support for jihadists in Syria;
- Regime change in Belarus;
- Maintaining tension in the South Caucasus;
- The decline of Russia’s influence in Central Asia;
- Competition with Russia’s participation in Transnistria [9].

It is known that four of these six options - supporting the jihadists in Syria, attempting to change the government in Belarus, intensifying the situation in the South Caucasus with the help of N. Pashinyan, and the 44-day war and unrest in Kazakhstan took place. Currently, the fifth option - Russia-Ukraine war is being implemented. The last option is planned to be tested in Moldova.

The West managed to increase its pressure on Russia by making the Russia-Ukraine war a reality, but also managed to put it in a quagmire similar to Afghanistan or Vietnam. As a result of the war continuing for more than a month, the increase in the number of Russian losses and the ability to achieve the main goals set for it gives reason to say that the events are going according to the plans of the West. As a result of the prolongation of the military operations, Russia felt that its military potential was exhausted and withdrew part of its peacekeeping

forces from the South Caucasus region and sent them to the Ukrainian front.

It is impossible to deny the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the South Caucasus. Although the countries of the region, with the exception of Georgia, do not join the international financial sanctions against Russia, they are using this opportunity to realize their own interests. Georgia applied to join the European Union, expressed hope that its membership in NATO would be accelerated, and joined the international financial sanctions against Russia from April 1. Armenia hopes more for the intensification of relations with the European Union.

Azerbaijan is pursuing a successful policy in the direction of continuing the reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh, ending the demarcation, signing a peace agreement with Armenia and increasing the role of Turkey in these activities. Unlike its neighbors, Azerbaijan does not try to increase relations with either NATO or the European Union in order not to irritate Russia, and even did not participate in the voting phase of the resolutions adopted in the UN General Assembly against Russia. The official Baku is trying to use the decrease in the number of Russian peacekeepers for its own provocative purposes and thus to damage the mediation of the official Moscow and thereby increase the role of the European Union in the conditions of post-conflict reconstruction, by neutralizing the armed factions of Armenia in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, to prevent the situation from getting out of control and internationalization. This step of Azerbaijan serves to liberate Nagorno-Karabakh from illegal Armenian armed groups, prevent the violation of the peace of November 10, fulfill the 18th paragraph of the "Declaration on Mutual Cooperation of the Alliance" signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, and also prevent the post-conflict situation from developing into a Russian-western conflict.

Conclusion

Azerbaijani diplomacy is trying to direct the results of de-occupation to the creation of an environment of regional cooperation. For this purpose, he is trying to restore and diversify the communications that were destroyed during the occupation, to turn the region into a transport and communication center of Eurasia, and to resolve all problematic issues through dialogue and a zero policy formula. Armenian revanchists and despite the destructive activities and biased policies of some countries that were in the camp of the losers in the war, Azerbaijan insists on using all means of force to strengthen regional peace.

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Changing NATO Priorities and New Security: Analysis of Strategic Concepts 1949-2022

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Abstract

NATO, which was structured as a defence organization in 1949, followed a realistic security policy focused on the military threats of the Cold War era and the Soviet Union. However, near the end of the Cold War, the classical perception of security began to be questioned and the importance of critical approaches began to increase. The most basic features of critical approaches are that they place individuals and societies other than the state at the center of security, and they assume that these different actors may have their own perceptions of security and threats. The present article reveals to what extent NATO's changing security approaches and priorities have been affected by the theoretical environment in which it developed, and what its reflection is in NATO's political and military policies. For this purpose, the study is designed as a comparative qualitative analysis based on NATO's Strategic Concepts, official documents and secondary sources published between 1949-2022. According to the analysis, especially in NATO's strategic concepts published after 1990, areas such as climate change, human security, protection of basic rights and freedom, stabilization in post-conflict regions and reconstruction of state mechanisms draw attention alongside classical military threats. However, the Russian Federation's attempt to invade Ukraine in 2021 affects NATO as well as other international actors. In the historical process, as seen in the strategy documents, although NATO has built a comprehensive perception in terms of security, it is seen that the most striking security problems that directly actuate the organization are still military threats. Based on the negative experience gained in the case of Ukraine, the most effective measures that can be taken against these threats are the expansion and strengthening of the collective security mechanism and the support of countries open to external threats, such as Georgia.

Keywords:

NATO, Strategic Concept, Georgia, New Security, Ukraine.

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the consequence of the idea based on establishing a collective security umbrella against the military threats that could be directed by the Soviet Union, under the influence of the realist security approaches of the Cold War era. This function that continued for nearly 40 years, started to be questioned with the end of the Cold War and its existence became controversial. However, in the 1990s, increasing ethnic conflicts and civil wars provided an important basis for those arguing that the alliance did not yet complete its mission. In this period, NATO began to be evaluated as an alliance that should continue to exist in order to protect the common Western values such as democracy, freedom and human rights shared by the member countries beyond defending a geographical region. It started to develop relations with former Warsaw Pact member countries in 1991, and redefined itself as an important actor in the crisis management process in the prevention of conflicts and genocides in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995.¹

NATO intervened with aerial bombardments in Kosovo, where the United Nations Security Council remained indifferent due to its structural problems, and set a controversial example of the legitimacy of the use of military force in ensuring human security. With the 2001 Terrorist Attacks, Article 5 was put into effect and the US intervention in Afghanistan was supported. NATO, which took over the command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the following process, contributed greatly to the state-building activities conducted to gain public support and establish a stable country, as well as the kinetic operations carried out against the Taliban in Afghanistan.²

Currently, although military security is still considered as an important topic, issues such as development, poverty, natural disasters, migration, global warming, and sustainable energy sources are evaluated within the scope of security studies.³ In line with these evaluations, NATO is keeping up with the conjuncture as a security initiative with a crisis management function.

It is important to critically examine the activities carried out by NATO in areas such as the prevention of irregular migration, security and stability operations in post-conflict regions, natural disaster management, environmental security and energy sustainability, which are the main examples of these efforts to keep up.

While NATO has increasingly emphasized areas such as cyber-attacks, energy security, environmental security and human security, which are outside of traditional security threats, especially in the post-2010 period, the war that broke out with Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2022 has strikingly reminded the function of the structure in its first establishment. It is possible to see this situation in the Strategic Concept published in 2022. Although a significant emphasis is placed on the political agenda and policy documents, it is seen that new threats against military security can be pushed directly into the background.

This study examines how new security threats have taken place in NATO's agenda from 1949 until 2022, when the last Strategic Concept was published, and how NATO has followed these different discourses and theoretical approaches in the field of security. In this sense, it is a period-based comparative analysis. Strategic concepts, guidance documents, statements of key leaders were chosen as the most important sources of analysis. Security perceptions and threats of the periods when the strategic concepts were published were evaluated through secondary sources and used in the comparative analysis of NATO documents. As a result, by emphasizing the fluidity in security concept and threat perceptions, it is seen that military security is still considered as an important problem along with the non-negligible features of new security threats. Based on the experience of the Ukraine War, it is emphasized that security measures, which can be taken only with collective endeavours, are needed more than before not only for traditional threats but also for new ones.⁴

New Approaches to Security in NATO's Official Discourse

The most basic documents that reflect the security perception and perspective of NATO as a collective structure are strategic concepts and other official texts prepared based on these concepts. NATO's first strategic concept was DC 6/1, approved by the North Atlantic Council on January 6, 1950.⁵ According to this document, which aims to protect values such as democracy, individual freedoms, and the rule of law, the two most important functions for the organization were the prevention of war and the effective use of military and industrial power within the understanding of common defence in case of war.⁶

Ensuring the peace and security of the North Atlantic countries with minimum economic resources, man-

1 Gülnur Aybet, "NATO Conditionality in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 5 (2010): 20-34.

2 Astri Suhrke, "A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no.2 (2008): 214-236.

3 Michael Rühle, "NATO and energy security: from Philosophy to Implementation," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10, no. 4 (2012): 388-395.

