

LEPL - DAVID AGHMASHENEBELI  
NATIONAL DEFENCE ACADEMY OF GEORGIA



„South Caucasus and Black Sea Security Conference“



INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION OF THE PAPERS OF THE SCIENTIFIC-PRACTICAL CONFERENCE

Gori, 2024

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# Diplomatic Discourses in the Security Policy of the Black Sea Region

**Brigadier General Mamia Balakhadze**

Rector of LEPL-David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia

PhD in International Relations

## **Abstract**

During the Cold War, the Black Sea was essentially divided between Turkey, a NATO member, and the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies, including Bulgaria and Romania. As a result, the security of the Black Sea relied on the balance of power and interests between NATO and the Soviet Warsaw Pact. After the Cold War, the geopolitical and economic significance of the Black Sea increased considerably. The Black Sea coastal states, including Georgia and Ukraine, acquired a new geopolitical role along with fresh opportunities and challenges. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict has heightened the significance of the Black Sea, making the region a strategic asset for all involved states. In this paper, I will discuss the security policy discourses surrounding the Black Sea region at regional and global levels. The role of the Republic of Turkey is central to the development of stability in this area. The primary focus of this research is to identify and analyze the security policy discourses in the Black Sea region. Understanding these political discourses is crucial as they influence decision-making, shape foreign security policies, and define future areas of cooperation. To explore this topic, the research employs qualitative methods, which allow for an in-depth examination of the issues at hand. Specifically, the study will utilize Discourse Analysis, a qualitative research method commonly used in international relations, to conduct this analysis.

**Keywords:** discourses, balancing, deterrence, NATO and security.

## Introduction

Historically, the Black Sea region has been the main centre of the clash of Western and Eastern civilizations (Samuel P. Huntington's concept) and has served as a key hub for global connections for centuries. Most of the maritime conflicts in history have occurred in this area. The political significance of the Black Sea dates back to ancient Greece when the Greeks began to establish city-states, or "poleis," along its shores. This development soon led to the region's political and economic importance, which was marked by confrontations between the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Pontus (a Hellenistic kingdom located on the southern coast of the Black Sea). During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire exerted full control over the political and economic dynamics of the Black Sea. However, after the 17th century, the Russian Empire began to supplant the Ottoman Empire and establish its supremacy in the region. For the Russian Empire, the Black Sea was critically important for its imperial resurgence and ambitions, as it borders the southwestern flank of what Moscow refers to as "Eurasia."<sup>1</sup>

The 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict has greatly increased the significance of the Black Sea, as it serves as a strategic asset for all involved states. **\*\*Global Level:\*\*** The security of the Black Sea region has emerged as a new global challenge, especially since many countries rely on Ukraine for their grain and oil supplies. The conflict has severely disrupted exports from Ukraine, resulting in price instability in global food supplies. **\*\*Regional Level:\*\*** In the east, pipeline projects are being developed through Ukraine and the Black Sea region to supply oil and gas to Europe. The conflict has caused a combination of energy and economic issues in the area. This highlights the importance of both global and regional security, indicating that the Black Sea is a strategic tool for Russia. Celeste Wallander, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, stated, "Russia's actions and investments in the region confirm the strategic importance it attaches to the Black Sea as a foundation for projecting its economic and military power."<sup>2</sup>

## Main Part

Security experts generally agree that the Black Sea region remains largely inaccessible to Europe and the West. Their engagement in the region's developments lacks cohesion, as evidenced by Russia's conflicts with Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. While countries in the Black Sea region joined NATO and the European Union following the Cold War, a key challenge persists: creating a comprehensive strategic vision for the area. Notably, Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022 has garnered significantly more attention from the

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<sup>1</sup> Stephan Malerius, *"Security Dynamics in the Black Sea Region: Geopolitical Shifts and Regional"*, Page 13-20,

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, *"The Security Context in the Black Sea Region"*, Page 22-30



Western world compared to previous conflicts. This heightened focus is due to the war's implications for both global and regional security challenges, as well as the increased presence of Russian military forces in the Black Sea region.<sup>3</sup>

In 2024, the United States enacted the Black Sea Security Act, which establishes an official U.S. strategy for the Black Sea region. This move is seen in security discussions as the West's response to Russia's actions in 2022. The Western presence in the Black Sea region is supported by three NATO member states—Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania—as well as NATO partners Georgia and Ukraine, EU members Romania and Bulgaria, and three EU candidate countries: Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Despite its geopolitical significance, the Black Sea has traditionally been viewed in security discussions as Russia's periphery, or "Strategic Backyard." However, it is now recognized as a critical area of Western interest due to emerging security challenges. The repercussions of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the subsequent changes to the security framework in the Black Sea are considered vital components of the wider European and global security architecture.<sup>4</sup>

In discussions about security, Turkey's role has become increasingly important due to the growing significance of the Black Sea to Western interests. As the most capable member of NATO's military presence in the region, Turkey plays a key role in regional security. It is recognized by its partners for its ability to manage escalations effectively. With centuries of experience in relations with Russia, Turkey's unique geographical position serves as a crucial deterrent against Russian influence in the area. Turkey has consistently proven to be an invaluable ally to Western partners in the Black Sea region. In political terms, there is potential for synergy between Turkey and the West, as their shared interests can lead to results that may not be achievable without cooperation from both sides. However, one of the main challenges in these relations is the ongoing tension between Turkey and the West. Ankara's pursuit of strategic foreign policy autonomy often clashes with the perspectives and policies of its Western allies.<sup>5</sup>

The countries in the Black Sea region collaborate on political issues such as seeking stability, countering Russian revisionism, enhancing resilience, and pursuing Euro-Atlantic integration. They also aim to maximize the region's potential in energy, transportation, and

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<sup>3</sup> George Scutaru, "Security Challenges in the Black Sea: NATO, the Wider Region and the Global Order", <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/Research-Reports/security-challenges-in-the-black-sea> (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

<sup>4</sup> Sen. Shaheen, Jeanne [D-NH] (Senate - Foreign Relations), S.804 - Black Sea Security Act of 2023 - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/804/text> (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

<sup>5</sup> Maryna Vorotnyuk, "Political and diplomatic dialogue: Challenges and opportunities for Black Sea cooperation between Turkey and the West in the post-2022 environment" - <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/part-1-political-and-diplomatic-dialogue-challenges-and-opportunities-for-black-sea-cooperation-between-turkey-and-the-west-in-the-post-2022-environment/> (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

communication links. While these interests are shared by all states in the region, Russia's position complicates matters. Turkey serves as the main balancer and negotiator in the area. The accession of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova to NATO will likely increase Turkey's role, making it a key player in the security architecture of the Black Sea region.<sup>6</sup>

The stability of regional security relies on identifying common interests and areas within security discussions. While the states around the Black Sea have expressed their interests, they struggle to establish a unified strategic vision and approach. One contributing factor to this lack of cohesion is that the Black Sea region has not been a priority for Western countries, including the United States. This absence of focus has resulted in a lack of specific strategies and clear visions for the Black Sea. Consequently, this situation allows Russia to pursue its interests in the region more effectively, while also complicating the coordination of joint Turkish-Western actions.<sup>7</sup>

Discussions about security policy often raise the question: How does Turkey view its relationship with NATO in the Black Sea region? [Discourse N1] Turkey perceives the Black Sea's security as integral to its independent security policy framework. As a result, it questions the necessity of NATO's greater role, particularly that of the United States, which aligns somewhat with Russia's perspective.

[Discourse N2] - The states in the Black Sea region rely on the long-term common interests of Turkey and Russia, particularly in areas like energy, trade, and pipeline policy. As a result, these countries must adopt a balanced foreign policy emphasising manoeuvrability and flexibility. Ultimately, their actions are driven by national interests, with priorities established at the national level.

[Discourse N3] - To support the development, stability, and sustainability of the Black Sea region, Turkey can offer suitable incentives to other countries in the area. In contrast, Russia is unable to provide such incentives now and is unlikely to do so in the future. Russia's vision for the region is rooted in imperial revisionism, which sharply differs from Turkey's approach.

[Discourse N4] - Ensuring stability and restoring security in the Black Sea region requires the restoration of territorial integrity for Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. It involves strengthening their resilience, supporting their aspirations to join the European Union, and facilitating Georgia's and Ukraine's accession to NATO. Additionally, the

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<sup>6</sup> Yevgeniya Gaber, A New Security Reality: Strategic Approaches for the Wider Black Sea Region - <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/clock-tower-series/new-security-reality-strategic-approaches-wider-black-sea-region/new-security-reality-strategic-approaches-wider> (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

<sup>7</sup> Challenges For The Black Sea Region – <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/challenges-for-the-black-sea-region-.tr.mfa> (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

stability of the Black Sea region is connected to a strategy of non-escalation, a perspective shared by the countries in the region and reflected in the relationships between Turkey and the West.

[*Discourse N5*] - The countries in the Black Sea region view Russian revisionism as the primary threat to stability, which all nations in the area are striving to uphold at any cost. This perspective forms the basis for a shared strategic vision among Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Western nations. Turkey is notably focused on balancing Russian influence in its neighbourhood in the South Caucasus.

[*Discourse N6*] - Strengthening NATO's presence in the Black Sea region relies on enhancing the Eastern and Black Sea flanks. Turkey serves as NATO's main stronghold in this area, having initiated and supported the region's integration process into the alliance. Since 2014, Turkey has invested significantly in its armed forces and has bolstered security cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, including their efforts to join NATO. However, Turkey's inclination to pursue an independent and autonomous foreign policy often leads to conflicts with NATO's objectives. This situation raises an important political discourse: [*Discourse N7*] - Is Turkey a pillar of support for NATO in the Black Sea, or does it act as an obstructive force?

[*Discourse N8*] – The countries in the Black Sea region have concentrated on enhancing cooperation and integration. To establish a new security architecture for the area, it is essential to revitalize regional cooperation formats. In this context, Turkey should assume the “role of a central state” in the Black Sea's security policy. Additionally, the influence of non-regional actors should be limited as negotiations with regional states continue.

[*Discourse N9*] – The states in the Black Sea region have varying perceptions of threats, which poses a significant obstacle to realizing common interests. For Georgia, the primary security challenge is the restoration of its territorial integrity, and it views membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations as a top priority to achieve this goal. For Turkey, the key concern is balancing and containing Russian influence in the region. Turkey sees the Ukraine-Russia war as an isolated regional conflict, irrespective of its broader implications for the global order.

## **Conclusion**

In the main section of this paper, we have examined the security policy discourses that shape the formation of foreign and security policies. This analysis includes insights from official documents and strategies, as well as statements made by high-ranking diplomats. By exploring these political discourses, we can identify the key opinions and perspectives that

will guide the implementation of future security policies and determine which states will adopt them as a foundation for their approaches. There is no single optimal opinion on this matter. The discussions mentioned earlier stem from empirical analysis and can be applied to various states, particularly concerning Georgia's national interests and security policy. It is crucial to address the fragmented security architecture in the region, focusing on peace, stability, and development. Georgia's foreign security policy is balanced, rational, and pragmatic, taking into account modern security challenges. This approach aligns with the establishment of cooperation formats and mechanisms among the Black Sea region states, complementing NATO's efforts and involving Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. To enhance maritime and military cooperation, it is important to develop individual action plans that are coordinated with NATO. Thus, exploring the idea of new cooperation models in the Black Sea region, given the current security environment, is valuable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Black Sea Security Dynamics in the Age of Uncertainties - [https://trendsresearch.org/publication/black-sea-security-dynamics-in-the-age-of-uncertainties/?srsltid=AfmBOoqCHl2GmpF-0\\_ZVaSKr4jDWR4J\\_LgrTR-tFlF5Gk4zI0TW2nd8](https://trendsresearch.org/publication/black-sea-security-dynamics-in-the-age-of-uncertainties/?srsltid=AfmBOoqCHl2GmpF-0_ZVaSKr4jDWR4J_LgrTR-tFlF5Gk4zI0TW2nd8) (Accessed Date: 19.11.2024)

# The Geopolitical Significance of the South Caucasus and the Middle Corridor for the European Union's Energy Security

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## **Abstract**

The South Caucasus is crucial to Europe's energy security, serving as a vital link between the Old continent and the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Since the onset of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the geopolitical importance of the South Caucasus has grown significantly. In response to extensive sanctions imposed on Russia and the EU's efforts to reduce its energy dependence on Moscow, European nations are actively seeking alternative energy sources. In this context, the South Caucasus stands out as a key player in enhancing the EU's energy security.

A vitally important transcontinental economic and trade route runs through the South Caucasus, the so-called "Middle Corridor". The Middle Corridor has the potential to serve as a crucial bridge between Europe and Asia, particularly if large-scale infrastructure projects are executed and the corridor's capacity is significantly enhanced. With Europe lacking sufficient energy resources and the Northern Corridor through Russia rendered ineffective since the onset of the war in Ukraine, the development of this transcontinental route has become essential for the West. The Middle Corridor can play a pivotal role in helping the EU navigate the energy crisis and reduce its reliance on Russian energy supplies.

The development of the Middle Corridor is a complex and time-intensive endeavor that necessitates substantial financial resources and investments in key infrastructure projects, including the construction of railways, roads, and seaports. Countries along the Middle Corridor have begun to improve their transport and communication infrastructure, but they still lack the capacity to move large volumes of goods through their territories. These countries should join efforts to jointly overcome infrastructure problems and agree on common tariffs and regulations.

While the Middle Corridor holds great promise, significant work remains to establish it as a globally important economic and trade route. To facilitate the swift and efficient transport of Central Asian energy resources to Europe, the European Union should prioritize the development of trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines, along with the construction of trade routes across the Caspian Sea. The development of these projects is crucial for Europe's energy security. If implemented effectively, they will enable the EU to reduce its dependence on Russian energy and diversify its supply routes.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, The Middle Corridor, European energy security, Trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines, energy infrastructure

## Introduction

### Emergence of the energy crisis in Europe

Before the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Europe was heavily reliant on gas supplies from the Russian Federation. But, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has completely transformed the natural gas supply landscape of Europe and fundamentally altered the EU's energy policy. The large-scale military aggression and extensive sanctions imposed on Russia have significantly affected the energy security of the European Union, triggering an energy crisis across Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, Russia has become one of the primary suppliers of essential energy resources for Europe. That is why the disruption of energy supplies from Russia has put Europe in front of great challenges and threats. The heavy industry of Europe, which for decades depended on cheap energy resources from Russia, was particularly affected by the energy crisis. Many large enterprises and businesses were closed due to the surge in energy prices.

Over the past few decades, the European Union has become so reliant on inexpensive Russian oil and gas that Moscow has started to leverage this dependence to exert pressure on European countries. Europe became vulnerable to Russia's coercive policies and found itself in a severe energy crisis. The recent energy crisis in Europe clearly illustrates the Kremlin's use of energy resources as a political weapon to coerce European countries.