4 Jamie Shea, "NATO: the Challenges Ahead," *Global Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2015), 121-128.

5 Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area, 1 December 1949.

6 Erhat Güvenç, "NATO'nun Evrimi ve Türkiye'nin Transatlantik Güvenliği Katkıları", *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 12, no. 45 (Bahar 2015): 101-119.

power and materials was one of the main priorities outlined in the document. The document that reflects a completely realistic approach and traditional security understanding included physical conditions such as ensuring security, strategic bombardment, control of sea and airspaces, and keeping communication systems operational. In this context, issues such as joint training and exercises, intelligence sharing, standardization of maintenance and logistics services were emphasized.

The second strategic concept is the document approved in December 1952 that was created by the articulation of the experiences gained during the Korean War and the adaptations made with the participation of Turkey and Greece in the organization.⁷ While traditional security approaches and military security were prioritized in this document, nuclear deterrence was emphasized, and it was stated that the organization should be prepared for the defence of air, land, and sea areas. The period between 1950 and 1952 was the period in which NATO was not only a treaty and partnership, but also a military unit under a common command in a practical sense. NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) were established during this period and its first commander became General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The third strategic concept, dated May 1957, had a similar characteristic to the previous ones, but included more consideration of nuclear weapons and a possible nuclear war situation. While it was emphasized that the increase in the level of influence of nuclear weapons and their use through different means increased the danger, and it was also stated that the Soviet Union might turn to covert and open limited conflicts and wars, and that it might try to dominate the countries outside the NATO responsibility area.⁸ These issues are compatible with the security perceptions of the period. This mentality also bears the characteristics of the USA's Domino Theory and Containment Policies. In the course of action that was shaped as a massive response strategy in the face of possible Soviet attacks, it was planned to use all means and capabilities, including nuclear weapons, to prevent and eliminate the said aggression.⁹ Again in the same document, the satellite communication capability and capability of the Soviet Union with Sputnik and the possibility of using it for nuclear purposes were also included as a threat.

The fourth strategic concept, adopted in January 1968, envisaged a gradual response strategy in the face of possible Soviet attacks, based on the nature of the offensive.¹⁰ According to this strategy, called Flexible Response, there was a three-stage response planning: direct defence, controlled escalation, and general nuclear response. It is striking that the strict attitude towards responding with all kinds of means in the previous strategic concepts softened with the effect of the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹¹ Another important difference was that in this concept, not only the Soviet Union but also the Warsaw Pact was described as a threat with a comprehensive perception of aggression. This softening was not welcomed by all members at the same level and led France, which had developed its own nuclear capacity, to leave the military wing of the alliance in 1966.

According to the Strategic Concept, which was renewed in 1991 after the end of the Cold War, issues such as pluralist democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and free market economy began to be shared and adopted by former Warsaw Pact members.¹² The ideological enmity that divided Europe as well as the danger of a large-scale war disappeared. However, different threats and reference objects in terms of theoretical approaches changed security perception; NATO's perception of threat and security began to reshape in this direction addressing instabilities, ethnic tensions and conflicts arising from economic, social and political difficulties defined as new risk and threat areas.

This new threat perception caused the organization to seek closer cooperation with the Warsaw Pact countries and even the Russian Federation. The establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in order to improve cooperation with non-NATO countries, the Partnership for Peace program, the NATO-Russia Permanent Partnership Council and the NATO-Ukraine Commission can be evaluated in this direction. With this new strategic concept, a strategic approach in which the armed force was shaped as a conflict/crisis management tool or a peacebuilding actor began to be adopted.

The new strategic concept prepared in 1999 reveals a broader security approach than the previous one. The security threats of this concept include terrorism, ethnic conflict, human rights, political instability, economic fragility, religious and ethnic conflicts, organized crime, nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.¹³ Measures to be taken against these threats are listed under the headings of effective crisis management, taking joint initiatives and strengthening partnerships, collective defence and promoting peace. Within this new concept, there seems to be an increasing emphasis on areas other than traditional threats. For this reason, crisis management in terms of

7 Strategic Guidance, 9 December 1952.

8 A Report by the Military Committee on Measures to Implement the Strategic Concept, 23 May 1957.

9 Fulya Aksu Ereker, "NATO'nun Güvenlik Anlayışı ve Stratejik Konseptleri", Güvenlik Yazıları Serisi, no.23 (Ekim 2019).

10 Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Area, 16 January 1968.

11 Saadet Değer, "The Economic Costs and Benefits of US-Turkish Military Relations," Jane M. O. Sharp (der.), Europe after an American Withdrawal: Economic and Military Issues, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990): 243-273.

12 The Alliance's New Strategic Concept Agreed by the Heads of State and Government (1991), 07-08 November 1991, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

13 The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999) Approved by the Heads of State and Government (1999), 24 April 1999, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm

military strategy, developing partnership and cooperation and enabling a dialogue environment attract attention as a different approach. 14

The change in global security approaches with the September 11 attacks was also reflected in NATO. With the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11 and NATO's direct involvement in the activities carried out in these areas, the 2008 Russia-Georgia war revealed the need for a new strategic concept.¹⁵ In this new concept dated 2010, which includes active participation or relationship development and modern defence approaches, issues such as collective defence, crisis management and common security approaches as well as cyber security and environmental security issues were included for the first time.¹⁶ Organized crime groups, all kinds of smuggling activities, terrorist and radical groups, transportation and supply system security and energy security are also important issues addressed in the concept. Under the heading of environmental security, global and local resource constraints, climate change, water scarcity, increasing energy needs and meeting the minimum level of food, drink and shelter needs can also be put under the heading of security.

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 has turned into an attempt to invade Ukraine and a broad-spectrum war as of 2022.¹⁷ In the face of this developing situation, NATO members needed a serious change in the strategic concept. The Russian Federation has again become the first priority threat for the organization, while it was on the way to establish a partnership with the end of the Cold War.¹⁸

Ukraine, which the Putin Administration began to perceive as a threat due to its relations with the West, has become today's battlefield of the former Cold War era. Another country mentioned as a threat in the new strategic concept is the People's Republic of China. The possibility of using its technological and economic superiority in the direction of aggressive policies makes China an issue that needs to be taken care of.¹⁹

In addition to this discourse, which can be interpreted as a return to classical security approaches and military strategy, new threats are also included in the concept. Authoritarian governments, harmful activities in cyberspace and space, disinformation, instrumentalization of migration, use of energy resources as a threat, economic pressure, terrorism, instability and conflicts in Africa and the Middle East, acts of violence against civilians, different security needs of women and children are included in the security perception of the new concept.

The concept also focuses on climate change and environmental security. The issue of climate change creates a negative force multiplier effect in insecure environments and conflicts. Rising sea levels due to rising temperatures and harsh weather conditions not only affect all societies globally but also have an impact on NATO security architecture. There is also a positive point of view on the use of NATO forces in aid, rescue and reconstruction activities in natural disasters, which increase due to the restriction of the mobility of military units in harsh weather conditions since climate change directly affects the use of military power.²⁰ Although the new concept exhibits a realistic perspective in the face of a concrete threat from the Russian Federation, critical security approaches are also referred to in terms of expressing the diversity of women's needs. According to this concept, NATO's responsibilities are grouped under three headings: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and collaborative security.

Conclusion

NATO, which was initially designed as a defence mechanism against military threats reflecting the traditional security understanding, has gained a broad perspective over time by emphasizing that security does not consist only of military threats. At this point, an understanding that cares not only for the protection and survival of national interests in the individual sense but also for the concepts of human security and social security has been built. However, as seen in the strategy documents in the historical process, although NATO has an inclusive perception in terms of security, the most striking security problems that directly activate the structure are still military threats.

Even though NATO has carried out many initiatives against new security threats, the situation in Ukraine has surpassed all of them and brought the security of Eastern Europe and the military threat posed by the Russian Federation to the top of the agenda of NATO members. On the other hand, the different degrees of dependence of NATO members on Russia's energy resources have also led to debates on the military and economic importance to be taken. At this point, it is understood that the organization, which has unhesitatingly regarded military threats

14 Jamie Shea, "How is NATO Dealing with Emerging Security Challenges?" *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2013): 193-201.

15 Allen G. Sens, "The Changing Politics of European Security," In: Gänzle, S., Sens, A.G. (eds) *The Changing Politics of European Security*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

16 Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 19-20 November 2010.

17 Jens Ringsmose & Mark Webber, "Hedging Their Bets? The Case for a European Pillar in NATO," *Defence Studies* 20, no. 4 (2020): 295-317.

18 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 29 June 2022.

19 Pierre Haroche & Martin Quencez, "NATO Facing China: Responses and Adaptations," *Survival* 64, no. 3 (2022): 73-86.

20 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 29 June 2022.

as the highest level of security in the past, can keep the issue of energy security and sustainability on an equal footing with military security, even partially at the forefront.

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3+3 Cooperation Platform in the Caucasus?! Challenges and Opportunities for the Countries in the Region

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Abstract

The present paper on “3+3 Cooperation Platform in the Caucasus?! Challenges and Opportunities for the Countries in the Region” is an analysis of the new format of cooperation announced by the Republic of Turkey. The purpose of the study is to examine and outline both the probable strategic, geopolitical goals of the states presented in the named format and the probable expected results in case of the possibility of creating a cooperation platform. The research aims to determine to what extent the interests of the countries of the South Caucasus will be taken into account in the six-member cooperation format, whether it will be an impeding factor for Georgia in terms of integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures, whether it will promote the country’s long-term de-occupation strategy as well as how unprofitable Georgia will be in case of joining it. The purpose of the research is to determine whether the six-party cooperation platform is a threat to Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and to determine the probable benefits obtained as a result of cooperation. Importantly, the research aims to determine the probable place and role of Georgia in the new cooperation format, and in case of refusal to cooperate, to highlight the probable challenges and risks facing the country.

Keywords:

Geopolitics, Conflicts, State, Security, Economy, Transit.

Methods: The present paper is based on proven qualitative research methods in the social sciences. Research methods such as secondary data analysis, case study, and observation have been used. In the research process, journals, articles, reports and papers related to the topic were studied. The research is also based on the conclusions obtained as a result of the author's personal observation. The paper also analyzed important sources related to the research topic, which are an important component for the objective evaluation of the event.

Introduction

As a result of the 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the fall of 2020, Azerbaijan, supported by the Republic of Turkey, won and established its control over a large part of Nagorno-Karabakh. The hostilities stopped after the capture of the strategically important city of Shusha and it became possible to carry out a direct attack on the capital of the self-recognized Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert. The Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation were actively involved in the process. It was precisely through this latter that a number of tripartite negotiations were held in Moscow, where a peace agreement was finally signed, and Russia was allowed to send peacekeepers to the region. In this process, the West was distanced from the beginning, and Iran, that is particularly careful about the processes developed in the region, did not have a real leverage to intervene and influence the peace negotiations and processes.

The Second Karabakh War created a new geopolitical situation in the region. The parties involved in the hostilities and subsequent peace processes clearly demonstrated that they themselves were the creators of the political order in the region. This emphasized their geopolitical aspirations and their desire to make decisions independently.

After the end of the Second Karabakh War, during the visit of the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Azerbaijan, the idea of Caucasian cooperation was voiced. It implied the issues of cooperation in various directions of the countries in the region in the 3+3 format. It was emphasized that the creation of such a platform should be in the interest of all the states included in the format, where the common interests of these countries will be taken into account. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation, Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran should be represented in the cooperation format. The president emphasized that Azerbaijan's victory in the Karabakh War created new opportunities for cooperation among the countries of the region. According to his own statement, the Caucasian cooperation platform will be based on the so-called win-win initiatives that will contribute to common good and benefits.¹

Discussion and implications - Interests and potential challenges of Turkey, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Georgia in the Caucasus Cooperation Platform. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of conflicts emerged in the Caucasus region. In parallel with the frozen conflicts, a number of talks were held between the governments of the countries of the region on the issue of conflict settlement and peaceful resolution. Taking into account the geostrategic location of the region and the natural resources in the Caspian Sea Basin, it was repeatedly put on the agenda to create a cooperation organization with the participation of the Caucasus countries that would contribute to the rapid and stable economic rise of the region, where all parties would be guided by the principle of win-win and there would be no losers. In order to create such a platform, it is important to resolve the existing conflicts between the states of the region. That is why the President of the Republic of Turkey Abdullah Gül rightly noted - "There are many conflicts in the world, and trying to keep these conflicts in a frozen state will be a wrong step and will lead to irreversible consequences in the long run."²

The idea of cooperation in the region is not new. At the European Security Summit held in Istanbul in 1999, the then President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, put forward a proposal to create a peace pact that would help solve regional problems, strengthen security and stable development of the South Caucasus. The President of Turkey Suleyman Demirel also supported this idea. A proposal for cooperation was also offered to the Republics of Georgia and Armenia. The idea of cooperation included the format of 3+3+2 cooperation. The Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republics of Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the United States of America and the European Union, would be represented as parties. Azerbaijan named the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh occupied by Armenia as a precondition for the implementation of the mentioned proposal.³ The idea of a similar type of cooperation was later proposed on August 13, 2008 by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It meant creating a platform for stability and cooperation in the Caucasus.⁴

1 Daily Sabah, Dec 11, 2020, 6-Country Regional Cooperation Platform Win-Win for Actors in Caucasus, Erdoğan says, Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/6-country-regional-cooperation-platform-win-win-for-actors-in-caucasus-erdogan-says>

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3 Huseynov, V. 12.01.2021, A Stability Pact for the South Caucasus, Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/a-stability-pact-for-the-south-caucasus/>

4 Fotiou, E. 06.2009, Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform: What Is That Stake for Regional Cooperation? ICBSS POLICY BRIEF no. 16, Available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104737/PB_16.pdf

The interests of the Republic of Turkey in the Caucasus Region are determined by a combination of factors.

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave Turkey the opportunity to return to the region after 100 years through political, economic, cultural, diplomatic and other ties. Turkey's geostrategic location, growing demographic and economic growth contributed to the political leadership's desire to become a regional state. In order to expand the economic and political influence of the Turkish state, the agenda of the political leadership faced the following tasks:

Support of economic activity:

- Strengthening cooperation with the USA and the European Union;
- Strengthening close political, economic, diplomatic and security ties with the Countries of South Caucasus and Central Asia;
- Expanding influence in the Middle East;
- Turning the country into an energy hub;
- Strengthening cooperation with the countries of the region;
- Pursuing an independent foreign policy.

In the nineties, Turkey followed the strategy developed by Turgut Özal's office in order to fulfill the set tasks. The proposed strategy for increasing Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia envisaged a cautious and prudent policy. According to the strategy developed by the Justice and Revival Party since 2007, Turkey should become the energy hub of the region, which would connect the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. It would contribute to the policy of soft power in the region. The main task of the political leadership of Turkey was to fulfill the goals they set without an open confrontation with Russia. According to the Turkish political leadership, the mentioned initiatives could also be interesting for the European Union and the United States of America due to the following factors: 1) It would contribute to supplying Europe with alternative sources of energy resources that would contribute to reducing the growing political influence of Russia and diversifying energy resources; 2) In the region, it could become a restraining and balancing link for Russia; 3) It would be an important force in the region in terms of deterring and balancing threats and influence from Iran. Turkey's policy in the region followed a planned and consistent course. Heydar Aliyev's phrase "two states, one nation" became the basis for close cooperation between these two countries. The ethnic, linguistic and border proximity to Azerbaijan helped the Republic of Turkey to actively return to the current processes in the region through Azerbaijan.⁵

Considering the above, we believe that the idea of Caucasian cooperation proposed by Turkey serves the following goals:

- Actively returning to regional processes after the victory obtained as a result of Turkey's active intervention in the Karabakh War;
- Strengthening the economic, political and military components in the region based on the Shushi Agreement;
- Trying to reduce the influence and role of the European Union and the West in the region;
- Trying to distance Russia and the West;
- Conducting an independent foreign policy;
- Seizing trade leverage in negotiations;
- Strengthening the new economic, political, and energy relations with the countries of the region and searching for ways of alternative energy carriers;
- Conducting a soft power policy;
- Turning the country into a regional state.