The sharp reduction in natural gas imports from Russia has had a profound impact on energy prices across Europe. With Russia's position as a dominant supplier severely diminished, wholesale gas prices on the European market have soared to unprecedented levels. This, in turn, has driven a dramatic increase in the cost of electricity generation, making power significantly more expensive for consumers. The energy crisis has been particularly acute during the winter months, when European households' demand for heating and electricity usage typically peaks. Facing skyrocketing utility bills, millions of citizens across the EU have found it increasingly challenging to afford basic energy needs for their homes.

The emergence of this widespread "cost-of-living" crisis has compelled European governments to intervene with various forms of financial support and subsidies. Many countries, including Germany, France, Spain, and Portugal, have allocated emergency funds to assist vulnerable households and critical industrial sectors that have been most severely affected by the rise in energy prices.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferriani Emiliozzi, Gazzani, „The European energy crisis and the consequences for the global natural gas market,“ Available from World Wide Web:<https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/european-energy-crisis-and-consequences-global-natural-gas-market>, 2024 y.

The political elite of the European Union suddenly realized that certain steps must be taken to strengthen Europe's energy security. A substantial portion of the political elite believes that the primary cause of the current crisis is the rushed transition to green energy in Europe's industrialized countries. The necessity of the policy itself is not in doubt, as it addresses a critical problem facing humanity during times of global warming. But the hasty and unplanned implementation of this policy inflicted enormous economic damage on the highly industrialized countries of Europe. Germany serves as a prime example, where the simultaneous closure of coal-fired and nuclear power plants triggered an energy crisis and contributed to a recession. In France, nuclear power plants provide more than 70% of the country's electricity production. If France follows the example of Germany and decides to close all nuclear power plants, economic collapse will be inevitable. It has become evident that the current capacities of renewable wind and hydropower are insufficient to meet the energy needs of millions of European citizens. This is why the French government advocates for nuclear energy to be classified as "green energy."<sup>2</sup>

The European Union is actively seeking alternative energy sources to decrease its reliance on Russian hydrocarbons. European countries have begun purchasing liquefied natural gas from the United States, which is significantly more expensive than Russian gas. This shift has led to increased costs for manufactured goods across Europe. Since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the consumption of liquefied natural gas in Europe has surged, prompting highly industrialized countries to begin constructing relevant terminals at European ports.

In 2022, the export of liquefied natural gas from the United States to Europe increased by 2.5 times compared to the previous year, reaching 117.4 million cubic meters. By the end of 2022, the EU had become the world's largest buyer of liquefied natural gas, surpassing China, Japan, and South Korea. According to statistics from the International Energy Agency, American liquefied natural gas surpassed Gazprom's gas in Europe for the first time. As a result, USA emerged as a significant player in the European energy market.<sup>3</sup>

However, Europeans are aware that the liquefied natural gas is too expensive and they have to find cheap resources and new energy supply routes. Long-term reliance on expensive liquefied gas can be harmful for the European economy and Europeans have to find new suppliers urgently.

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<sup>2</sup>ჯაბა დევდარიანი, „რისი ბრალია ევროპის ენერჯოკრიზისი,“ available from World Wide Web: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/450295>, 2021 წ.

<sup>3</sup> International Energy Agency, „Gas Market Report,Q1-2024,“ Available From World Wide Web:<https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/601bff14-5d9b-4fef-8ecc-d7b2e8e7449a/GasMarketReportQ12024.pdf>, 2024 წ.

The long-term impact of the war in Ukraine on Europe's security landscape is substantial. The fundamental shifts in the continental power dynamics and the vulnerabilities revealed in the energy sector will require a comprehensive rethinking of Europe's security architecture and energy policy frameworks. Navigating this new reality will be a complex and challenging endeavor for the EU and its transatlantic allies in the years to come.

The energy crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities inherent in Europe's over-reliance on a single, unreliable supplier. It underscores the urgent need for the European Union to diversify its energy supply routes and expedite the construction of trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines. This crisis in Europe's energy security has far-reaching ramifications. It has highlighted the necessity for the EU to swiftly diversify its energy sources and expedite the development of the Middle Corridor. The pursuit of energy independence from Russian hydrocarbons has become a critical strategic priority for the EU. Consequently, it is seeking to establish a presence in the energy-rich regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Addressing this energy crisis and creating a more secure, sustainable, and diversified energy landscape will be a top priority for the European Union in the coming years. Tackling this challenge will necessitate substantial investments in the Middle Corridor, strategic policy reforms, and strong collaboration with the Caucasian and Central Asian states. A sustainable solution to this urgent issue will involve strengthening partnerships with energy-rich regions, especially in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as making substantial investments in the development of the Middle Corridor.

## **Main Part**

### **Why Caucasus matters - The geopolitical significance of the South Caucasus**

The South Caucasus plays a crucial role in ensuring European energy security. Located at the intersection of Europe and Asia, the South Caucasus acts as an essential link, facilitating Europe's access to the energy-rich Caspian Sea basin, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Often called Europe's "Energy Corridor," this region offers a crucial land route for transporting hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia to European markets. With substantial reserves of oil and natural gas, it has become a key player in energy geopolitics

The South Caucasus's strategic position has made it an essential route for transporting hydrocarbons from resource-rich areas to European markets. This area is home to



substantial reserves of oil and natural gas, which are becoming increasingly important for reducing Europe's dependence on Russian energy imports.<sup>4</sup>

According to estimates from the United States Department of State, the Caspian Sea basin holds approximately 5 percent of the world's probable oil resources and around 6 percent of the global proven natural gas reserves. The substantial energy potential of the Caspian region has been a major factor driving geopolitical competition and underscoring the strategic significance of the South Caucasus in recent decades. The abundant hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea basin, especially in countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, have drawn the interest of major global powers eager to secure access to these essential energy resources.

It is estimated that the Caspian Sea region holds around 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proven and probable reserves.<sup>5</sup> This positions it as one of the most resource-rich basins globally, rivaling the Persian Gulf in terms of hydrocarbon potential. With the launch of large-scale energy projects in the Caspian Sea, the region has gained a new geostrategic significance, drawing the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of major world powers. Experts predict that global oil demand will significantly increase by 2030, reaching 110 to 113 million barrels per day. Consequently, leading countries are making substantial capital investments in this energy-rich region.<sup>6</sup>

The capacity to access and transport Caspian energy resources to global markets has been a pivotal factor in shaping the geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus. The development of extensive energy infrastructure, including pipeline networks such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa oil pipelines, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and the Southern Gas Corridor, has facilitated the swift and efficient transportation of energy resources from the Caspian and Central Asian regions to European countries. These projects have played a critical role in diversifying Europe's energy supply routes, enhancing energy security, and reducing reliance on Russian gas and oil.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, these projects have greatly enhanced the geopolitical significance of the energy-rich South Caucasus region, transforming it into a vital energy hub for Europe. The

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<sup>4</sup> ვალერი მოდებაძე, „ევროკავშირის უსაფრთხოება და გამოწვევები კავკასიის რეგიონში,“ საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო კონფერენცია: „ევროკავშირთან ასოცირების შეთანხმება: სამართლებრივი, პოლიტიკური და ეკონომიკური ასპექტები“, კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი და საინფორმაციო ცენტრი ნატოსა და ევროკავშირის შესახებ, თბილისი, 2016 წ.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, „Overview of oil and natural gas in the Caspian Sea region,“ Available From World Wide Web: [https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/regions\\_of\\_interest/caspian\\_sea/](https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/regions_of_interest/caspian_sea/), 2013 y.

<sup>6</sup> ნიკა ჩიტაძე, *გეოპოლიტიკა*, გამომცემლობა „უნივერსალი“, თბილისი, 2011 წ.

<sup>7</sup> Valeri Modebadze, Fatih Mehmet Sayin, „Georgian –Turkish Relations Since the Breakdown of the Soviet Union,“ Journal of The Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Volume 4, Issue 1, pp.359-369, Çankırı Karatekin University, Turkey. Available from World Wide Web: <https://library.dogus.edu.tr/mvt/pdf.php>, 2014 y.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa oil pipelines have been instrumental in transporting Caspian Sea energy resources from Azerbaijan to European markets while bypassing Russian-controlled routes. These pipelines have facilitated the diversification of Europe's oil supply, thereby reducing dependence on Russian imports.

Similarly, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Gas Pipeline, also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline, has enabled the delivery of natural gas from the Shah Deniz field in Azerbaijan to Turkey and further into European markets via the Southern Gas Corridor. This multibillion-dollar initiative, comprising several interconnected pipelines, has been a game-changer for European energy security. By accessing the substantial gas reserves of the Caspian Sea basin, this infrastructure has significantly improved Europe's access to alternative natural gas sources, further diminishing reliance on Russian gas imports.

The aforementioned pipeline projects have turned the South Caucasus into a key energy transit hub, connecting the resource-rich areas of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea with European consumers. This progress has increased the region's geopolitical significance, establishing it as an essential junction for energy flows between the East and the West.

In 2022, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, convened with the President of Azerbaijan in Baku to sign a new "Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy." This agreement seeks to strengthen collaboration between Azerbaijan and the European Union in the energy domain. Both sides agreed to enhance the transit capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor. As part of this agreement, Azerbaijan is committed to doubling its natural gas supply to Europe, delivering a minimum of 20 billion cubic meters to the EU by 2027.<sup>8</sup> This agreement could play a very important role in reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

In 2022, European and Caucasian nations signed a memorandum of understanding to advance the development of the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable. On December 17, 2022, the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary formalized a strategic cooperation agreement aimed at the development and transmission of green energy. The above-mentioned countries agreed to create a Black Sea submarine cable that will supply European Union with Solar and wind energy. Upon completion of this project, a 1,195-kilometer cable will connect Romania with the Caucasian states, consisting of 1,100 kilometers of underwater cable and 95 kilometers of terrestrial cable. This infrastructure will enable enhanced energy cooperation between the countries of the South Caucasus and

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<sup>8</sup> Commonsplace, eu EU and Azerbaijan seal strategic partnership agreement on energy security, <https://www.commonspace.eu/node/11502>, 2022 y .

Romania.<sup>9</sup> This project represents a significant advancement in the diversification of the European Union's energy supply routes. In the long term, it can ensure the supply of green energy and electricity to European countries. If it will be properly implemented, it could bring the energy security, political and economic stability to European countries, as well as to Georgia and Caucasian states.

Given its strategic geographic position as a bridge between Europe and Asia, the South Caucasus has emerged as a battleground for geopolitical rivalry, with regional and global powers competing for influence in the area. This region is where the geopolitical interests of the West and Russia converge. While the West tries to gain a foothold in this energy-rich region, the Kremlin is sparing no effort to bring the Caucasus states back into Russia's orbit. The Kremlin continues to regard the post-Soviet space as its traditional sphere of influence and views the South Caucasus as its backyard, striving to maintain dominance over the region's energy resources. Russia aims to become the sole supplier of hydrocarbons to the West and is actively working to exert firm control over the energy-rich areas of the post-Soviet landscape. It perceives the West as a geopolitical competitor in the South Caucasus and is determined to prevent the region from falling under the influence of the European Union. Moscow views the development of alternative energy pipelines that circumvent Russian-controlled routes as a direct threat to its geopolitical influence and economic interests in the region. To maintain its dominance over the South Caucasus, Russia has implemented a classic "divide and conquer" strategy, aiming to assert control over this strategically significant area through frozen conflicts and military engagements.<sup>10</sup>

Frozen conflicts and wars pose significant challenges to the security of this region and could pose a threat to the uninterrupted flow of energy resources to Europe. Disruptions to energy infrastructure or supply routes could have serious consequences for European energy security. To address the risks posed by the unstable geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus, the European Union has sought to strengthen its engagement with the countries in the region. The EU is actively involved in conflict resolution efforts and aims to prevent the emergence of new conflicts in this energy-rich area. A key initiative in this regard has been the establishment of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia. Deployed following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the EUMM has been instrumental in monitoring the security situation on the ground and in helping to avert new conflicts and

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. High-level Meeting on Black Sea Submarine Cable Project Held in Tbilisi, <https://www.economy.ge/?page=news&nw=2204>, 2024 y .

<sup>10</sup> Valeri Modebadze, „EU relations with the South Caucasian countries since the breakdown of Soviet Union, 3rd International Scientific Conference - Politics Around Caucasus, Proceedings,“ Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Institute for Georgia's Neighbourhood Studies Tbilisi, 2018 y.

hostilities in the Caucasus. Despite its efforts to regulate Caucasian conflicts, Europeans have only achieved a limited success in this regard. One of the challenges that European Union is facing is the absence of its own military forces, which significantly diminishes its ability to regulate conflicts<sup>11</sup>

Since its establishment, the EU has aimed to enhance regional cooperation and integration within the South Caucasus, acknowledging that improved connectivity and economic interdependence can foster greater stability and security in the region. This effort includes supporting infrastructure development, promoting trade and investment, and encouraging people-to-people exchanges.

The EU's involvement in the South Caucasus is integral to its broader strategy of deepening partnerships with the Caucasian republics and promoting democratization in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Over the years, the European Union has offered technical and financial assistance, along with political support, helping these countries strengthen their democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law, and align their policies with European standards.

By adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates conflict resolution, regional cooperation initiatives, and broader partnership-building, the European Union aims to foster long-term stability and prosperity in the South Caucasus. This, in turn, is expected to enhance the security and reliability of the region's strategic energy infrastructure, which is vital for Europe's energy diversification and security. Furthermore, the EU recognizes the South Caucasus's potential as a gateway for connecting Europe with Central Asia and the Middle East. The region's strategic location and its involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative have made it a focal point for European investment and infrastructure development efforts, including the TRACECA project and the Eastern Partnership program.

Nevertheless, the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus remains intricate and dynamic. The region's closeness to Russia, Turkey, and Iran, combined with unresolved territorial disputes, continues to shape the strategic environment, offering both opportunities and challenges for European policymakers. Regional conflicts and instability sometimes threaten the uninterrupted flow of energy resources to Europe. The frozen conflicts, as well as tensions between the regional powers, have the potential to disrupt energy infrastructure and supply routes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Valeri Modebadze, „EU relations with the South Caucasian countries since the breakdown of Soviet Union, 3rd International Scientific Conference - Politics Around Caucasus, Proceedings,“ Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Institute for Georgia's Neighbourhood Studies Tbilisi, 2018 y.

Addressing these security challenges and ensuring the continued stability and reliability of the South Caucasus as an energy corridor will be crucial for Europe's long-term energy security. Solving the above-mentioned frozen conflicts will require a multifaceted approach from the EU, involving diplomatic efforts, security cooperation, economic incentives, and capacity-building support for local institutions. For the EU, sustaining a long-term, comprehensive strategy will be essential to effectively manage conflicts and ensure the stability of energy infrastructure in the South Caucasus.

### **Why the Middle Corridor matters - the role of middle corridor in enhancing Europe's energy security**

With Europe's increasing reliance on energy resources from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, the Middle Corridor is expected to become an essential route for the continent's future energy security.