Despite Russian-Turkish cooperation, separate geopolitical aspirations of Turkey are still unacceptable to the Russian side. In parallel with the invasion of the Russian army in Ukraine, the Turkish-Ukrainian military cooperation program, in particular the supply of the Ukrainian armed forces with Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles is perceived as painful. The position of Turkey is also important, which supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine, does not recognize the aggression of Crimea, condemns the Russian intervention in Ukraine, but despite the international sanctions imposed against Russia, maintains energy and economic relations with Russia in a number of cases.⁶ It also facilitates Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations on the territory of Turkey.⁷

Azerbaijan is the only state in the Caucasus that has a land border with all the countries of the region.

It also has common interests with the Republic of Turkey. After the defeat in the First Karabakh War, the agenda of the political leadership of Azerbaijan became the rapid economic rise of the country in order to

5 Górecki, W., Mateusz Chudziak, 01-02-2021, The (pan-)Turkic Caucasus. The Baku-Ankara Alliance and Its Regional Importance, Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2021-02-01/pan-turkic-caucasus-baku-ankara-alliance-and-its-regional>

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7 WATERHOUSE, T., Turkey's Erdogan Performs Balancing Act as Russia-Ukraine Mediator, 16/03/2022, France24, Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/middle-east-matters/20220316-turkey-s-erdogan-performs-balancing-act-as-russia-ukraine-mediator>

timely rise from poverty, fight against corruption and crime, and most importantly, not to create a threat to the political power of the ruling elites. During the administration of Heydar Aliyev and later his son and political successor Ilham Aliyev, the implementation of the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyshan, Baku-Tbilisi-Ezerum, Baku-Sufsi, Trans-Natal gas pipelines and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway projects began. The following long-term tasks were set before the political leadership of Azerbaijan: a) Export existing natural resources to the world bypassing Iran and Russia, without an open confrontation with them. It would contribute to the economic rise of Azerbaijan, stable development and strengthening of the country's defence capability and security; b) Along with the strengthening of the military component, a real solution to the issue of the return of Karabakh based on the agreement with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. Thus, on the one hand, the lands seized as a result of the first war would return to the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan, on the other hand, the return of the Karabakh region would strengthen the power of the existing political elites.

The victory in the Karabakh War gave Azerbaijan the opportunity to pursue an active and relatively independent foreign and domestic policy. Accordingly, the idea of Caucasian cooperation proposed by the President of the Republic of Turkey is attractive for Azerbaijan considering the following factors: a) The victory in the Karabakh War created an opportunity to build the new transport corridors with Russia, Turkey and Iran. The Zangezur corridor and the possible implementation of the Nakhichevan-Kars railway projects will give Azerbaijan the opportunity to bypass Georgia and directly connect with Turkey, provide direct supply of existing natural resources, which will also help bring Turkey and Azerbaijan even closer. b) The emergence of a real prospect of taking existing natural resources to the world market; c) Influencing Armenia through Russia so that the latter agrees to the implementation of Zangezur, Nakhichevan or other projects. d) Azerbaijan's cautious and moderate policy towards the millions of ethnic Azerbaijanis living in northern Iran.

The creation of a platform for joint cooperation of countries in the region and further relations should be in the interest of all countries as a rule. As it was announced, the idea of the Caucasian cooperation platform should be based on the principle of win-win. Nevertheless, the named idea turned out to be unacceptable for Georgia and at the same time put the country in a rather difficult situation. After the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war, Russia's occupation of 20% of Georgia's territory, creeping annexation, and economic crisis as a result of Covid-19, the country faced complex security, political, economic, social and demographic challenges. The foreign-political course of Georgia, supported by the majority of the population of the country, on the issues of integration with the European Union and NATO is unchanged. The idea of proposing a Caucasian platform and the inclusion of Russia in it created a negative attitude among political circles, experts and the population of Georgia. The public and the authorities shared the position that any union where Russia would be represented is unacceptable to Georgia until Russia withdraws the recognition of the independence of de facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia and withdraws its armed forces from the territories of Georgia. The position on the proposed idea was fixed by the representatives of the government. "According to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aleksandre Khvtisiashvili, Georgia supports the establishment of peace platforms to ensure security in the region with the participation of three South Caucasus countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), but not with Russia."⁸ According to the government representatives, they welcome any economic and political cooperation initiative in the region, which will be based on mutual respect and trust between nations, recognition of sovereignty and inviolability of territorial integrity.⁹ The idea of cooperation named for Georgia is unacceptable due to the following circumstances:

- The Caucasian platform does not represent an opportunity for Georgia that will contribute to the de-occupation of Georgian territories and the peaceful resolution of the conflict;
- The idea of Caucasian cooperation implies the reduction of the role of the European Union and the USA in the region. For Georgia, as a regional leader in the implementation of state democratic reforms and a strategic partner of the West in the region, it is unacceptable to join such a cooperation organization where the West is not represented as a party;
- It is unacceptable for Georgia to join such an organization, in which the Russian Federation is represented as one of the main parties and policy makers;
- In case of joining the Caucasian Platform, Georgia will remain one-on-one with Russia, without the support of the West, which will put the country in a losing position;
- Joining the organization will help to strengthen the interests of the strong countries of the region, including the Russian Federation in the military, economic, and political terms, and will help to promote the use of soft or active force against the countries of the region;
- The scarcity of economic, demographic, territorial or political resources of Georgia cannot prevent the effective pursuit and protection of the interests of the Georgian state in the Caucasian cooperation platform.

In case of refusal by Georgia in the format of Caucasian cooperation, the country faces the following challenges: a) Turkey, as Georgia's number one trade partner and strategic ally after the United States of America, may try to use economic and political leverage to convince Georgia to join the Caucasus Platform; b) Azerbaijan, as an important trade partner and ally of Georgia as well as a major supplier of natural gas, may try to convince the

8 Chichua, N., 28.01.2021, Georgia Refuses to Join the Caucasian Platform with Russia, Netgazeti, available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/514749/>

9 Ibid.

Georgian side to join the Caucasus Platform; c) Possible economic, political or other projects may be implemented in the region bypassing Georgia.