The Middle Corridor refers to the transportation and logistics network connecting two continents – Europe and Asia. It is a transcontinental trade and economic route, which provides an alternative to the Northern Corridor, reducing Europe's reliance on Russian-controlled energy resources. Amid growing concerns over the reliability and security of the established Southern Corridor and Northern Corridor, the European Union has turned its focus towards developing the Middle Corridor as a strategic alternative.

The Southern Corridor, a maritime route linking China to Europe, has encountered significant geopolitical tensions and instability since the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East, jeopardizing its reliability as a supply route for European energy needs. As Somali pirates and Houthi forces intensified their attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea, the West became acutely aware of the corridor's volatility and unpredictability for global trade. Similarly, the Northern Corridor, which traverses Russia, has become increasingly unreliable due to deteriorating relations between the EU and Moscow, particularly following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In response to these developments, the EU has acknowledged the urgent need to diversify its energy supply routes and trade connections. The Middle Corridor, which includes multimodal transportation networks across the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia, has emerged as a promising alternative that could strengthen the EU's energy security and broaden its economic ties with the dynamic markets of the Eurasian region.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Valeri Modebadze, „Challenges Facing Humanity Since the Outbreak of the War in Ukraine,“ LAP – Lambert Academic Publishing, London, 2023 y.

Through its investment in the development of the Middle Corridor, the EU aims to establish a more resilient and geographically varied network of energy pipelines, rail connections, and maritime infrastructure. This initiative is designed to lessen the European Union's susceptibility to geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions, while also promoting enhanced trade, investment, and economic collaboration between Europe and the nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

However, to fully realize the potential of the Middle Corridor, the EU and its partners must tackle several challenges. These include resolving longstanding regional disputes, mobilizing significant financial resources, aligning the interests of diverse stakeholders, and enhancing cross-border coordination and regulatory frameworks. Overcoming these hurdles will be crucial for the Middle Corridor to emerge as a globally significant economic and energy corridor in the years ahead.

Enhancing the Middle Corridor's role as an energy transit route is crucial for Europe's energy diversification and supply security. This initiative can help the European Union navigate the energy crisis and safeguard the continent's energy stability. By securing this corridor, Europe can better shield itself from potential supply shocks or political crises in Russia and neighboring regions.

However, to fully realize the Middle Corridor's potential, significant investments in infrastructure upgrades, along with regional cooperation and political stability in transit countries, are essential. The EU must mobilize financial resources to support the construction of trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines and expand existing pipeline networks. The Southern Gas Corridor urgently needs expansion and modernization to enhance its capacity for transporting natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe. Additionally, the European Union should prioritize the development of new pipelines, such as the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline, which would connect Turkmenistan—and potentially Kazakhstan—to the Southern Gas Corridor.

Furthermore, modernizing and expanding railway infrastructure, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, is essential for the efficient movement of oil, gas, and other commodities along the corridor.

The countries participating in the Middle Corridor initiative are actively working to enhance their transportation and communication infrastructure to bolster the viability and competitiveness of this emerging transcontinental trade and logistics route.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Genevieve Donnellon-May, „Beijing's interest in the Middle Corridor,“ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/beijing-s-interest-middle-corridor>, 2023 y.

Across the region, these nations are making substantial investments in a wide range of infrastructure development projects. New and upgraded port facilities, ferry services, and rail networks are being constructed to improve multimodal connectivity. Furthermore, the countries are collaborating to establish integrated customs and border management procedures, harmonize regulatory frameworks, and align technical standards.<sup>15</sup>

The successful realization of the Middle Corridor's full potential hinges on the development of modern, high-quality infrastructure. Recognizing this imperative, Georgia has decided to undertake significant modernization efforts for its transport and communication systems during 2023-2024. A key focus for Georgia will be the upgrading of its railway network to accommodate the expected surge in cargo volumes transiting through the country. By modernizing its rail infrastructure, Georgia aims to ensure that its transport capabilities can effectively meet the growing freight demands of the Middle Corridor, which is poised to double in capacity in the coming years.<sup>16</sup>

Georgia also plans to build a deep-sea port in Anaklia to transport more cargo to European countries. Georgia currently lacks deep-water seaports capable of handling large cargo vessels. The Anaklia Deep Sea Port project is considered a revolutionary initiative that will significantly boost Georgia's transit potential and capacity. The Anaklia port is designed to be a modern, deep-water facility capable of accommodating the largest container ships and bulk cargo vessels. Once completed, the Anaklia port will play a crucial role in connecting two continents – Europe and Asia. This will give Georgia greater flexibility and competitiveness in facilitating the movement of goods between Europe and Asia.

Additionally, the Anaklia project is expected to drive broader economic development in the surrounding region, creating new jobs and business opportunities related to logistics, warehousing, and other port-dependent industries. It will also strengthen Georgia's position as a regional logistics and transit hub, potentially drawing increased foreign investment and trade flows.

These infrastructure enhancement initiatives across the Middle Corridor countries demonstrate their commitment to transforming this transcontinental route into a globally competitive and efficient logistics network. By implementing targeted investments, harmonizing regulations, and enhancing cross-border coordination, the countries are establishing a solid foundation for the Middle Corridor to emerge as a viable alternative to

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<sup>15</sup> Valeri Modebadze, „Challenges Facing Humanity Since the Outbreak of the War in Ukraine,“ LAP – Lambert Academic Publishing, London, 2023 y.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the existing Northern and Southern Corridor options. This effort aims to diversify supply chains and trade routes between Europe and Asia.<sup>17</sup>

The development of the Middle Corridor is also backed by international organizations, including the European Union, which views it as a strategic priority for diversifying transportation routes and enhancing economic ties with the Eurasian region.

Despite all the above-mentioned efforts, outdated infrastructure and regional tensions can severely hinder the effective development of the Middle Corridor. Frozen conflicts in the Caucasus could reignite at any moment, potentially delaying the implementation of major projects in the region. For instance, the ongoing frozen conflicts in Georgia and the border disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan serve as pertinent examples.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, old and poor-quality infrastructure could significantly delay the transportation of energy resources to Europe. One of the problems that the Caucasian and Central Asian states face is poor transportation and communication systems and a shortage of wagons. Central Asian republics and Caucasian countries do not have sufficient number of wagons to carry large amount of cargo from Asia to Europe.<sup>19</sup> Due to the lack of adequate transportation and communication infrastructure, the cargo transportation process is often significantly delayed. The absence of adequate infrastructure also impedes the transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea.<sup>20</sup>

The Middle Corridor cannot be effectively implemented without strong cooperation and coordination at both national and regional levels. No single country acting unilaterally can adequately address the various infrastructure deficiencies and communication challenges that currently hinder the corridor's full potential.

Improving the Middle Corridor requires a collective, multilateral approach involving the countries along the route, including Central Asian and Caucasian states. These nations must work together to streamline customs and border crossing procedures, harmonize technical standards, and invest in upgrading and expanding critical transportation infrastructure such as railways, ports, and logistics hubs.

Outdated and fragmented infrastructure has long been a major impediment to the Middle Corridor's efficiency and competitiveness as a viable alternative to the established

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Valeri Modebadze

<sup>18</sup> Chang, Felix K. The Middle Corridor through Central Asia: Trade and Influence Ambitions. Foreign Policy Research Institute. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/02/the-middle-corridor-through-central-asia-trade-and-influence-ambitions/>, 2023 y.

<sup>19</sup> ლუკა პერტაია, „საქართველო „შუა დერეფანში“ - ჩინეთსა და ევროპას შორის,“ რადიო თავისუფლება, 2023 y.

<sup>20</sup> Meray Ozat, Haley Nelson, „The Middle Corridor: The Beginning of the End for Russia's Northern Corridor? Caspian Policy Center,“ <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/energy-and-economy-program-eeep/the-middle-corridor-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-russias-northern-corridor>, 2023 y.



northern and southern routes connecting Europe and Asia. Addressing these physical constraints will be essential to enhancing the corridor's cargo capacity, transit times, and overall reliability.

Furthermore, strengthening communication and information-sharing mechanisms between the participating countries is crucial. Coordinating policies, regulations, and operational protocols can help create a more integrated and seamless multimodal transportation network across the region.

Only through joint and cooperative efforts can the nations of the South Caucasus and Central Asia fully realize the strategic and economic potential of the Middle Corridor. The European Union intends to invest billions of euros to improve the transport network and infrastructure in both Central Asian and Caucasian countries. Furthermore, the EU is actively engaged in mediating conflicts in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. European leaders understand that the successful implementation of large-scale projects in this region depends on political stability. Persistent ethnic conflicts and wars in the South Caucasus present significant threats to the European Union's energy security, as these tensions generate instability and increase the risk of supply disruptions. The EU aims to promote long-term peace in this turbulent region.<sup>21</sup> Effectively navigating the complex geopolitics of the South Caucasus and managing potential conflicts will be crucial challenges for the EU in the years ahead.

To address these challenges, the EU should pursue a multi-pronged approach that includes diplomatic engagement, financial support for infrastructure projects, and efforts to promote regional cooperation and conflict resolution. Securing the Middle Corridor is a long-term task that will require the development of credible peace initiatives and a deep understanding of the region's complexities.

## Conclusion

The Middle Corridor is a strategically significant project for the European Union, enabling European countries to decrease their reliance on Russian energy resources while providing access to alternative energy supply routes. This corridor allows Europe to gain access to the world's energy-rich regions and vast hydrocarbon resources, which are becoming increasingly important for the stable functioning of the European economy.

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<sup>21</sup> ვალერი მოდებაძე, „ევროკავშირის უსაფრთხოება და გამოწვევები კავკასიის რეგიონში,“ საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო კონფერენცია: „ევროკავშირთან ასოცირების შეთანხმება: სამართლებრივი, პოლიტიკური და ეკონომიკური ასპექტები“, კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი და საინფორმაციო ცენტრი ნატოსა და ევროკავშირის შესახებ, თბილისი, 2016;



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# Turkey's Evolving Role in the Middle East and South Caucasus: Implications for Regional Security

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## **Abstract**

Turkey's geopolitical role and influence in ongoing regional processes in the Middle East and the South Caucasus are increasingly active. The strategic location of the Republic of Turkey, along with its historical legacy and military-political resources, enables it to exert significant military, political, economic, and cultural influence on developments in these regions. Turkey is actively working to expand its influence through energy policies, as well as military, economic, and cultural factors, including through multilateral international partnerships. Regional projects, such as the Trans-Anatolian and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines, enable Turkey to engage actively in Europe's energy security processes, while military and political cooperation with Azerbaijan, particularly regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, strengthens Turkey's regional positions. The Republic of Turkey also aims to reduce the threat of Kurdish separatism, which is reflected in its intensified military operations in Syria and Iraq. Turkey has reinforced its relations with Western states and NATO; however, the growing influence of Russia and Iran in the region has increased Turkey's readiness to reassess and reevaluate its security policy. In the South Caucasus and the Middle East, Turkey actively seeks to enhance its military, political, and energy roles through the development of multilateral international relations, economic cooperation, and by positioning itself as an energy hub.

**Keywords:** Security, Geopolitics, Energy, Strategic Partnership, National Interests.

## **Introduction**

In today's dynamic geopolitical arena, Turkey has become a key state in both the Middle East and the South Caucasus regions. Due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Turkey has historically sought to extend its political, economic, cultural, and military-political influence over neighboring regions. Although Turkey's geopolitical role is significantly influenced by both internal and external factors, in recent years, we have observed a marked increase in the country's influence in political, economic, and military-political terms. This trend is reinforced by Turkey's political activities in the region, which, in turn, reflect on the dynamics of regional processes and security.

The gradual rise of Turkey's role and its transformation into a regional power impact the ongoing processes in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Turkey's political elite aims to ensure national security, economic stability, and the expansion of its geopolitical influence. To achieve these strategic goals, Turkey employs a complex set of measures, including military-political tools, energy-related projects, international and regional economic cooperation formats, and educational-cultural initiatives.

## **Main Part**

### **Retrospective Analysis of Turkey's Geopolitical Role**

As the successor of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has historically been involved in the processes shaping the Middle East and the Caucasus. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the newly established Turkish Republic was significantly influenced by longstanding territorial and political rivalries. Initially focused on internal unity, border security, international legitimacy, and avoiding military-political conflicts in regional matters, the young Turkish Republic under Atatürk's modernization policies set its sights on stabilizing itself.

For centuries, the Ottoman Empire served as a major geopolitical power, with military-political influence extending over the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. The empire's dissolution led to political and social transformations in these regions, spurring the formation of new national identities and republics. Turkey's establishment as an independent republic altered the regional geopolitical landscape. Atatürk's reforms, aimed at modernizing Turkey and introducing European models, initially encouraged an isolationist policy, distancing Turkey from Middle Eastern and Caucasian issues.

During the Cold War, Turkey, as a NATO member, played a crucial role in the unified strategy to contain Soviet influence. With the growth of Soviet influence, Turkey strengthened its military-political ties with Western nations and allowed NATO military

bases on its soil. This circumstance defined Turkey's geopolitical stance during the Cold War.

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened unprecedented opportunities for Turkey in the region. Turkey actively began to deepen military-political, economic, and cultural relations with the South Caucasus and Central Asian states. In particular, Turkey developed close political and economic cooperation with Azerbaijan, playing a significant role in Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the restoration of its territorial integrity. Turkey strongly supports the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan and promotes regional/international energy projects, aiming to position itself as a regional energy hub while enhancing its influence on military-political and economic processes in the South Caucasus.

After the dissolution of the USSR, Caspian Sea energy resources gained special importance for Turkey. This factor facilitated the implementation of regional projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, active participation in the geopolitical project of the Middle Corridor, and others<sup>1</sup>. All these efforts position Turkey as a key player in the European energy market. These and other factors contribute to Turkey's strengthened positions in the region, increasing its influence on the political, economic, and military spheres of South Caucasus countries.

### **Military-Political Aspects in Turkey's Foreign Policy**

Turkey's role in today's geopolitical environment has significantly expanded. In recent years, Turkish authorities have focused intensively on conflict regions in the Middle East and South Caucasus, driven by national security, economic, and political interests rooted in Turkey's "National Pact" doctrine<sup>2</sup>. In implementing its foreign policy, Turkey actively engages in military and political involvement closely linked to its NATO alliance membership and regional dominance strategy. This is particularly evident in Turkey's foreign policy interests concerning ongoing issues in Syria and Iraq. From the onset of Syria's civil war, Turkey adopted an anti-Assad stance. The Syrian crisis has posed serious security challenges for Turkey, associated with the rise in terrorist activities, the strengthening of Kurdish armed groups, the emergence of a potential Kurdish regional

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<sup>1</sup> K. Putkaradze, T. Jorzholiani, „Security challenges and prospects in the South Caucasus against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war" p. 112 Tbilisi, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> U. UZER, "IDENTITY AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY The Kemalist Influence in Cyprus and the Caucasus, New York, ." International Journal of Middle East Studies 17, 2011.

autonomy, and migration problems. These factors have accelerated Turkey's active military-political involvement in the crisis<sup>3</sup>.