The interests and potential challenges of the states of Russia, Iran and Armenia in the Caucasus Cooperation Platform. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union made it possible to change the balance of forces in the world and to establish a new geopolitical reality and security architecture. All this contributed to the process of formation of the new and regional states, and on the other hand, the post-Soviet space became the epicenter of the confrontation of various regional and even global powers. For Moscow, the former allied republics have always been an object of special interest, therefore the appearance of any other power in the region was perceived as an attempt to interfere in its own sphere of influence. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, 25 million ethnic Russians lived in the allied republics, some of whom later returned to Russia.¹⁰ Protection of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking population in the post-Soviet republics was considered a legitimate obligation of Russia on the one hand, but it was also a tool of significant political influence. Russia's main interest in the post-Soviet republics was due to economic factors, scientific and cultural ties with the nations living there, and issues related to security in the allied republics that had a direct impact on Russia's security and foreign policy.¹¹ The well-known term "Near Abroad" used by the Russian authorities refers to the issues of maintaining and strengthening Russian economic, political and security influence in relation to the former allied republics. The use of the mentioned term by Russia in international relations was a kind of emphasis on fixing the vital interests and relations that it had in the former post-Soviet republics.¹² Russia made it a goal not to allow a third power to intervene in its neighborhood, which it considered to be its sphere of influence. The prevailing realist vision in international relations significantly determines the essence of Russia's foreign and domestic policy. Of the five important components that realism talks about in relation to Russia, it is important to take into account the provision that focuses in interstate relations on geographically connected states, ethnic groups and actors related to them in international relations. At such a time, the rational behavior of states, foreign or domestic policy is a logical continuation of the national interests of this state.¹³

The principle of realism, that the world is anarchic and the government can never be sure of the goals and intentions of the government of another country, and the security of the state will be ensured only as a result of achieving absolute security, is a kind of cornerstone of Russia's foreign policy. According to the assessment of the Russian government, the further expansion of NATO represents an existential threat to the country's security. Therefore, despite the fact that today international, interstate relations are conducted at a different level and format and it is part of the international system, it can't fully define and/or explain the actions of the state, which in turn can be considered as a kind of flaw in the realist approach. A clear example of the insufficient explanation of states' behavior is Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. In this context, the Caucasus issue and Russia's participation and interests within the framework of the Caucasian Cooperation Platform should be discussed.

The idea of creating a Caucasian cooperation platform is not new. It was announced at the time by the President of Turkey, which was based on the principle of mutual cooperation with the neighboring powers of Turkey and an attempt to expand political/economic influence. The initially named idea could not be implemented. It was due to the complicated Russian-Turkish relations, their alleged connections with Chechnya and Kurdish separatism, the existence of different positions in relation to Kosovo and a number of other strategic issues. Over time, it became possible to find common interests between the two states. Turkey refused to help Chechen groups, and Russia refused to support Kurdish separatism. The goal of weakening the influence of the West coincided with the common interests of the two states. All of this subsequently contributed to the improvement of Russian-Turkish relations, which was manifested by the adoption of the Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia in 2001 and the Joint Declaration on the Deepening of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership in 2004".¹⁴

By creating the Caucasus Cooperation Platform, Russia is trying to reduce Western influence in the region as much as possible, but at the same time, with the participation of regional powers Turkey and Iran, it considers the participation and interests of these two countries in the processes of the region as permissible. By creating a Caucasian cooperation platform, Russia will try to become the main leading force in the region, and with the participation of the Turkish and Iranian sides, it will finally reduce the Western influence and create an alternative center of gravity in the region that will balance the Euro-Atlantic positions not only in the Caucasus, but also in the Middle East.

10 Cara, O. "Black Sea and Baltic Sea Regions: Confluences, Influences, and Crosscurrents in the Modern and Contemporary Ages," The Second International Conference on Nordic and Baltic Studies of the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies (ARSBN), May 20–22, 2011.

11 Smith, M., *Russica, P.: Russia's Monroe Doctrine* (London, UK: The Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, Smith 1993): 10.

12 Harstedt G. P. and Knickrehm K. M., *International Politics in a Changing World* (London, UK and New York, NY: Pearson Higher Education, 2003): 323.

13 Romaniuk S. N., *Global Power Shift, Great Powers and Geopolitics International Affairs in a Rebalancing World*, Aharon Klieman Tel-Aviv University, Department of Political Science Ramat-Aviv, 2015:116-117

14 Demiryol, T., *Global Power Shift, Great Powers and Geopolitics International Affairs in a Rebalancing World*, Aharon Klieman Tel-Aviv University, Department of Political Science Ramat-Aviv, 2015:67

The issue of Armenia's participation in the Caucasus Cooperation Platform is critically important. The results of the Second Karabakh War, the political attitudes of Azerbaijan-Turkey and the anti-Azerbaijani/anti-Turkish sentiments of its own population determine the negative attitude of the Armenian authorities towards the named platform. In the case of participation in it, the agenda will include whether Armenia's national interests will be ensured in the format of regional cooperation and whether the Russian Federation will support Armenia's positions. The mentioned issue is significant to the extent that Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Organization, and Russia is the main guarantor of its security. Nevertheless, the ambiguous position of the Russian side in the Second Karabakh War, Russia's non-interference in the constant border clashes and non-fulfillment of the terms of the collective security agreement¹⁵ forced the Armenian authorities to make important conclusions and re-evaluate the issues of bilateral relations with Russia and Georgia. It should be noted that one of the vectors of Russian foreign policy, which implies dominance in the Caucasus region, determines the role of Armenia in the process of strengthening Russian positions in the region. Moscow is trying not only to maintain but also to strengthen Armenia's military, political, economic, and energy dependence on Russia and to subject Armenia's strategic energy facilities to its own control¹⁶ that will enable to strengthen its spheres of influence in the region. After Nikol Pashinyan came to power, Armenia's efforts to strengthen relations with Euro-Atlantic structures and reduce dependence on Russian energy resources can be noticed. The format of Armenian-Iranian cooperation also concerns the reduction of dependence on Russian energy resources. Armenia is trying to diversify its energy and economic sectors, which in turn will lead to a decrease in dependence on Russian resources. It was the Armenian-Iranian economic relationship that came under the attention of the US Obama administration to the extent that it was related to the reduction of dependence on Russian resources.¹⁷

In the Caucasus Cooperation Platform, another factor that creates the resistance of the Armenian side to participate in it is the historical Armenian-Turkish relations and Turkey's role in the Second Karabakh War. Historically, a certain part of Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire, namely in Anatolia. The Armenian uprising that started in 1915 was followed by massive and large-scale punitive measures by Turkey, which killed thousands of ethnic Armenians.¹⁸ Armenian historians refer to the named fact as genocide that is also accepted by individual states in the international language.¹⁹ The mentioned events are firmly reflected in the history and mentality of the Armenian people. Turkey's actions in favor of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War further increased and strengthened the anti-Turkish sentiments of the Armenian population. It is believed that their participation in the cooperation platform will put them in a position where it will be difficult to defend the Armenian positions. Despite the difficult Armenian-Turkish relations, there were separate attempts by both states to normalize relations. The Armenian-Turkish state border has been closed for years, making it difficult to connect Turkey with Azerbaijan and provide a transit corridor. The normalization of relations between the two countries will be beneficial for them and will help stimulate the economy. Taking the above into account, Turkey appointed the former ambassador of Turkey, Serdar Kalic, as a special representative for relations with Armenia, and later in 2009, both sides reached an agreement to mutually restore and open the state border, which had been closed for decades.²⁰ Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also speaks about the importance of normalizing Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations. The results of the Second Karabakh War and the systematic clashes on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border undermine the prospects of their cooperation and, accordingly, Armenia's desire to be represented in the Caucasian cooperation platform. The moods in Yerevan related to the feeling of lack of security are noteworthy.²¹

Another factor in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement signed after the Second Karabakh War. According to the Azerbaijani side, the provisions of the agreement allow them to use the Armenian territory of Siunuk to create a transit corridor and connect Azerbaijan to the Nakhichevan Auton-

15 Martirosyan, A., Can Armenia Leave the CSTO and Head West? Yerevan, 22. 09.2022, <https://jam-news.net/can-armenia-leave-the-csto-and-head-west/>

16 Romaniu, N., Global Power Shift, Great Powers and Geopolitics International A airs in a Rebalancing World, Aharon Klieman Tel-Aviv University, Department of Political Science Ramat-Aviv, 2015:128

17 Nixey, J., The South Caucasus: Drama on Three Stages, America and a Changed World, August 2010, DOI:10.1002/9781444391565.ch7

18 Daily Sabah, Next 3+3 Caucasus Platform planned to be held in Turkey, DEC 20, 2021, Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/next-33-caucasus-platform-planned-to-be-held-in-turkey/news>