Turkey's military operations in northern Syria aimed to establish a so-called "safe zone" - a buffer area along the Turkish-Syrian border, where ethnic Kurds would leave and pro-Turkey Syrian migrants could resettle. To achieve this strategy, Turkey conducted several military operations: *Euphrates Shield* (2016), *Olive Branch* (2018), and *Peace Spring* (2019)<sup>4</sup>. Officially, these operations were part of Turkey's security policy, aimed at reducing terrorist threats and facilitating refugee return to Syrian territory<sup>5</sup>. Turkey views Kurdish armed groups, especially the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), as a direct threat to its national security, and thus its goal is to neutralize Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, Turkey seeks to expand its military-political and economic influence while promoting a policy of "Turkification" in these areas<sup>6</sup>. Regarding the Kurdish issue, Turkey actively seeks political support from NATO, which it considers a security guarantor. However, due to differing stances on the Kurdish issue among NATO member states, Turkey often acts independently, which exacerbates both Turkish-Western tensions and regional conflict.

In its foreign policy, Turkey largely relies on bilateral and multilateral relationships and partnerships. On one hand, Turkey is actively involved in NATO operations; on the other hand, it strives to strengthen regional ties independently. In its relationship with NATO, Turkey is heavily involved in the organization's strategic activities. Turkey's geopolitical location enhances its special role within NATO. Although there have been periodic tensions in Turkey-NATO relations (e.g., due to Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems and its close cooperation with Russia),<sup>7</sup> Turkey's commitment to the alliance remains a cornerstone of regional stability.

In terms of regional cooperation, Turkey and Azerbaijan share a close military-political strategic partnership, which is distinguished by its strategic foundation, rooted in the slogan expressed by Heydar Aliyev in 1999 in Istanbul: "One nation, two states."<sup>8</sup> As a strong ally, Turkey supports Azerbaijan's independence and territorial integrity. In the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Turkey provided Azerbaijan with active support militarily,

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<sup>3</sup> A. Demirdas, „The Turkish Foreign Policy Under The Justice And Development Party (AKP): A Paradigm Shift?“, University of South Carolina, p. 145, (2015).

<sup>4</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774, 3rd edition*,. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Demirdas A., (2015)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A. Coşkun, S. Ülgen, *Political Change and Turkey's Foreign Policy*, 2022



politically, and economically. This support enhances Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus, exemplifying military-political partnership. Furthermore, Turkey's development of military infrastructure, including establishing military bases, conducting joint exercises, supporting modernization of armed forces, and exporting Turkish military products, reinforces Turkey's military strength and extends its influence over neighboring states. A noteworthy example is Turkey's strategic military-political cooperation with Qatar, where Turkey has stationed military forces, emphasizing Turkey's growing interest in regional affairs and its expanding influence in the region.

#### **Turkey's energy and economic policy and its impact on regional politics and security.**

Turkey's energy policy is a significant aspect of regional security. Its geopolitical position and proximity to energy-rich countries—such as those in the Caspian Sea region and the Middle East—enhance its strategic potential as a transit hub. In recent years, Turkey has actively invested in energy infrastructure development, aiming to establish itself as a central energy hub, gathering resources from the Middle East, the Caspian Basin, and Russia. This strategy includes the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, one of Turkey's first and most important energy projects. Operational since 2006, the BTC pipeline facilitates the transport of Azerbaijani oil from the Caspian Basin through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea<sup>9</sup>. This project provides Turkey not only with economic benefits but also strengthens its geopolitical status. As a connector between Europe and Asia, Turkey has become an essential energy corridor through the BTC, granting it a role as a regional leader. The BTC pipeline reflects Turkey's successful cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia, which enhances energy security for all three countries and elevates their geopolitical positions.

Turkey's energy and economic policy and its impact on regional dynamics deserve particular attention, especially regarding the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) project. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) enables Azerbaijan to transport gas from the Shah Deniz field towards Europe via Georgia and Turkey. Along with the South Caucasus and Trans-Adriatic Pipelines, this project forms an integrated network of the Southern Gas Corridor. Through TANAP, Turkey receives 6 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Azerbaijan, with an additional 10 billion cubic meters delivered to Europe. This supply connects to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, which annually transports 10 billion cubic meters of gas to Greece, Albania, and Italy.<sup>10</sup> TANAP promotes energy diversification in Europe and reduces dependency on Russian gas, positioning Turkey as a

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<sup>9</sup> K. Putkaradze, T. Jorzholiani, „Security challenges and prospects in the South Caucasus against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war" p. 116-122, Tbilisi, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> From website, Gakharia participated in the inauguration of the TANAP project in Turkey, 02/12/2019, <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/329990>,

key player in Europe's energy security strategy. TANAP is another successful example of the energy and political partnership between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, accelerating Turkey's transformation into an energy hub and strengthening its position in regional politics.

Currently, Turkey is heavily dependent on imported energy resources, which drives the political elite's goal of increasing energy independence and diversifying the energy sector. For this reason, Turkey has recently allocated significant resources to explore energy resources in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions, aiming to discover domestic resources and bolster energy independence<sup>11</sup>.

Turkey's energy policy significantly impacts regional processes and security. Its focus on energy transit and energy independence policies is transforming Turkey into a regional player, expanding its military-political, economic, and cultural influence. This shift, in turn, increases Turkey's political impact on neighboring states. In this regard, Turkey's support for various infrastructure projects is notable. Turkey is actively involved in developing passenger and freight transportation infrastructure in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. One of the most significant projects is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, which connects Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. This project not only reduces transportation time but also strengthens Turkey's role as a transit hub and creates new opportunities for both economic and strategic cooperation.

Turkey's economic policy and active participation in regional trade processes are also key factors. Free trade agreements in the region are crucial for Turkey, facilitating its export-oriented policy. Such agreements extend Turkey's economic dominance in economically weaker neighboring states, increasing their economic dependence on Turkey. Turkey maintains close economic ties with South Caucasus countries, especially Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the nations of Central Asia. Turkey has signed multiple free trade agreements with various countries and regional blocs, including those in Europe, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. These agreements promote improved trade-economic relations and bolster Turkey's role in strengthening regional economic security and stability.

### **Turkey's Regional Policy and Security Challenges**

Regional security issues hold a significant place in Turkey's geopolitical strategy. The complex conflicts in neighboring countries increase both domestic and external threats for Turkey. In recent years, Turkey's political, military, and economic policies have directly influenced security in the Middle East and the South Caucasus.

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<sup>11</sup> T. Tskhovrebadze, K. Putkaradze, Z. Zerekidze, „Rethinking European Security: the Strategic Nexus after Russian-Ukraine War”, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, Vol.9, No. 3, 2023.

Conflicts in the South Caucasus pose a serious security issue for Turkey, further intensified by its strong support for Azerbaijan. Turkey's growing military and political involvement in the region is directly linked to its goals of safeguarding strategic interests and strengthening regional security. Turkey's military-political support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has bolstered Azerbaijan's regional standing, impacting security dynamics in the South Caucasus. Turkey regularly conducts military exercises and actively collaborates with Azerbaijan and Georgia on the acquisition of Turkish military equipment and dual-use technology. These exercises, along with military education support and arms exports, reflect Turkey's policy aimed at establishing regional dominance in the South Caucasus while seeking to reduce Western and Russian influence.

In this context, Turkey-Russia relations are noteworthy. Despite a history of geopolitical rivalry and a complex past, the two nations have engaged in cooperation across economic, energy, and political spheres, often aligning their regional interests. Both countries appear to share the objective of diminishing Western influence in the South Caucasus, as evidenced by Turkey's proposal for a "3+3" cooperation format, though Georgia firmly rejected participation in this platform<sup>12</sup>. Despite specific areas of cooperation, strategic disagreements exist, particularly regarding Syria and certain processes in the Caucasus, which influence of the regional security architecture.

In Syria, Turkey and Russia support opposing geopolitical forces. Although the 2019 bilateral agreement temporarily eased tensions, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has intensified efforts by both states to increase their military-political influence in the region, negatively impacting regional security dynamics. The two countries also hold differing views on the South Caucasus. While Russia does not openly oppose Turkey's renewed involvement in South Caucasus politics following the Nagorno-Karabakh war, any Turkish-Armenian normalization efforts without Russian participation present a challenge to Russia.

In terms of regional security, Turkey-Iran relations are also significant. Historically, the two states have been regional rivals for dominance. In the current era, relations are marked by pragmatism and rooted in principles of *realpolitik*. Shared interests include cooperation in economics, energy, and Kurdish issues. Iran has considerable influence over regional dynamics, particularly in Syria and Iraq, which directly impacts Turkey's regional policy.

Turkey and Iran have divergent interests in Syria and Iraq, backing different political factions to achieve influence. Iran-backed groups in Syria and Iraq represent a significant

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<sup>12</sup>K. Putkaradze, I. Japaridze, „3+3 cooperation platform in the Caucasus?! Challenges and opportunities for the countries in the region,“ 2022.

threat to Turkey's security and long-term geopolitical strategy, cultivating anti-Iranian sentiment among segments of Turkey's political elite and encouraging closer alignment with the West on Iran-related issues.

One of Turkey's greatest internal and external security challenges remains terrorism and the Kurdish issue. The Turkish government considers the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) a terrorist organization and consistently seeks to neutralize this threat.

### **Conclusion**

Turkey's growing geopolitical role in the Middle East and South Caucasus significantly impacts regional dynamics. Turkey's strategic location enhances its potential to become a primary player in regional security. To achieve this goal, Turkey employs a multifaceted approach, encompassing energy policy, military leverage, cultural-educational cooperation, and economic partnerships. In this context, cooperation in the energy sector is especially crucial. Through the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Turkey seeks to transform into an energy hub and increase its role in Europe's energy security strategy.

Turkey's active involvement in Azerbaijan, strong political and military partnership, and engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict significantly amplify Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus region. Additionally, the complexity of Turkish-Armenian relations and its intricate relationship with Russia are noteworthy. Turkey actively utilizes "soft power" tools, including cultural and educational projects, to promote its influence among neighboring states and encourage regional integration within Turkey's political and economic sphere.

Another characteristic of Turkey's foreign policy is its assertive stance on the Kurdish issue. A fundamental element of its national security strategy is to prevent the establishment of any autonomous Kurdish political entity near its borders and to weaken pro-Kurdish military and political groups. This objective underlies Turkey's active military interventions in Syria and Iraq. Its efforts to establish "security zones" and conduct military operations in northern areas demonstrate Turkey's regional strategy, which focuses not only on internal security but also on reducing threats beyond its borders.

Turkey's geopolitical role is also evident within the context of its relationship with NATO. Despite periodic tensions, such as the acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense system, Turkey plays a crucial role in NATO's regional security and its strategy for securing the Alliance's eastern flank. Through cooperation with Russia and Iran, including the attempt to establish the "3+3" cooperation format, Turkey is pursuing a multi-vector foreign

policy. This approach aims to strengthen Turkey's foreign policy positions in relations with both the West and the East.

*Ultimately*, Turkey's geopolitical strategy and regional involvement reflect its long-term interest in becoming a regional political force with a strong geopolitical presence that encompasses military, economic, political, and cultural influence in its immediate neighborhood. Turkey continues to establish itself as a formidable player, enabling it to protect and develop national interests and enhance its influence over regional politics.

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# Consequences of Ongoing Conflicts in the Middle East on the Caucasus

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## Abstract

This research examines the multifaceted impact of ongoing Middle Eastern conflicts on the Caucasus region. The study analyzes how regional instability in the Middle East, particularly the Syrian Civil War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and tensions between Iran and other regional powers, affects the South Caucasus countries - Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan - as well as the North Caucasus region of Russia.

The research identifies several key areas of impact: security challenges, including the flow of foreign fighters and arms; economic consequences, particularly regarding energy markets and trade routes; humanitarian issues, specifically refugee flows and displacement; and geopolitical implications, especially concerning the shifting balance of power among regional actors. Special attention is paid to how these conflicts influence religious dynamics and ethnic relations within the Caucasus.

Economically, the instability has disrupted trade routes and energy supplies, impacting the Caucasus's role as a transit corridor between Europe and Asia. This study highlights the interconnectedness of these regions, emphasizing that the resolution of conflicts in the Middle East is crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability in the Caucasus. By analyzing these dynamics, the paper aims to provide insights into potential strategies for conflict resolution and regional cooperation, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical landscape.

The analysis reveals that Middle Eastern conflicts have created both challenges and opportunities for Caucasian states, affecting their domestic and foreign policies, security arrangements, and economic strategies. The findings suggest that the interconnectedness of these regions requires a comprehensive approach to regional security and stability, with implications for international policy-making and conflict resolution strategies.

**Keywords:** Middle East, Caucasus, regional security, conflict spillover, geopolitical impact, migration, energy security, religious dynamics

## Introduction

The Middle East has long been a focal point of global geopolitical tensions, shaped by a complex interplay of historical grievances, ethnic divisions, and religious sectarianism. Security in this region is not merely a local concern but resonates across the globe, affecting international relations, economic stability, and humanitarian conditions. This article examines the multifaceted security landscape of the Middle East and explores its far-reaching consequences.

The Middle East, a region at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, has long been a focal point of global geopolitics. Its strategic location, vast energy resources, and complex historical and cultural tapestry have shaped it into a arena of intense international interest and conflict. The region encompasses a diverse array of states, from oil-rich monarchies like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to populous republics such as Egypt and Iran, each vying for influence and security in a volatile environment.<sup>1</sup> Religious divisions, primarily between Sunni and Shia Muslims, often intersect with political rivalries, further complicating the landscape.<sup>2</sup> External powers, notably the United States, Russia, and increasingly China, have consistently sought to shape regional dynamics to their advantage, often exacerbating local tensions.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a central issue, influencing diplomatic relations and regional stability.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings has left several states, including Syria and Libya, in protracted civil conflicts, creating power vacuums that have been exploited by non-state actors and terrorist organizations.<sup>5</sup> This intricate web of competing interests, historical grievances, and external interventions forms the backdrop against which current security challenges in the Middle East must be understood and addressed.

The complex security situation in the Middle East has far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond its geographical boundaries, profoundly impacting regional stability, global politics, and economic systems. This multifaceted crisis, rooted in historical conflicts, religious schisms, and geopolitical rivalries, has created a volatile environment that threatens not only the immediate region but also the broader international order.<sup>6</sup> The ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya have destabilized neighboring countries, leading to unprecedented refugee flows and humanitarian crises that challenge the capacities of both regional and European nations.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the persistent threat of terrorism emanating from the region has compelled nations worldwide to reassess their security policies and international alliances.<sup>8</sup> The intricate web of alliances and enmities in the

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Fawcett, „International Relations of the Middle East,“ 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019 y.

<sup>2</sup>Vali Nasr, „The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future,“ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007 y.

<sup>3</sup>Zbigniew Brzezinski, „The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives,“ New York: Basic Books, 1997 y.

<sup>4</sup>Avi Shlaim, „The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World,“ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014 y.

<sup>5</sup>Marc Lynch, „The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East,“ New York: PublicAffairs, 2016 y.

<sup>6</sup>Louise Fawcett, „International Relations of the Middle East,“ 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019 y.

<sup>7</sup>Pinar Yazgan, Utku Deniz Eroglu and Sirkeci Ibrahim, "Syrian Crisis and Migration." Migration Letters 12, no. 3, 2015 y., 181-192.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel Byman, Warriors Road, „Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad,“ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019 y.

region has also drawn in global powers, reshaping international diplomacy and potentially altering the global balance of power.<sup>9</sup> As such, understanding and addressing the security challenges in the Middle East is not merely a regional imperative but a global necessity, with implications for international peace, economic stability, and the future of global governance.

Due to the fact that the Caucasus region is geographically very close to the Middle East, the processes taking place there are perceived as sensitive to the region and have a direct proportional impact on the security of the South Caucasus and its economic development.

## **Main Part**

### **Historical Context**

The roots of contemporary security issues in the Middle East can be traced back to the colonial legacy, the creation of nation-states, and the subsequent Cold War dynamics. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the Ottoman Empire's territories between Britain and France, laid the groundwork for many of today's conflicts by disregarding ethnic and sectarian identities. The rise of nationalism, combined with the discovery of oil, intensified competition among regional powers and external actors.

### **Legacy of colonialism and arbitrary borders**

The modern geopolitical landscape of the Middle East is inextricably linked to its colonial past, particularly the aftermath of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This period saw the implementation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, a secret accord between Britain and France that effectively carved up the region into spheres of influence with little regard for ethnic, religious, or historical realities on the ground.<sup>10</sup> The arbitrary nature of these borders, drawn primarily to serve European imperial interests, has had profound and lasting consequences for the region. In Iraq, for instance, the British merged three Ottoman provinces—Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul—into a single state, forcibly combining Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish populations with divergent interests and identities.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the creation of Syria and Lebanon as separate entities under French mandate ignored complex local dynamics and sectarian divisions.<sup>12</sup> This colonial legacy has contributed to ongoing conflicts and instability in several ways:

- **Ethnic and Religious Tensions:** The artificial borders often grouped disparate ethnic and religious communities together, leading to internal strife and challenges to state legitimacy;<sup>13</sup>
- **Weak State Institutions:** Many post-colonial states struggled to establish effective governance over territories that lacked a shared national identity;<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Marc Lynch, 2016 y.

<sup>10</sup> David Fromkin, „A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East,“ New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989 y.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 y.

<sup>12</sup> D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914–1958*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 y.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa." *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 1, 1987 y., 1-18.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2004 y.



- Resource Disputes: The arbitrary division of territories led to uneven distribution of natural resources, particularly oil, fueling both internal and interstate conflicts;<sup>15</sup>
- Separatist Movements: Some ethnic groups, finding themselves minorities in newly created states, have pursued separatist agendas, as seen with the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria;<sup>16</sup>
- Irredentist Claims: The mismatch between ethnic distributions and political borders has led to irredentist claims and interstate tensions, exemplified by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.<sup>17</sup>

### **Cold War dynamics and superpower interventions**

The Cold War era, spanning from the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, profoundly shaped the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. As the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a global struggle for ideological and strategic supremacy, the oil-rich and strategically located Middle East became a critical arena for superpower competition. The Cold War era significantly shaped the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, as the United States and the Soviet Union vied for influence in this strategically crucial region. The United States, guided by the Truman Doctrine, sought to contain Soviet influence and secure access to the region's vast oil reserves. The dynamics of Cold War in the Middle East were characterized by several key features:

- Proxy Wars and Alliances: Both superpowers sought to expand their influence by supporting regional allies. The U.S. developed strong ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and pre-revolution Iran, while the Soviet Union aligned with countries like Egypt (until 1972), Syria, and Iraq.<sup>18</sup> These alliances often exacerbated regional tensions and conflicts.
- Ideological Battleground: The superpowers competed to promote their respective ideologies. The U.S. supported capitalist-oriented regimes and monarchies, while the Soviet Union backed socialist and nationalist movements.<sup>19</sup>
- Military Aid and Arms Race: Both superpowers provided substantial military aid to their allies, fueling a regional arms race. This militarization has had long-lasting effects on regional security dynamics.<sup>20</sup>
- Oil Politics: Control over Middle Eastern oil resources became a crucial aspect of Cold War strategy, with both superpowers seeking to secure access and deny it to their rival.<sup>21</sup>

Several key events and interventions during this period had lasting impacts:

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<sup>15</sup>Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*. New York: Free Press, 2008 y.

<sup>16</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. 3rd ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004 y.

<sup>17</sup> F. Gause, Gregory III. *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 y.

<sup>18</sup> *Salim Yaqub, Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004 y.

<sup>19</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Translated by Anthony F. Roberts. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002 y.

<sup>20</sup> Pollack, Kenneth M. 2002.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Yergin, Daniel. 2008 y.

- 1953 Iranian Coup: The CIA-backed overthrow of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran, aimed at preventing Soviet influence, led to long-term anti-American sentiment in the country.<sup>22</sup>
- Suez Crisis (1956): This conflict demonstrated the waning influence of traditional colonial powers (Britain and France) and the rising role of the U.S. and Soviet Union in the region.<sup>23</sup>
- Arab-Israeli Conflicts: The superpowers' involvement in Arab-Israeli wars, particularly in 1967 and 1973, intensified the conflicts and solidified alliances.<sup>24</sup>
- Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (1979): This event marked a significant escalation of Cold War tensions in the region and had far-reaching consequences, including the rise of militant Islamist groups.<sup>25</sup>
- Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988): Both superpowers played complex roles in this conflict, with the U.S. ultimately tilting towards Iraq to prevent an Iranian victory.<sup>26</sup>

The end of the Cold War did not resolve the tensions and conflicts that had been exacerbated during this period. Instead, it created a power vacuum that contributed to new forms of regional competition and conflict. The legacy of Cold War interventions continues to influence Middle Eastern politics and security dynamics, from ongoing tensions between Iran and the West to the complex relationship between the U.S. and its regional allies.

Understanding this Cold War context is crucial for comprehending the current security challenges in the Middle East, as many contemporary issues have roots in or were shaped by the superpower rivalry of this era. The end of the Cold War did not mark the end of great power involvement in the Middle East. The United States, now the sole superpower, continued to play a significant role, as evidenced by the Gulf War of 1990-91 and subsequent interventions. However, the Cold War's legacy continues to shape regional dynamics, with many current conflicts and alliances tracing their roots to this era of superpower rivalry.

### **Rise of political Islam and its impact on governance**

The rise of political Islam, also known as Islamism, has been one of the most significant developments in the Middle East since the mid-20th century. This phenomenon has profoundly influenced governance, social dynamics, and regional politics, reshaping the landscape of the Middle East in ways that continue to reverberate today.

The roots of modern political Islam can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as a response to Western colonialism and the perceived failure of secular nationalist movements. Key figures such as Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, articulated a

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003 y.

<sup>23</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011 y.

<sup>24</sup> David W Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 y.

<sup>25</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004 y.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*. Translated by Nicholas Elliott. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015 y.

vision of Islam as a comprehensive system for organizing society and politics.<sup>27</sup> The appeal of political Islam grew in the post-colonial era, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, fueled by: Disillusionment with secular nationalist regimes that failed to deliver economic prosperity and political freedom;<sup>28</sup> The perceived moral and cultural erosion associated with Westernization and modernization;<sup>29</sup> The success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which established an Islamic theocracy and inspired Islamist movements across the region.<sup>30</sup>

The rise of political Islam has had multifaceted impacts on governance in the Middle East. Islamist movements became the main opposition to numerous secular authoritarian governments, presenting an alternative model of governance rooted in Islamic principles. In nations where Islamist groups have risen to power or wielded significant influence, there have been attempts to reform laws and institutions to reflect Islamic principles, as observed in Iran, Sudan, and to varying extents in other regions. Numerous Islamist movements garnered widespread support by offering social services in areas where the state was deficient, effectively establishing a parallel governance system. In nations permitting a certain level of political diversity, Islamist parties frequently achieved electoral success, exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia. Governments frequently addressed the Islamist challenge by combining repression with co-optation, occasionally incorporating Islamic rhetoric or institutions to enhance their legitimacy.

### **Current Security Challenges**

The Middle East continues to face a myriad of interconnected security challenges that have profound implications for regional stability and global geopolitics. These challenges are rooted in historical conflicts, sectarian divisions, and the complex interplay of domestic and international factors. That is why such problems were conceived, matured and arose in the mentioned region, which are still relevant today and hinder its development.

The Middle East, a region of strategic importance, faces numerous security challenges that have significant implications for global stability. These challenges are multifaceted and stem from a combination of historical, political, and socio-economic factors. There are a number of countries in the region that are involved in both internal conflicts and are at war with other states in the region. Examples of this are: Syrian civil war, which started in 2011. This conflict has drawn in multiple regional and global powers, created a massive refugee crisis, and provided a breeding ground for extremist groups.<sup>31</sup> Also the civil war in Yemen, exacerbated by Saudi-Iranian rivalry, has led to what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.<sup>32</sup> Instability in Libya, also initiated mainly by external forces, is one of the conflicts that threaten the security of the region. The power

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<sup>27</sup> Richard P Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 y.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002 y.

<sup>30</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 y.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020 y.

<sup>32</sup> Asher Orkaby, *Yemen: What Everyone Needs to Know®*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021 y.

vacuum following Gaddafi's fall has led to ongoing conflict between rival governments and militias, with implications for regional security and migration.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to global internal and external military confrontations, there are many areas of operation of various terrorist and extremist groups in the region. Despite significant setbacks, terrorist organizations continue to pose a serious threat. The world's well-known terrorist and extremist organizations that operate in the countries of the Middle East are:

- a) **Islamic State (ISIS):** While territorially defeated, ISIS remains a threat through its affiliates and its ability to inspire lone-wolf attacks;<sup>34</sup>
- b) **Al-Qaeda and its Affiliates:** Groups like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continue to operate and threaten regional stability;<sup>35</sup>
- c) **State Sponsorship of Terrorism:** Allegations of state support for terrorist groups continue to complicate regional relationships and security efforts.<sup>36</sup>

Sectarian tensions also remain a difficult challenge for the region. The Sunni-Shia divide, encouraged by a number of states, remains an important driver of the conflict. Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry and sectarian and geopolitical competition shape many regional conflicts and alliances.

The marginalization of minorities also remains a challenge. The stigmatized attitude towards religious and ethnic minorities in various countries remains a source of tension and conflict.

The possibility of nuclear proliferation and related programs is causing concern in the Middle East. Despite the nuclear agreement, Iran continues its nuclear program, thus earning sanctions imposed by Western countries. Several countries in the region also have nuclear energy programs, which raises the risk of its misuse. The flow of IDPs caused by the conflicts in the region remains a challenge, which has created serious problems for the EU countries. Large-scale population movements have significant security implications. Millions of Syrian refugees have moved to neighboring countries, creating a negative impact on economic, social and political dynamics.<sup>37</sup> There is a lot of internal displacement in the regional countries. Conflicts in Yemen, Libya, and Iraq have led to significant internal displacement, creating humanitarian crises and potential security risks.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth noting the ongoing processes in the direction of cyber security in the Middle East. The digital domain has emerged as a new frontier for regional conflicts. Countries in the region have been both perpetrators and targets of sophisticated cyber operations. Rival countries in the region attack each other using cyberspace, damaging them both economically and militarily.<sup>39</sup> The region's

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<sup>33</sup> Frederic Wehrey, *The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018 y.

<sup>34</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 y.

<sup>35</sup> Elisabeth Kendall, *Twenty Years of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*. Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 2021 y.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 y.

<sup>37</sup> André Bank, "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Between Protection and Marginalization." *GIGA Focus Middle East*, no. 3, 2016 y., 1-12.

<sup>38</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021*. Geneva: IDMC, 2021 y.

<sup>39</sup> Simon Mabon, *Cybersecurity in the Middle East*. London: Hurst & Company, 2020 y.

growing reliance on digital systems in critical sectors like energy and finance increases its vulnerability to cyber attacks.<sup>40</sup>

Challenges in the country's governance and civil unrest create political instability in the region, which remains a significant security problem. Against the background of unrest, authoritarian governments have been established in the region, which causes people's discontent and instability. All this contributes to the strengthening of economic inequality, unemployment increases, especially among young people, and economic inequality contributes to social unrest and radicalization. Foreign interventions and proxy conflicts involving external forces complicate regional security dynamics. The ongoing tension between the United States and Iran has a significant impact on regional stability. The growth of Russian and Chinese interests in the region creates new difficulties in the process of power distribution. The security challenges in the Middle East are multifaceted and interrelated. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the complex historical, cultural and geopolitical factors in the region. Resolving these security issues is critical not only to the stability and prosperity of the Middle East, but also to global peace and security.

### **Main Factors Contributing to Instability in the Middle East**

As we mentioned above the Middle East has long been recognized as one of the most unstable regions in the world, a situation that has deep historical roots and complex contemporary dimensions. Several interrelated factors contribute to this ongoing instability, shaping the political landscape and impacting the lives of millions.

At the heart of the region's instability is political turmoil. Many Middle Eastern nations are ruled by authoritarian regimes that suppress dissent and restrict political freedoms. Governments often rely on repression to maintain control, leading to widespread public frustration and occasional uprisings. Corruption is rampant, undermining public trust in institutions and fueling calls for reform. The Arab Spring of 2011 highlighted this discontent, as citizens across the region sought greater political freedom and accountability, only to face brutal crackdowns in many cases.

Sectarianism is another critical factor driving instability. The divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims has historically contributed to conflict in several countries, including Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. In Iraq, the aftermath of the U.S. invasion exacerbated these tensions, leading to violent sectarian strife. In Syria, the civil war has taken on a sectarian dimension, with various groups aligning themselves based on religious identity. These divisions are often manipulated by political leaders for power, further entrenching societal fractures.

Such interventions can destabilize governments and create power vacuums, leading to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, which thrive in chaotic environments.

Economic issues play a crucial role in fueling instability. Many countries in the region are heavily reliant on oil exports, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. This dependence often stifles economic diversification and innovation. High unemployment, particularly

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher Bronk and Tikk-Ringas Eneken, "The Cyber Attack on Saudi Aramco." *Survival* 55, no. 2, 2013 y., p. 81

among the youth, breeds frustration and can lead to unrest. Economic disparities further exacerbate social tensions, as wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, while large segments of the population struggle to make ends meet.

Social issues, including human rights violations, also contribute to instability. Widespread repression and the lack of basic freedoms lead to societal discontent. Additionally, the region faces significant environmental challenges, including water scarcity and the impacts of climate change. These issues can exacerbate tensions over resources, further complicating already fragile social dynamics.