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19 France24, US President Biden Calls 1915 Massacres of Armenians by Ottoman Empire a 'Genocide', 24/04/2021, Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210424-us-president-biden-calls-1915-massacres-of-armenians-by-ottoman-empire-a-genocide>

20 Daily Sabah, Next 3+3 Caucasus Platform planned to be held in Turkey, DEC 20, 2021, Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/next-33-caucasus-platform-planned-to-be-held-in-turkey/news>

21 Dzumukashvili, S., A Six-Party Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: a Beneficial Opportunity or a Threat? ICR center, November 5, 2021 available at: <https://icrcenter.org/a-six-party-regional-cooperation-in-the-south-caucasus-a-beneficial-opportunity-or-a-threat/>

omous District. The Armenian side uses the term corridor only in relation to the Lachin corridor. It is a narrow connecting section between Armenia and Karabakh. Significant disagreements were caused by the statements of the Azerbaijani side regarding the existence of an Armenian state on the ancestral lands of Azerbaijan.²² Although the normalization of Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations will contribute to the creation of the new transport corridors in the South Caucasus, assigning a new strategic function to Armenia, restoring the Armenia-Azerbaijan railway section canceled during the Soviet period and connecting with Turkey with a new railway network, Armenia-Azerbaijan and Armenia-Turkey,²³ there are still many key conflicting issues between the states, which complicates the process of rapprochement between the mentioned states and the desire of the Armenian side to be represented in the platform of Caucasian cooperation. It is worth noting that the named cooperation platform gives Armenia the opportunity to get rid of the economic blockade that has existed for years and contribute to the economic strengthening of the country. Insecurity in Yerevan, systematic clashes at border crossings and doubts of the Armenian side about Turkish-Azerbaijani long-term goals, radical attitudes in the population and the opposition hinder the process of mutual cooperation between the parties. Armenia's participation in the Platform for Caucasian Cooperation is full of contradictions. On the one hand, Armenia sees an opportunity to see economic and political benefits within the framework of cooperation, to get rid of the existing economic blockade, and on the other hand, the presence of Armenian positions, protection of national interests and balance of power as a counterweight to Azerbaijani-Turkish relations in the named cooperation platform in the region is questioned. Taking into account the mentioned circumstances, the Armenian authorities are faced with two difficult choices: a) As a result of Russian pressure, to make a decision to agree to join the Caucasian Cooperation Platform in order to overcome the economic blockade, which will lead to the irritation of a significant part of the Armenian society and political elite, or b) To follow the will of a certain part of the society, to analyze the issues of the balance of power in the region and Azerbaijan-Turkey long-term interests and refuse to join it.

Another important player in the Caucasian Cooperation Platform is the Islamic Republic of Iran. After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1976, the country is under international economic sanctions, which significantly threatened the country's economic development and stability. Along with the chosen foreign policy course, Iran's nuclear program remains an important challenge for the international community. It is one of the factors of expansion and prolongation of international economic sanctions. It is critically important for Iran to get rid of the economic blockade, to expand international political and economic ties, and to be represented on regional and international political platforms as a regional power. All of the above circumstances, along with other factors, lead to Iran's increased interest in being actively involved in the Caucasus regional cooperation platform.

On December 21, 2021, the first meeting of the 3+3 platform at the level of deputy foreign ministers took place in Moscow.²⁴ The meeting was represented by the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Iranian side. It should be noted that despite the offer to the Georgian side to participate in the meeting, they refused. It is connected with the Russian occupation of Georgian territories. Previously, on October 6, 2021, the Russian Foreign Minister together with his Iranian counterpart discussed the formation of a regional format for security and economic cooperation in the region, thus giving the parties in the region the opportunity to open new and expand existing economic and transport communications.²⁵ For the Iranian side, participation in the 3+3 cooperation platform is interesting due to several factors:

- The active involvement of Russia-Turkey in the Second Karabakh War, as well as the distancing of the West, left Iran in a position of no play in the region, which significantly reduced the political role of Iran in the regional processes.²⁶ A transit corridor passed through the 7 districts returned by Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh War, through which the transit of Iranian goods took place. The issue of the security of the transport hub was also on the agenda. The Caucasian cooperation platform gives Iran a unique opportunity to return to the region as a regional player after the Second Karabakh War that will significantly increase its political power in terms of economic benefits. On the other hand, it will be possible to normalize Iran-Azerbaijani relations in order to obtain common economic benefits, which in turn will ensure the safety of the transport corridors in the 7 regions returned by the Azerbaijani side that are actively used for the transportation of the Iranian cargo.
- One of the main goals of Iran's foreign policy is to get rid of the Western economic blockade, to establish itself as a regional state and to create international transport corridors, thereby exporting the Iranian goods

22 Dzumukashvili, S., A Six-Party Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: a Beneficial Opportunity or a Threat? ICR center, November 5, 2021 available at: <https://icrcenter.org/a-six-party-regional-cooperation-in-the-south-caucasus-a-beneficial-opportunity-or-a-threat/>

23 Shahbazov, F., The prospect of Six-Party Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus, The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, January 26, 2022, the CACI Analyst, available at: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13704-the-prospect-of-six-party-regional-cooperation-in-the-south-caucasus.html>

24 Mizroyan, A., South Caucasus 3+3 Cooperation Platforms Holds First Meetings, Hetq, Dec, 2021, Available at: <https://hetq.am/en/article/138886>

25 Shahbazov, F., The Prospect of Six-Party Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus, The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, January 26, 2022, the CACI Analyst, available at: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13704-the-prospect-of-six-party-regional-cooperation-in-the-south-caucasus.html>

26 Ibid.

and natural resources. In the case of its participation in the Caucasian Cooperation Platform, it has the opportunity to overcome/reduce the Western economic blockade, diversify export production and finally create a North-South link and Gulf-Black Sea Transit Corridor. Through the named transit nodes, Iran will be able to export important resources to the Black Sea region and Europe, which is why the South Caucasus, especially the maritime component of Georgia, is a bridge connecting it with the Black Sea countries and Europe.²⁷

- The successful implementation of the Caucasian Cooperation Platform will put the issues of railway infrastructure development on the agenda in the region. It will deepen the economic, political, tourism, security relations of the countries of the region that is an additional opportunity for the Iranian side.²⁸

In conclusion, we can say that the desire of the Iranian side to actively participate in the 3+3 cooperation platform is due to economic, political, geopolitical and security interests. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict puts on the agenda the possibility of renewing negotiations on the economic sanctions imposed on Iran and issues related to the nuclear program, however, there are still problematic issues such as to what extent it will be possible to replace Russian energy resources with the Iranian side and what position Russia and Iran itself will have on this issue. The 3+3 Caucasus Platform allows Iran to access and implement economic projects in the Caucasus or the regions of Asia. At the same time, cooperation in the region creates an opportunity for sustainable and safe development.²⁹

Conclusion

As mentioned in the study, the idea of Caucasian Cooperation Platform is not new for the countries of the region. Simultaneously with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ethno-separatist conflicts encouraged in Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the change in world geopolitics and the transformation of the existing security environment contributed to the process of forming the new regional states. It made possible to create new economic, political, and cultural ties. In the international arena, the collapse of the Soviet Union became an encouraging factor for the Republic of Turkey to return with new force to the politics of Eurasia and the region. On the one hand, Turkey set a goal to establish and expand political, economic, and military ties with the Turkic-speaking states of the former USSR (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan) as well as to get a unique opportunity to return to the geopolitics of the South Caucasus it did not have for decades. The 3+3 cooperation platform aims at establishing Turkey as a regional state and increasing the political and economic role of Turkey in the ongoing processes in the region. The Caucasus Cooperation Platform allows Turkey to become an energy hub and encourage the creation of the new transit corridors, economic and political connections.