In summary, the instability in the Middle East is driven by a multitude of factors, including political repression, sectarian divisions, foreign interventions, economic challenges, and social issues. Addressing these interconnected factors requires a comprehensive approach that considers the unique historical and cultural contexts of each country. Only through such an understanding can there be a realistic pathway toward lasting peace and stability in the region.

### **The Negative Impact of Middle East Instability on the South Caucasus**

The ongoing instability in the Middle East has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond its immediate geographical boundaries. The South Caucasus region, comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, finds itself particularly vulnerable to the ripple effects of Middle Eastern turmoil. This article examines the multifaceted negative impacts of Middle Eastern instability on the South Caucasus, highlighting the interconnectedness of these regions and the challenges faced by South Caucasian nations.

One of the most immediate effects of Middle Eastern instability on the South Caucasus is the alteration of geopolitical dynamics. The South Caucasus serves as a critical transit corridor for energy resources, connecting Europe to the Caspian Sea. However, instability in neighboring regions often threatens these energy routes, leading to heightened tensions among regional powers. For instance, conflicts in Syria or Iraq can disrupt oil and gas supplies, prompting fears of energy shortages in Europe and increased competition among regional actors.

Additionally, the involvement of external powers in the Middle East, such as Russia and the United States, often spills over into the South Caucasus. Russia, seeking to maintain its influence, may exploit instability to solidify its foothold in the region.

One of the primary concerns for the South Caucasus is the potential for spillover of conflicts and extremist ideologies. The proximity to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq has raised fears of radicalization among vulnerable populations.<sup>41</sup> This threat is particularly acute given the region's history of ethnic and religious tensions. The influx of refugees from Middle Eastern conflicts has

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<sup>41</sup> Michael B. Bishku, "The South Caucasus Republics and the Muslim Middle East: Political and Economic Imperatives." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26, no. 2, 2015 y.

also strained resources and social services in South Caucasian countries, potentially exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges.<sup>42</sup>

Economic repercussions are another significant aspect of Middle Eastern instability's impact on the South Caucasus. The region's economies are closely tied to energy exports and transit routes that often involve Middle Eastern partners or pass-through volatile areas. Fluctuations in oil prices, driven by Middle Eastern geopolitics, can have severe implications for Azerbaijan's oil-dependent economy and, by extension, the entire region's economic stability.<sup>43</sup>

The economic repercussions of instability in the Middle East are equally significant for the South Caucasus. The region's economies are interconnected with Middle Eastern markets, and ongoing conflicts can disrupt trade routes and economic partnerships. For example, trade between the South Caucasus and Middle Eastern countries, including Iran and Turkey, can suffer due to security concerns, leading to decreased economic growth and increased unemployment.

Moreover, the influx of refugees from the Middle East can place additional strain on the South Caucasus nations, which may lack the resources to adequately support large populations of displaced individuals. This situation can lead to social tensions, as local populations may perceive refugees as competitors for jobs and resources.

Furthermore, the instability in the Middle East has complicated the South Caucasus's efforts to diversify its international relations and reduce dependence on traditional power brokers like Russia. The region's attempts to forge closer ties with Western nations and institutions have been hampered by the West's preoccupation with Middle Eastern crises, potentially limiting opportunities for economic and political development.<sup>44</sup>

The security landscape of the South Caucasus has also been affected. The region's strategic importance as a buffer zone between Russia, Turkey, and Iran has been heightened amidst Middle Eastern turmoil. This has led to increased military presence and geopolitical maneuvering by regional powers, potentially destabilizing the delicate balance in the South Caucasus.<sup>45</sup>

Socially and culturally, the instability in the Middle East also affects the South Caucasus. The region has a diverse population with various ethnic and religious backgrounds, and the rise of extremist ideologies in the Middle East can resonate with vulnerable groups in the South Caucasus. This can lead to the radicalization of certain segments of the population and increase the risk of domestic terrorism.

Furthermore, the historical ties between the South Caucasus and the Middle East mean that developments in one region can influence sentiments in the other. As conflicts in the Middle East gain international attention, they can trigger nationalist sentiments or exacerbate ethnic tensions within the South Caucasus, complicating efforts to maintain peace and stability.

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<sup>42</sup>E. Svante Cornell, "The Middle East and the South Caucasus: Between Stability and Conflict." In *Azerbaijan in the World*, edited by Svante E. Cornell, 153-170. Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2011 y.

<sup>43</sup> Ilgar Gurbanov, "Repercussions of Syrian Conflict for the South Caucasus." *Caucasus International* 7, no. 1, 2017 y.

<sup>44</sup> Fariz Ismailzade, "The Geopolitics of the South Caucasus." *Global Dialogue* 7, no. 3/4, 2005 y.

<sup>45</sup> Anar Valiyev, "The Syrian Crisis and Its Impact on the South Caucasus." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 16, no. 4, 2018 y.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the negative impact of instability in the Middle East on the South Caucasus is multifaceted, affecting geopolitical dynamics, economic conditions, and social cohesion. The interconnectedness of these regions necessitates a comprehensive understanding of how turmoil in one area can have ripple effects in another. As the South Caucasus navigates these challenges, it will be crucial for regional leaders and international stakeholders to work collaboratively to mitigate the adverse effects of Middle Eastern instability and promote sustainable peace.

The instability in the Middle East poses significant challenges to the South Caucasus across multiple domains. From security threats and economic vulnerabilities to geopolitical complications, the region finds itself grappling with the consequences of conflicts beyond its borders. As the South Caucasus continues to navigate these challenges, the need for robust regional cooperation and international support becomes increasingly apparent to mitigate the negative impacts of Middle Eastern instability.

This instability in the Middle East has created a complex web of challenges for the South Caucasus region. The spillover effects are multifaceted, touching upon security, economic, and geopolitical dimensions. The threat of extremism and radicalization looms large, particularly given the region's own history of ethnic and religious tensions. Economically, the South Caucasus finds itself vulnerable to the volatility of energy markets and disruptions in trade routes, with Azerbaijan's oil-dependent economy especially at risk.

Moreover, the region's efforts to forge a more independent path in international relations have been complicated by the shifting focus of global powers towards Middle Eastern crises. This has potentially limited opportunities for the South Caucasus to diversify its partnerships and reduce dependence on traditional regional influencers.

The security landscape of the South Caucasus has also been reshaped, with increased military presence and geopolitical maneuvering by regional powers adding new layers of complexity to an already delicate balance. As the region continues to navigate these challenges, it becomes clear that the stability and prosperity of the South Caucasus are inextricably linked to developments in the Middle East.

Looking ahead, the South Caucasus faces the daunting task of building resilience against external shocks while pursuing its own development agenda. This will require not only robust regional cooperation but also thoughtful engagement with international partners. As the global community grapples with persistent instability in the Middle East, it must not overlook the cascading effects on neighboring regions like the South Caucasus. Only through comprehensive, collaborative approaches can the negative impacts of Middle Eastern instability be effectively mitigated, allowing the South Caucasus to chart a more stable and prosperous future.



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# Great Power Dynamics in the Sahel Region Since 2022

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## **Abstract**

The Sahel's region is important for its role as a buffer zone between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, its impact on regional security, and its potential as an economic hub. However, the Sahel is also beset by severe political instability, as evidenced by a recent wave of military coups that have destabilized governments across the region. This instability has created fertile ground for the rise of violent extremism, further exacerbating the region's security challenges. As these crises unfold, the Sahel has become a battleground for strategic competition, with France, the United States, Russia, and China each vying for influence.

The article aims to examine the dynamics of the competition since February 2022, particularly to determine whether the policies of these powers have been influenced by one of the most significant crises of recent years—Russia's war against Ukraine. Of particular interest is the potential causal link between the two distant regions: the Sahel and Eastern Europe. Notably, the military juntas in Mali and Niger have recently severed ties with Ukraine, and these countries, along with Burkina Faso, have addressed the United Nations Security Council with allegations that Ukraine is supporting rebel groups in West Africa's Sahel region.

**Keywords:** Sahel, Power politics, regional security, Ukraine, crises.

## Introduction

The Sahel region, a vast stretch of land spanning the width of Africa, has become a focal point of international concern in recent years. This region, noted for its strategic importance, abundant natural resources, and complex socio-political landscape, is increasingly becoming a theater for geopolitical competition among major global powers.<sup>1</sup> The Sahel's significance is highlighted by its role as a buffer zone between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, its impact on regional security, and its potential as an economic hub.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Sahel is also beset by severe political instability, as evidenced by a recent wave of military coups that have destabilized governments across the region. This instability has created fertile ground for the rise of violent extremism, further exacerbating the region's security challenges.<sup>3</sup> As these crises unfold, the Sahel has become a battleground for strategic competition, with France, the United States, Russia, and China each vying for influence.<sup>4</sup>

The article aims to examine the dynamics of the competition since February 2022, particularly to determine whether the policies of these powers have been influenced by one of the most significant crisis of recent years—Russia's war against Ukraine. This war has significantly altered priorities and perceptions of international security, impacting how countries approach their defense and security matters. Of particular interest is the potential causal link between the two distant regions: the Sahel and Eastern Europe. Notably, the military juntas in Mali and Niger have recently severed ties with Ukraine<sup>5</sup>, and these countries, along with Burkina Faso, have addressed the United Nations Security Council with allegations that Ukraine is supporting rebel groups in West Africa's Sahel region.<sup>6</sup>

This article will explore the multifaceted dynamics of the Sahel, beginning with an examination of the region's importance. It will then address the political instability and military coups that have shaken the Sahel, followed by an analysis of the violent extremism that continues to threaten regional security. The discussion will then shift to an exploration of the great power competition in the Sahel, with a detailed analysis of the strategies,

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<sup>1</sup> Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, "Senior Study Group for the Sahel: Final Report and Recommendations," *United States Institute of Peace (USIP)*, 2024 y., 7-36.

<sup>2</sup>Yahia H. Zoubir, "Crisis in the Sahel: Causes, Consequences, and the Path Forward," *Middle East Council on Global Affairs Issue Brief*, 2022 y., 1-6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Lebovich, "'Sovereignty' means never having to say you're sorry: The Sahel's new geopolitics," *Clingendael*, June 2024y.

[https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/202406/CA\\_Sovereignty\\_means\\_never\\_having\\_to\\_say\\_youre\\_sorry.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/202406/CA_Sovereignty_means_never_having_to_say_youre_sorry.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>Adam Durbin, "Mali cuts diplomatic ties with Ukraine over Wagner ambush claims," *BBC News*, 5 August, 2024 y., <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ceqdd7vdwg7o>.

<sup>6</sup>Melissa Chemam, "West African juntas complain to UN over Ukraine's alleged support for rebels," *rfi*. 22 August, 2024 y., <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20240822-west-african-juntas-complain-to-un-over-ukraine-s-alleged-support-for-rebels>.

interests, and outcomes of actions by France, the United States, Russia, and China. While the Sahel region as a whole will be studied, the focus will primarily be on three Central Sahel countries - Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger - due to the significant events that have taken place there within the timeframe of interest for this article.

## Main Part

### *The Geopolitical Importance of the Sahel Region*

The Sahel region, a vast and arid belt stretching across western and north-central Africa, holds a crucial place in global geopolitics. Its strategic importance cannot be overstated, as it lies at the crossroads of North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, influencing regional stability, migration patterns, trade routes, and security dynamics.<sup>7</sup> Although Russia's war in Ukraine has significantly shifted global priorities – understandably dominating the international agenda, reshaping security perceptions, and compelling leading states to revise their defense and security strategies<sup>8</sup> – regions like the Sahel continue to attract international attention and retain significant strategic importance to the world's leading powers<sup>9</sup>.

The Sahel's importance is underscored by its abundant natural resources, including valuable minerals and hydrocarbons, which make it a focal point for international competition.<sup>10</sup> However, the region's severe security challenges, such as cross-border terrorism, human and drug trafficking, and escalating ethnic conflicts, have turned it into one of the most dangerous and volatile areas in the world today<sup>11</sup>.

The rise of military juntas in recent years has further exacerbated the crisis, transforming the Sahel into the largest zone of military rule globally and signaling a profound governance crisis.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Laura Rajosefa Maj., "The Future of Strategic Competition in the Sahel Region – Placing Partnership First," Air Command and Staff College, Air University Press, no. 93. April 2023 y.

[https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF\\_93\\_Rajosefa\\_The\\_Future\\_of\\_Strategic\\_Competition\\_in\\_the\\_Sahel\\_Region.pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF_93_Rajosefa_The_Future_of_Strategic_Competition_in_the_Sahel_Region.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> EU-US Explainer, "EU and US strategies towards sub-Saharan Africa," European Parliament. February 2024y.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Hackenesch and Wolfram Lacher. "The Russia-Ukraine War's Shockwaves in Africa. A Zeitenwende for German Africa Policy?" Megatrends Afrika. February 2024 y.

[https://www.swpberlin.org/assets/afrika/publications/MTA\\_working\\_paper/MTA\\_WP10\\_2024\\_Zeitenwende\\_Collection.pdf](https://www.swpberlin.org/assets/afrika/publications/MTA_working_paper/MTA_WP10_2024_Zeitenwende_Collection.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, (*USIP*) 2024 y.

<sup>11</sup> Christophe Châtelot, "How France Was Driven Out of the Sahel," *Le Monde*, September 5, 2023 y.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/09/05/how-france-was-driven-out-of-the-sahel\\_6124522\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/09/05/how-france-was-driven-out-of-the-sahel_6124522_7.html).

<sup>12</sup> Shubhdayini Rajyalaxmi Jandev, "Intricacies of French Engagement in Sahel with Peace Prospects: Assessing the Policy Shifts and Its Implications," *Journal of Scientific Papers: Social Development & Security* vol. 14, no. 2, 2024 y., 226–245, <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2024.14.2.20>.

These issues are compounded by the devastating effects of climate change, which is rendering large swaths of the Sahel increasingly uninhabitable, forcing mass migrations<sup>13</sup>, and fueling further instability. The region's challenges are not isolated but are deeply intertwined with broader global issues, including the struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, the fight against terrorism, and the urgent need to address climate change.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Political Instability and the Wave of Military Coups***

The Sahel region has become synonymous with severe political instability, particularly marked by a surge in military coups since 2020.<sup>15</sup> This period has been described by researchers as the emergence of a "coup belt," highlighting both the frequency and profound impact of these events on regional stability.<sup>16</sup> Two military coups in Mali in 2020 and in 2021 preceded the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine, but three additional coups have taken place since then—in Burkina Faso in September 2022, Niger in July 2023, and Gabon in August 2023—bringing the total to eight in recent years.<sup>17</sup> These military takeovers have further destabilized an already fragile region.

Despite considerable international efforts, particularly from Western powers, attempts to stabilize the Sahel have largely fallen short.<sup>18</sup> In a striking display of defiance, the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have not only resisted these stabilization efforts but have also demanded the withdrawal of Western forces, including France, the U.S., and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which was terminated in 2023 at the request of Mali's junta.<sup>19</sup>

The military juntas of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso have announced the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)<sup>20</sup>, a development that is deserving close attention. This new alliance, designed to consolidate power among these coup-hit nations, marks a

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<sup>13</sup> Abdennour Toumi, "Recent French Interventions in the Sahel," *Center for Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 146 (2020): 3-10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, (USIP) 2024 y., 7-36.

<sup>15</sup> Katia Cavigelli and James Rupert, "For Peace in SAhel, African and U.S. Experts Urge Focused Partnership," United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 22 February 2024 Ibid. Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, (USIP) 2024 y.

Ibid. Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, (USIP) 2024 y., <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/peace-sahel-african-and-us-experts-urge-focused-partnership>.

<sup>16</sup> Shubhdayini Rajyalaxmi Jandev, "Intricacies of French Engagement in Sahel with Peace Prospects: Assessing the Policy Shifts and Its Implications," *Journal of Scientific Papers: Social Development & Security* vol. 14, no. 2 (2024 y., 226–245, <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2024.14.2.20>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Bipartisan Senior Study Group for the Sahel, (USIP) 2024 y., 7-36.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Center for Preventive Action, "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," Global Conflict Tracker, 14 February, 2024 y., <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

<sup>20</sup> Alain Antil and Thierry Vircoulon, "After the Failure in Sahel, Rethinking French Policy in Africa," Sub-Saharan Center, 10 April, 2024 y. [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri\\_antil\\_vircoulon\\_french\\_policy\\_africa\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_antil_vircoulon_french_policy_africa_2024.pdf).

significant shift in regional dynamics that could worsen the already precarious security situation in the Sahel.

The wave of coups and the rise in anti-Western sentiment reflect a shift in the Sahel's political landscape. Concerns are mounting about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the declining prospects for development, and the ability of local governments to effectively combat entrenched insurgencies and extremist groups that pose significant threats to the region. As Western influence diminishes, non-Western powers like Russia and China are increasingly likely to fill the resulting vacuum, potentially reshaping the geopolitical dynamics of the Sahel.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Separatism and Violent Extremism in the Sahel***

Amidst the ongoing political unrest, the Sahel region has emerged as a critical hotspot for both separatism and violent extremism.<sup>22</sup> The Tuareg separatist movement, rooted in the longstanding desire of the Tuareg people—a Berber ethnic group spanning Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso<sup>23</sup>—to establish an independent state called "Azawad" in northern Mali, has played a pivotal role in this instability. This movement, driven by historical marginalization and socio-economic disparities, has not only fueled cycles of conflict and humanitarian crises but has also facilitated the rise of violent extremism in the region.<sup>24</sup>

The Tuareg rebellions, particularly the 1990 and 2012 uprisings in Mali, have led to significant regional destabilization. The 2012 rebellion, in particular, was marked by the return of Tuareg fighters from Libya, who declared the independence of Azawad.<sup>25</sup> Though this declaration was short-lived, it created a power vacuum that was quickly exploited by Islamist militant groups. Initially, some of these groups allied with the Tuareg separatists, but they eventually turned against them, further complicating the security landscape.

This intersection of separatism and violent extremism has severely undermined state authority in the Sahel, making the region a sanctuary for terrorist organizations. The resulting insecurity has drawn international interventions, notably by France and the

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<sup>21</sup> Aja Melville, "Russia Exploits Western Vacuum in Africa's Sahel Region," *Defense and Security Monitor*, 22 April, 2024 y., <https://dsm.forecastinternational.com/2024/04/22/russia-exploits-western-vacuum-in-africas-sahel-region/>.

<sup>22</sup> Riccardo Alcaro and Nicoletta Pirozzi, "Transatlantic Security from the Horn of Africa". *Institute of International Affairs, Edizioni Nuova Cultura* 2014 y., 13-104.

<sup>23</sup> Baz Lecocq and Georg Klute, "Tuareg Separatism in Mali," *International Journal* 68, no. 3, September 2013 y., 424-434.

<sup>24</sup> Francesco Strazzari, "Azawad and the Rights of Passage: The Role of Illicit Trade in the Logic of Armed Group Formation in Northern Mali," January 2015, The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2016-02/Strazzari\\_NOREF\\_Clingendael\\_Mali\\_Azawad\\_Dec2014.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2016-02/Strazzari_NOREF_Clingendael_Mali_Azawad_Dec2014.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "The War in Mali: Islamists, Tuaregs and French Intervention," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 5, no. 2, February 2013 y., 2-8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26351123>.

United Nations, yet the underlying grievances of the Tuareg people remain unresolved. As a consequence, the Sahel continues to witness a troubling escalation in terrorism, particularly in central Sahelian states like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where military juntas now govern. Despite extensive counter-terrorism efforts<sup>26</sup>, the region has seen a dramatic increase in violent extremism, with Burkina Faso recently ranking first on the Global Terrorism Index in 2024.<sup>27</sup> This escalation underscores the deepening crisis, as the Sahel now accounts for nearly half of all global terrorism deaths—a stark contrast to the situation in 2007 when it represented only one percent.<sup>28</sup>

The most affected countries include Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and Niger, where insurgent groups like Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) – a coalition of Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups including Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), Al-Mourabitoun, and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – as well as Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) and Boko Haram, are intensifying their activities. These groups exploit political instability and local grievances to expand their control and influence. For instance, JNIM has gained significant ground in Burkina Faso and Mali, while ISWA continues to be Nigeria’s deadliest terrorist organization.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Great Power Competition***

Great power competition is one of the defining frameworks of global affairs, shaping regional dynamics worldwide, including in the Sahel.<sup>30</sup> To grasp the implications of this competition in the Sahel, it is crucial to first consider historical precedents, particularly the Cold War—a period of intense rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. During this era, the world was divided into spheres of influence, with both superpowers engaging in a strategic contest for global dominance. This bipolar order eventually transitioned into a unipolar world under U.S. leadership following the Soviet Union’s collapse.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ebimboere Seiyefa, "Exploring Lapses in West Africa’s Security Architecture and Their Implications for Regional Security," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 42, no. 4 (2024): 641-659, published online February 5, 2024 y, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2023.2298969>.

<sup>27</sup> Alain Antil and Thierry Vircoulon, "After the Failure in Sahel, Rethinking French Policy in Africa," Sub-Saharan Center, 10 April, 2024 y. [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri\\_antil\\_vircoulon\\_french\\_policy\\_africa\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_antil_vircoulon_french_policy_africa_2024.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Freedman, "Who Wants to Be a Great Power?," *Institute for National Strategic Security, National Defense University PRISM* Vol, 8, no. 4, 2020 y., 2-15.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander L. Vuving, "Great Power Competition: Lessons from the Past, Implications for the Future," *Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, 2020 y., 13-32.



Today, international relations scholars increasingly highlight the resurgence of great power competition<sup>32</sup>, suggesting a shift back towards bipolarity, primarily between the United States and China.<sup>33</sup> In this evolving geopolitical landscape, Russia is also striving to reassert itself as a dominant global player, as evidenced by its war of aggression in Ukraine and its strategic interventions in various regions, including the Sahel.<sup>34</sup> This region has become a focal point for all these major powers, exemplifying the broader patterns of great power competition.<sup>35,36</sup> France, with its deep historical ties and longstanding influence in Africa, also remains a key actor in this contest, alongside the U.S., Russia, and China.

### ***France in the Sahel***

France's long-standing ties and strategic interests in the Sahel have shaped its extensive involvement in the region over the years.<sup>37</sup> Through a sustained array of interventions—including military and security operations, development aid, and people-to-people contacts—France has established itself as a key player and a leader in the fight against terrorism and instability in the Sahel.<sup>38</sup>

France's role is deeply rooted in its desire to maintain its influence in Africa, evident in the establishment of military bases across the continent. Since the late 1990s, the country has sustained its military presence in the Sahel, primarily through counterterrorism operations like "Serval" and later "Barkhane."<sup>39</sup> Additionally, France supported the creation of the G5 Sahel, an intergovernmental cooperation framework among Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali,

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<sup>32</sup> J. Michael Mazarr, "Understanding Competition Great Power Rivalry in a Changing International Order – Concepts and Theories," *RAND Corporation* 2022 y., 1-42.

<sup>33</sup> Allison Graham, "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap," Harvard Kennedy School, 2017 y.,

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/destined-war-can-america-and-china-escape-thucydides-trap>.

<sup>34</sup> Theodore Murphy, "Middle powers, big impact: Africa's 'coup belt,' Russia, and the waning global order," European Council on Foreign Relations, 6 September 2023 y., <https://ecfr.eu/article/middle-powers-big-impact-africas-coup-belt-russia-and-the-waning-global-order/>.

<sup>35</sup> Shalin Mehta, *The Sahel as a Geopolitical Laboratory: Long-Term Instability as a Result of Great Power Rivalry*, August 15, 2023 y., available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4541836> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4541836>.

<sup>36</sup> Vasu Gounden and Andrea Prah, "Africa's Place in a New Global (Dis)order," *Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* no. 21, 2022 y., 116-123.

<sup>37</sup> Abdennour Toumi, "Recent French Interventions in the Sahel," *Center for Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 146, 2020 y., 3-10.

<sup>38</sup> Shubhdayini Rajyalaxmi Jandev, "Intricacies of French Engagement in Sahel with Peace Prospects: Assessing the Policy Shifts and Its Implications," *Journal of Scientific Papers: Social Development & Security* vol. 14, no. 2, 2024y., 226-245, <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2024.14.2.20>.

<sup>39</sup> Denis M. Tull, "France's Africa Policy under President Macron – Good Intentions, Partial Reform and the Fiasco in the Sahel," *SWP Comment*, no. 51, 2023 y., 1-6.

Mauritania, and Niger, to combat growing security threats<sup>40</sup>, and later the boost of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.<sup>41</sup>

However, this involvement has yielded mixed results, often exacerbating the very conflicts it aimed to resolve. As regional instability grew, France's role shifted from a leading force to a more reactive one, frequently criticized for its failure to address the root causes of insecurity. Although President Macron initially signaled a shift towards a more holistic and less interventionist approach, this ultimately led to widespread criticism and questions about France's effectiveness in the region.<sup>42</sup> In recent years, France's influence in the Sahel has significantly diminished, reflecting broader challenges in maintaining its strategic position in Africa.

The relationship between France and the Sahel countries, especially the central states of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has deteriorated dramatically in the past few years, marking a significant shift in the region's geopolitical landscape.<sup>43</sup> These three nations, once key members of the anti-jihadist coalition G5 Sahel, had previously hosted French and Western forces as part of their collective effort to combat jihadist armed groups. However, a series of events have led to the severance of these security partnerships and the termination of defense agreements with France, culminating in the expulsion of French troops from all three countries.<sup>44</sup>

The deterioration began when democratically elected governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which were aligned with Paris, were overthrown by military juntas unsympathetic to French interests. Notably, two of these coups—one in Burkina Faso in October 2022<sup>45</sup> and another in Niger in July 2023<sup>46</sup>—occurred after the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine.

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<sup>40</sup> Sylvain Medessoukou, "The Foreign Security Policy in Africa: France in Sahel Region," *American Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (ASRJETS)*, Global Society of Scientific Research and Researchers, ISSN (Print) 2313-4410, ISSN (Online) 2313-4402, <http://asrjetsjournal.org/>.

<sup>41</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, "5 Things to Know about France and the Sahel region," [onu.delegfrance](https://onu.delegfrance.org/5-Things-to-Know-About-France-and-the-Sahel-region), 28 March, 2023 y., <https://onu.delegfrance.org/5-Things-to-Know-About-France-and-the-Sahel-region>.

<sup>42</sup> Denis M. Tull, "France's Africa Policy under President Macron – Good Intentions, Partial Reform and the Fiasco in the Sahel," *SWP Comment*, no. 51, 2023 y., 1-6.

<sup>43</sup> Howard W. French, "The End of Francafrique? Fostering resentment of French neocolonialism is motivating a backlash against Paris across West Africa," *Foreign Policy*, 26 February, 2024 y., <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/26/france-sahel-mali-niger-francafrique-burkina-faso/>.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Atkinson, "Where France's Diplomacy Fails: Reassessing France's Policy Strategy for Africa," *Spheres of Influence*, 18 November, 2023 y., <https://spheresofinfluence.ca/reassessing-france-policy-strategy-for-africa/>.

<sup>45</sup> Constantin Gouvy, "The Twilight of French Influence in the Sahel," *Clingendael*, 27 September, 2023 y., <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/twilight-french-influence-sahel>.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Kayali and Clea Caulcutt, "France's Niger debacle marks end of an era in Africa," *Politico*, 27 September, 2023 y., <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-niger-military-army-withdrawal-west-africa-sahel-colonies-burkina-faso-mali/>.

The consequences of these shifts were swift and severe. In August 2022, French forces were expelled from Mali, leading to the official termination of Operation “Barkhane” in November of that year.<sup>47,48</sup> Similarly, French troops were forced to withdraw from Burkina Faso in February 2023, following demands from the military-led government in Ouagadougou.<sup>49</sup> Niger, once considered the last key ally of the West in the central Sahel region, also experienced a coup in July 2023, bringing a military junta to power.<sup>50</sup> This new regime demanded the departure of French troops, sponsored various anti-French demonstrations, and publicly accused France of complicity with jihadist groups.<sup>51</sup>

As the French military presence dwindled, so too did France's economic influence in the region. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have suspended economic agreements with Paris<sup>52</sup>, and the Nigerien military has taken control of French military bases.<sup>53</sup> The closure of the French Embassy in Niger on January 2, 2024, alongside the suspension of French development aid and visa services<sup>54</sup>, underscores the deepening rift. Moreover, the situation in the Sahel poses an even graver threat to France's economy, particularly due to the region's rich uranium reserves in Niger, which are vital for powering France's nuclear plants. For decades, uranium mined by the French company Orano has been the backbone of France's energy independence, fueling its 56 nuclear reactors. The Somair mine near Arlit, which contributed over 90% of Niger's uranium exports in 2021, exemplifies France's heavy reliance on this resource.<sup>55</sup>

France secured long-term access to Niger's uranium through agreements, including a recent extension of mining contracts until 2040. However, the 2024 military junta in Niger disrupted this critical supply chain by revoking Orano's operating license and bringing the

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<sup>47</sup> Shubhdayini Rajyalaxmi Jandev, "Intricacies of French Engagement in Sahel with Peace Prospects: Assessing the Policy Shifts and Its Implications," *Journal of Scientific Papers: Social Development & Security* vol. 14, no. 2, 2024 y., 226–245, <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2024.14.2.20>.

<sup>48</sup> Tony Chafer, Eloïse Bertrand, and Ed Stoddard, "France's Strategic Failure in Mali: A Postcolonial Disutility of Force?" *RUSI*, February 7, 2024 y., <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/frances-strategic-failure-mali-postcolonial-disutility-force>.