The 3+3 format is a significant opportunity for the Azerbaijani side. Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War brought significant political and economic dividends. Considering that Azerbaijan is the only state that has a land border with all countries in the region, the return of the 7 regions and the realization of the idea of cooperation gives it the opportunity to create the new transit corridors, including to restore and develop the Armenian-Azerbaijani, Azerbaijani-Iranian railway network and to encourage the Zangezur corridor and Nakhichevan - Development of Kars railway projects. The implementation of the 3+3 platform, taking into account the Russia-Ukraine conflict, prompts the Azerbaijani side to increase pressure on Armenia to agree to the opening of the Zangezur corridor and to find alternative markets for energy resources, to diversify export goods and countries so as not to enter into an open conflict with the Russian Federation. Regional cooperation will further bring Turkish-Azerbaijani relations closer and contribute to the normalization of Azerbaijani-Iranian relations.

Participation in the 3+3 platform is unacceptable and unprofitable for Georgia due to a number of factors. 20% of Georgia's territory is occupied by the Russian Federation that is considered one of the leading powers in the proposed format. The Russia-Ukraine war has once again put the risks facing Georgia's national security and the threat of possible military aggression from Russia on the agenda. It is unacceptable for Georgia as a reliable partner of democratic reforms in the region and the West to bypass international sanctions and establish economic ties with the Russian Federation within the framework of any cooperation format. The 3+3 platform does not create a new opportunity for Georgia to promote the de-occupation of the country and the peaceful transformation of the conflict and to withdraw the recognition of the independence of the separatist regions from the Russian Federation. It is strategically unprofitable for the country to have any regional union aimed at reducing the role of the European Union and the USA and keeping Georgia one-on-one with the Russian Federation, which in turn ensures putting the country in an unequal position. Georgia will not be able to balance the states represented in the 3+3 format without a strong ally with economic, political, demographic resources and the challenges facing it, therefore participation in it will automatically put the country in a losing position and force it to agree to stra-

27 Dzamukashvili, S., Armenia, Georgia, Take Cautious Approach to Regional Cooperation Initiatives in South Caucasus, Emerging Europe, October 26, 2021

28 Ibid.

29 Anastasia Lavrina, New Geopolitical Reality in the South Caucasus: "Six-Party Platform", December 2020, Available at: <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/lavrina%20december.pdf>

tegitally unprofitable initiatives and decisions as a result of pressure.

Russian military intervention in Ukraine, unprecedented Western support for Ukraine and international economic sanctions imposed against Russia forced Russia to look for new markets for economic access, to diversify export countries and to replace the European market with the Asian market. Russia's goal is to somehow break through the international economic and political blockade and stimulate the economy. In this regard, the implementation of the 3+3 platform is critically important for the Russian side. If the project is realized, Russia will try to reduce the Western influence in the region and to weaken the consequences of the sanctions imposed on it. Taking into account both the participation of regional states Iran and Turkey in the platform and their interests, Russia will try to gain a dominant position in the Caucasus and create an alternative center of gravity to more or less balance the economic-political challenges facing it and Western interests, both in the Caucasus and in the Middle East.

In the above context, the 3+3 Caucasian platform is an important opportunity for the Iranian side. Iran's distancing in the Second Karabakh War has significantly reduced its political weight in the region, and participation in it will help it return to the geopolitics of the Caucasus. The transit possibilities of the Caucasus are also of great interest to the Iranian side. The Caucasian Cooperation Organization is an opportunity for Iran to break through the Western economic blockade imposed on it for years. By establishing the new economic ties and creating the transit corridors, it will be able to diversify its export markets and support the implementation of the North-South and Gulf-Black Sea Transit Corridor projects. The 3+3 platform in the region is an attempt to weaken Western positions that gives Iran the opportunity to transform itself into a state of regional importance with new economic and political ties. The desire to break through the economic blockade, weaken Western influence and access to alternative economic markets aligns Russian-Iranian interests. Despite the convergence of common interests, it is still questionable what position Iran will take if it has an offer to replace Russian natural gas and oil in the European market with its own resources in exchange for easing economic sanctions, what effect it will have on the realization of the 3+3 platform and what will be the position of the Russian side.

For the Armenian side, participation in the 3+3 platform is full of consequences. On the one hand, it creates an opportunity for economic growth of the country, and on the other hand, it puts the issues of ensuring Armenia's national interests on the agenda and activates security risks. The Caucasian Cooperation Platform gives Armenia the opportunity to get rid of the years-long blockade, facilitate the normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations, build the new transit corridors in the region that will pass through Armenian territories, restore the Azerbaijani-Armenian railway and give the country an international function, although it is full of security-related challenges. Also, a legitimate question arises, will Armenia's national interests be neglected?! The defeat experienced in the Second Karabakh War has activated the historically existing image of the enemy in relation to the Turks and Azerbaijan among the Armenian society and political elites, at the same time the question arises as to how much Armenia will balance the strategic interests of these two countries, while its main strategic partner, the Russian Federation, has left Armenia practically alone in the war. The Armenian side's request to include Iran, which is its ally, in the named format does not give Armenia a full guarantee that it will find itself in an equal position with Azerbaijan and Turkey. The separate articles of the cease-fire agreement concluded after the Second Karabakh War have a significant negative effect, by interpreting which the Azerbaijani side is trying to force Armenia to agree to open the Zangezur corridor through a transit corridor to connect Azerbaijan with the Nakhichevan Autonomous District, while Armenia is talking about the possibility of opening the Lachin corridor. Systematic border skirmishes and the frequent deaths of Armenian border guards and soldiers as well as recent frequent military skirmishes have an extremely negative impact on the normalization of relations between the two countries and create antipathy towards Azerbaijan and Turkey in a large part of the Armenian society and political elite. In the +3 platform, Armenia without a reliable and strong strategic ally will not be able to balance Azerbaijani-Turkish strategic interests that will force it to make even more concessions.

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Emerging Global Security Environment and NATO Engagement in the South Caucasus

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Abstract

The contemporary security challenges across the world bring the role and importance of NATO as a key political-military institution into focal point. Variety and a number of security issues such as pandemic, nuclear threat, military engagements, poverty, famine issues and frozen conflicts across the world has direct or indirect impact on either nation and state. Of course, in such a complex and complicated security environment everyone wonders what steps and actions NATO would take as a key political-military bloc. This article seeks holistically mapping and analyzing the role and presence of NATO in the South Caucasus. The article analyses the regional state affairs and possible impacts of the Alliance on the region. Here, it is argued that NATO in the context of European security domain might play a crucial role in forming 'like-minded' states across the South Caucasus.

Keywords:

NATO, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Threat, Military, World, Security, Russia, Region, South Caucasus, Geopolitical, Strategy.

Introduction

Geographically, the South Caucasus occupies a small area in size of a dot on the World map, but geopolitically, its boundaries stretch too far away, almost reaching to either polar of the world. Today more than ever, the South Caucasus plays geostrategic role and importance in all domains of global and continental security. While the South Caucasus occupies a small area on the global geopolitical map, the scale of interest in the region is much bigger than its geopolitical size might suggest. Today, we can argue about how big and wide the South Caucasus is as a diverse geopolitical region that literally occupies a strategically important place in world energy security, logistic security, transnational security, etc. It is a region that provides and secures sustainable and stable energy and transnational logistic corridor for the Ally and partner countries. For these reasons, the presence of the alliance for the development, capability building as well as interaction in the region is very important since NATO as a key political-military institution offers guarantee of the security and peace across the globe.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 fundamentally altered the geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus as each of the new successor states sought to define their national interests and policy priorities.¹ Either country decided to lay a path of its destiny and draw its course of actions.

Today, the South Caucasus is a diverse geopolitical region that undeniably occupies a strategically important place as a hub in world energy security, logistic security and almost in all domains of security. Azerbaijan has been offering its geostrategic advantages to the West and East by calling Georgia and Armenia to take part in the transnational projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, TANAP, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, etc. While Georgia has actively been partaking in the transnational projects, Armenia rejected and isolated itself as it had been sticking to its abnormal territorial claims which could be treated as vivid violation of international law, norms, peace and security as well. But we can see the positive changes such as outcome of the collaboration and cooperation of the two South Caucasus States not only in their economy, but also in military capability building, prosperity of the countries in the political and diplomatic domains.

It is arguable whether the geographic location of the region is blessing of the God while it could be seen as cursing, in terms of its geopolitical and strategic importance that the Caucasus has always been at the focal point of the foreign policy of global powers and clash of strategic interests. In another word, the South Caucasus is facing challenges imposed not only by the regional actors but also global actors. If we have a look at the history of the region, we see the region as a battlefield of global rivalries. We can be an eye witness of a similar rivalry today as well.

This research paper seeks to engage in empiric analysis and literature review, whether NATO could play a role forming a common platform in order to reach sustainable peace and security in the region by bringing the regional states together through its mechanisms and programs.

Methodology

A review of literatures and shedding light on the current relations and challenges are touched upon in order to understand a broader process. Therefore, it includes the interplay between academic definitional characterisation of main concepts, and vision of politicians and analytics on foreign and security policy practice in the region and also across the globe. This article seeks not only engaging in the popular and academic debates, past and present on the existence of the strategic environment, but also applying empiric study analyses related with the region particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The South Caucasus and NATO

The three South Caucasus Republics have been different in terms of drawing their geo-political orientations and destinies. Armenia saw its future and security being a CSTO member, very depending on Russia, and having the least engaged relations among the South Caucasian states with NATO. But today, Armenia seems not to be able to set up its way of destiny, and trying to play between the West and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). With regard to Azerbaijan, it paved its destiny pursuing an independent policy in relation with global powers by joining “Non-Aligned Movement” in 2011, and still sticking its course of action. Georgia demonstrating NATO aspired position sees its security in NATO membership. In spite of heterogeneous geopolitical orientation and destinies in the region, Georgia and Azerbaijan are showing their efforts not only for the common secured heaven, prosperous lives of their citizens, contribution to sustainable peace and security in region and across the world, but also following strong and diversified cooperation and collaboration with NATO, EU and various international institutions in order to contribute to the various global security domains. Thus, the two countries have much in their common interest not only in peace at home but also peace in the world. Nevertheless, the way common interest might be interpreted into joint opportunities depends not only on NATO, EU and Russia’s policy

¹ Sergey Markedonov, NATO looks to the Caucasus, National Interest, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/nato-looks-the-caucasus-6933?page=2>, 17 May 2012

towards the South Caucasus, but also on how relations between the big actors evolve.

Starting from 1990, NATO by applying “Open Door” policy had a great enlargement in its historic success which worried Russia. Russia has always been against as it sees the NATO enlargement as threat to its national security. Therefore, it has been resisting the successful relation and presence of NATO with the countries along its borders. The outbreak of the Ukraine war could be presented as a vivid example.

Azerbaijan and Georgia are much interested in political dialogue and practical cooperation of NATO with partners, on the basis of reciprocal respect which contribute not only to the stability and security of the Euro-Atlantic domain, but also beyond its physical borders as well. Likewise, the Alliance values its cooperation with the two South Caucasus countries. According to NATO Strategy 2022, partnerships are crucial for NATO to protect the global commons, enhance its resilience and uphold the rules-based international order.²

Given the geostrategic importance of the region, after Bulgaria and Romania joined NATO in 2004 and then the European Union in 2007, besides Eastern partnership program members - Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine, the South Caucasus countries - Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia began to be considered as a new frontier for NATO and the whole structure of European security. According to Tamaz Papuashvili, the South Caucasus is the centre of economic interest and an important transportation corridor. Besides the economic and logistic importance, there is a number of other factors that have been fuelling interest in the region.³

Since 1994, all three countries in the South Caucasus have been members of NATO’s Partnership of Peace Program. The stated reasoning and logic for engagement in the region is that it is intended to support international efforts to support confidence building measures by means of political dialogue to foster a better environment for conflict resolution by helping the three countries to establish institutions that are better able to deal with the varied security challenges each country faces.⁴

NATO’s interest in the South Caucasus is to have sustainable security through cooperation, and secure its access to Caspian energy resources, but also to ensure Eurasian security by supporting and multiplying its efforts in capability building, in achieving interoperability and standardisation, and institutional reforms of the armed forces in the South Caucasus. In this regard, the South Caucasus countries have been offered NATO programs and mechanisms such as Planning and Review Process, Individual Partnership Action Plan, etc.

Through its programs, means and mechanisms for the West, NATO also arguably attempts to integrate the region into its sphere by transferring the principles (values and norms) of democratic governance and rule of law to bring the South Caucasus in line with those of liberal democracy. The general approach could be seen as attempt to create and maintain “like-minded” states. This policy could balance Russia’s common historical experiences and interests approach.

Russia vs NATO in the South Caucasus

There have been calls at what is seen as a means of redressing the “security deficit” in the South Caucasus throughout the gradual extension of NATO programs into the region. Regional states, including Armenia are now gradually realizing that their relations with NATO are in fact concerned with how to select, develop and incorporate NATO programs that would together and increasingly over time, transform the regional security picture overall.⁵ As a good example of practical cooperation and implementation of NATO programs and standards is trilateral exercises and activities organized between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This is arguably a practical way of implementation of NATO programs and STANAGs in the region.

The varied security interests which could be seen as threat perceptions also complicate the South Caucasus for the Ally, where Georgia views Russia as a threat, Azerbaijan does not, and Armenia is a traditional ally. Thinking of long strategy, Azerbaijan wants to have good relations and harmony with all neighbours and seeks for collaboration in peace and security of the region. Turkey and Azerbaijan seem reliable neighbours and partners and they can take the region forward. Nevertheless, almost 30 years passed over the proclamation of its independence, Armenia is yet tackling to take a side, which causes security issues for the region.

Conclusion

- The rationale and logic of NATO’s engagement in the South Caucasus also fits well with the process of securitisation, peace building and prosperity. NATO is a global military-political institution as an actor that

2 NATO Strategic concept-2022 [NATO-2022-Strategic-Concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/docu/strat/2022/20220320-strat-concept.pdf) (comedonchisciotte.org) Page 10

3 Thompson, Eric S., *Turkish influence in the South Caucasus and Levant: the Consequences for NATO and the EU*, Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive, 2013. Retrieved from http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/37733/13Sep_Thompson_Eric.pdf?sequence=1, p. 37

4 T. German. *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives?* Farnham: Ashgate, 2012 Page 152-153

5 Sadi Sadiyev, Elman Nasirov, Khayal Iskandarov and Greg Simons, “South Caucasus and a “New Great Game”: the communication of competition in securitised international relations-<https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1826914>

engaged in the act of security based on a number of various motivations, such as securing energy transportation routes, investing in stability of the region via the export of norms and values that might create more “like-minded societies”, and to keep Russian influence away from the region.

- Having like-minded societies in its turn might redouble effort to resolve and settle down complex challenges and issues that cause threat to regional peace and stability. Programs such as Partnership of Peace that NATO has been exercising could be very beneficial in this sense.

- Seen practical cooperation with partners, and traditional regional partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Ally might facilitate and expand Azerbaijani-Georgian military cooperation and interoperability to enforce peace and stability in the South Caucasus in the foreseeable future through active partnership.

- By close and practical cooperation for getting high interoperability and common perception of security, NATO might improve both Azerbaijan’s and Georgia’s defence capabilities that would enhance security at home and far beyond the region.

- Europe is vulnerable to energy coercion, and Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey unity offers the best option to withstand this coercion.

- NATO might contribute to the transference of values and norms that are meant to transform the South Caucasus countries into the entities that are more ‘like-minded’ in security and prosperity spectrum.

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