<sup>49</sup> Constantin Gouvy, "The Twilight of French Influence in the Sahel," *Clingendael*, 27 September, 2023 y. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/twilight-french-influence-sahel>

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> John Irish and Edward Mcallister, "West losing sight of Sahel after France announces Niger withdrawal," *Reuters*, 25 September, 2023 y., <https://www.reuters.com/world/west-losing-sight-sahel-after-france-announces-niger-withdrawal-2023-09-25/>.

<sup>52</sup> Alain Antil and Thierry Vircoulon, "After the Failure in Sahel, Rethinking French Policy in Africa," *Sub-Saharan Center*, 10 April, 2024 y. [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri\\_antil\\_vircoulon\\_french\\_policy\\_africa\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_antil_vircoulon_french_policy_africa_2024.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Shola Lawal, "Au revoir, Sahel: Did 2023 crush France's influence in Africa," *Aljazeera*. 31 December, 2023 y., <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/au-revoir-sahel-did-2023-crush-frances-influence-in-africa>.

<sup>54</sup> Melissa Chemam, "Diplomatic dip for France as African nations seek out stronger partners," *RFI*, 6 January, 2024 y., <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20240106-diplomatic-dip-for-france-as-african-nations-seek-out-better-partners>.

<sup>55</sup> Martina Schwikowski and Philipp Sandner, "Are Niger's Uranium Supplies to France under Scrutiny?" *DW*, September 28, 2023 y., <https://www.dw.com/en/are-nigers-uranium-supplies-to-france-under-scrutiny/a-66711717>.

mine under public control.<sup>56</sup> This move has raised significant concerns in France over its energy security, as the loss of Niger's uranium threatens to undermine its nuclear energy production.

These developments have further eroded France's already weakened military reputation and economic influence in the Sahel, signaling the end of an era in Franco-Sahelian relations.

France's setbacks in the Sahel in recent years can be viewed through the lens of shifting power dynamics and great power competition. As a Western power closely allied with the United States, France finds its interests increasingly at odds with those of other key players, particularly Russia and China. Historical animosity toward French policies in the Sahel has intensified, fueled by the strategic maneuvers of these rivals. Russia, in particular, has played a significant role in inflaming anti-French sentiment across the region.<sup>57</sup> Through coordinated disinformation campaigns, including targeting local youth via social media, Russia sought to destabilize governments aligned with Paris.<sup>58</sup> This strategy proved effective, motivating and providing opportunities for coup plotters, while contributing to a broader anti-Western political discourse. The rhetoric, especially potent in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, accuses Western nations—France, in particular—of exploiting African resources, imposing political systems, and practicing double standards. As a result, French diplomacy suffered significant setbacks, leading to a diminished presence in the region. This decline created a power vacuum, allowing other major actors like Russia and China to assert their influence more effectively.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding whether Russia's war in Ukraine influenced France's foreign policy agenda in the Sahel region, there is minimal evidence of a direct connection. The developments in the Sahel were primarily driven by internal issues. However, there were some instances where the war in Ukraine indirectly impacted the situation in the Sahel. For example, military rulers in Burkina Faso expressed frustration that France and the EU were providing arms to Ukraine while refusing similar support to them.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, as part of the reset

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<sup>56</sup>"Niger's Junta Returns French-Run Uranium Mine 'Back to Public Domain,'" *RFI*, June 25, 2024 y., <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20240625-niger-s-junta-returns-french-run-uranium-mine-back-to-public-domain>.

<sup>57</sup> Witold Repetowicz, "France New Approach in Africa in the Context of Russian Hybrid Operations," Casimir Pulaski Foundation, 17 March, 2023 y., <https://pulaski.pl/en/pulaski-policy-paper-france-new-approach-in-africa-in-the-context-of-russian-hybrid-operations-w-repetowicz-2/>.

<sup>58</sup> Constantin Gouvy, "The Twilight of French Influence in the Sahel," Clingendael, 27 September, 2023 y., <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/twilight-french-influence-sahel>.

<sup>59</sup> Aja Melville, "Russia Exploits Western Vacuum in Africa's Sahel Region," *Defense and Security Monitor*, 22 April, 2024 y., <https://dsm.forecastinternational.com/2024/04/22/russia-exploits-western-vacuum-in-africas-sahel-region/>.

<sup>60</sup>Alain Antil and Thierry Vircoulon, "After the Failure in Sahel, Rethinking French Policy in Africa," *Sub-Saharan Center*, 10 April, 2024 y.

of its regional strategy in the Sahel, Paris sought more robust European assistance, but countries that had previously been willing to send troops to Mali and Niger, particularly those in Eastern Europe, were less inclined to do so due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.<sup>61</sup> In conclusion, France's political maneuvers in the Sahel were largely shaped by complex, region-specific issues.

### *The United States in the Sahel*

The United States' involvement in the Sahel has been driven primarily by its counterterrorism strategy, developed in response to the 9/11 attacks.<sup>62</sup> Recognizing the vulnerability of the region's weak states and ungoverned spaces, the U.S. opted to strengthen local forces rather than deploy its military directly.<sup>63</sup> This approach was implemented through initiatives like the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), which later evolved into the more comprehensive Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCP).<sup>64</sup> Mali was one of the first countries targeted by the U.S., with significant investments made in both military and development assistance due to its strategic location. However, these efforts were undermined by pervasive corruption within the Malian government and military, as well as differing perceptions of the threat posed by jihadist groups like AQIM. Actions by the Malian government, such as marginalizing its northern citizens, further worsened the situation, leading to a rebellion and instability in 2012, which drastically reduced U.S. security cooperation. Although some limited cooperation resumed in 2014, it no longer involved directly training Malian troops.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast, Niger became an increasingly central focus of U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, particularly after the conflict in Mali began spilling over its borders. Starting with smaller-scale training initiatives in 2004, U.S. involvement in Niger expanded significantly after 2011, with a substantial increase in military assistance and the presence of U.S. troops. Key agreements signed in 2013 and 2015 allowed for more direct cooperation, including drone operations and joint patrols with Nigerien forces. This deeper partnership

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<sup>61</sup> John Irish and Edward Mcallister, "West losing sight of Sahel after France announces Niger withdrawal," Reuters, 25 September, 2023 y., <https://www.reuters.com/world/west-losing-sight-sahel-after-france-announces-niger-withdrawal-2023-09-25/>.

<sup>62</sup> Bruno Charbonneau, "Counter-Insurgency Governance in the Sahel," *International Affairs* 97, no. 6, November 2021 y., 1805–1823, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab182>.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Finucane, "Still at War: The United States in the Sahel," Just Security, 7 April, 2022 y., <https://www.justsecurity.org/81028/still-at-war-the-united-states-in-the-sahel/>.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Tankel, "US Counterterrorism in the Sahel: From Indirect to Direct Intervention," *International Affairs* 96, no. 4, July 2020 y., 875–893, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiiaa089>.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

enabled Niger to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities, becoming a more proactive force in the region, supported by U.S. training, equipment, and intelligence-sharing.<sup>66</sup>

Over the past two decades, the U.S. has made substantial investments in the Sahel, providing humanitarian aid, food assistance, and both military and non-military support.<sup>67</sup> However, as with France, events took an unexpected turn in the years of interest for this article.

Since 2022, the U.S. involvement in the Sahel has faced increasing challenges, particularly due to the military coups in central Sahel countries that further deteriorated relations.<sup>68</sup> The U.S. initially tried to maintain strategic ties, especially in Niger, where it had a significant presence with bases in Niamey and Agadez. Air Base 101 in Niamey was once a critical hub for U.S. and French operations in the region, supporting intelligence, reconnaissance, and counterterrorism missions against extremist groups. Similarly, Air Base 201 in Agadez, one of the most significant U.S. military installations in West Africa, was primarily used for drone operations, providing surveillance and intelligence across the Sahel.<sup>69</sup> However, following the 2023 coup in Niger<sup>70</sup>, the junta suspended military cooperation with the U.S., demanded the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and took control of these critical bases.<sup>71</sup>

The loss of these bases has created a substantial gap in U.S. operational capacity in the region and on the continent, significantly limiting its ability to monitor and respond to terrorism-related and other security threats.<sup>72</sup> The recent withdrawal of U.S. troops diminishes its ability to project power in the Sahel and signals a broader decline in U.S. influence across the region.

In the broader context of global power dynamics, the U.S. has long supported French counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, particularly through Operation “Barkhane,” by providing critical logistical, reconnaissance, and intelligence support.<sup>73</sup> However, recent

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Judd Devermont, “False Choices: U.S. Policy Toward Coastal West Africa and the Sahel. Center for Strategic & International Studies,” June 24, 2021 y., <https://www.csis.org/analysis/false-choices-us-policy-toward-coastal-west-africa-and-sahel>.

<sup>68</sup> Charles. A. Ray, “Is the United States Losing the Sahel,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 7 May, 2024 y., <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/05/is-the-united-states-losing-the-sahel/>.

<sup>69</sup> Will Brown, “The Final Nail: Niger’s Break with the US. Europe’s Old Sahel Strategy Is Dead – and Russia Is Circling Over Its Carcass,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 20 March, 2024 y., <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-final-nail-nigers-break-with-the-us/>.

<sup>70</sup> Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Niger,” 10 April, 2024 y., <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF12464.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Ryan Finnerty, “Niger Moves to Expel US Forces from West African Airbase,” 19 March, 2024 y., <https://www.flightglobal.com/defence/niger-moves-to-expel-us-forces-from-west-african-airbase/157416.article>.

<sup>72</sup> Jeff Hawkins, “Withdrawal of US Troops from Niger: A Setback for Washington?” *Le Point de Vue*, 26 April, 2024 y., <https://www.iris-france.org/185945-withdrawal-of-us-troops-from-niger-a-setback-for-washington/>.

<sup>73</sup> Brian Finucane, “Still at War: The United States in the Sahel,” *Just Security*, 7 April, 2022 y.,

military coups and the subsequent expulsion of French forces from several countries of Sahel, along with the termination of Operation “Barkhane” in 2022, have created a significant geopolitical vacuum. Russia, through its Wagner Group and bilateral military assistance, has swiftly moved to fill this void, fostering closer ties with the new military juntas and expanding its influence at the expense of Western powers. Meanwhile, China's growing economic engagement in Africa further complicates the U.S.'s position.<sup>74</sup>

As the U.S. faces a pivotal moment in the Sahel, its ability to project power and influence is increasingly challenged by strategic competition with Russia and China.<sup>75</sup> The decline of Western influence particularly that of France, signals a broader geopolitical struggle where the liberal international order is being contested by authoritarian powers,<sup>76</sup> threatening to destabilize the region further and undermine U.S. efforts to combat terrorism and promote democracy.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, while the war in Ukraine has significantly influenced global geopolitical dynamics, its direct impact on U.S. policy in the Sahel has been limited. The U.S.'s strategic decisions in the Sahel have remained primarily focused on counterterrorism and regional stability, largely unaffected by the shifting priorities and resources driven by what has been going on in the Eastern Europe.

### ***Russia in the Sahel***

Russia's historical interests in the Sahel are integral to its broader strategy of expanding influence in Africa, countering Western dominance, and securing economic and military advantages. This strategy is designed to challenge the existing international order and position Russia as a major global power.<sup>78</sup> In the Sahel, Russia has actively sought to counterbalance Western influence, particularly that of France and the United States.<sup>79</sup> The region's wealth of natural resources highlights the economic dimension of Russia's interests, as it seeks to access these resources, bolster its economy, and reduce dependence on Western

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<https://www.justsecurity.org/81028/still-at-war-the-united-states-in-the-sahel/>.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Stronski, “Russia’s Growing Footprint in Africa’s Sahel Region,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 February, 2023 y.,

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region?lang=en>.

<sup>75</sup> John J. Chin and Haleigh Bartos, "Rethinking U.S. Africa Policy Amid Changing Geopolitical Realities," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 2, 2024 y., 114-132, <https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/52237>.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Kris Inman and Matthew Edds-Reitman, "For Sahel Stability, U.S. Needs Broader, Coordinated Policy: U.S. Efforts Can Advance Peace with a Wider Scope, Deeper Integration to Its Efforts," March 21, 2024 y., <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/03/sahel-stability-us-needs-broader-coordinated-policy>.

<sup>78</sup> Samuel Ramani, *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?* (London: Hurst and Co, 2023 y.).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

markets. Additionally, Russia is a major arms supplier to the countries of Sahel,<sup>80</sup> a role that not only generates revenue but also strengthens its influence over the region's governments.

Since the war in Ukraine began, Moscow has intensified its engagement in the Global South, particularly in the Sahel, achieving outcomes that sharply contrast with those of France and the United States.<sup>81</sup> As Western influence has waned, Russia's presence and impact in the Sahel have notably increased. Moscow has strategically leveraged its private military company (PMC), Wagner Group—recently rebranded as the Africa Corps—to establish a strong foothold in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, capitalizing on opportunities created by Western missteps. Wagner's presence in Africa represents a blend of the profit-driven motives of PMCs and the strategic objectives of the Russian state.<sup>82</sup>

Russia has also used disinformation campaigns to stoke anti-Western sentiment. It has adeptly navigated the instability and security gaps in the Sahel, aligning itself with military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso by offering them security support, diplomatic endorsement, and assistance in information operations.<sup>83</sup> More recently, in April 2024, Russia extended its involvement to Niger, where a Russian aircraft reportedly delivered military trainers and equipment, including an air defense system, to Niamey. This event marked the start of a new partnership between the Kremlin and Niger's military rulers. Following the arrival of Russian personnel, protests in Niamey called for the withdrawal of American forces, demonstrating the direct impact of Russia's strategic actions in the Sahel.<sup>84</sup>

Despite its history of interfering in other nations' domestic affairs, Russia has portrayed itself as a non-interventionist power in the Sahel while providing food, security aid, and counterterrorism support. This approach, though seemingly ironic, serves Russia's broader objective of establishing new alliances to counterbalance other global powers.<sup>85</sup> The situation in the Sahel increasingly echoes the historical struggle for influence in Africa, raising concerns about a new configuration of great power influence. As a strategic

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<sup>80</sup> J. Chin John and Haleigh Bartos, "Rethinking U.S. Africa Policy Amid Changing Geopolitical Realities," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 2, 2024 y., 114-132, <https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/52237>.

<sup>81</sup> KCS Group Europe, "Shadows Over Sahel: Unveiling Russia's grip on Africa's resource frontier," June, 2024 y., <https://kcsgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/KCSGE-The-Sahel-Region-OP-0624.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Marcel Plichta and Christopher Faulkner, "Russia's mercenaries are bolstering autocratic regimes in the Sahel," ECPR's Political Science Blog, 13 May, 2024 y., <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/russias-mercenaries-are-bolstering-autocratic-regimes-in-the-sahel/>.

<sup>83</sup> E. Olumba Enzewa and John Sunday Ojo, "Russia has tightened its hold over the Sahel region – and now it's looking to Africa's west coast," *The Conversation*, 29 April, 2024 y., <https://theconversation.com/russia-has-tightened-its-hold-over-the-sahel-region-and-now-its-looking-to-africas-west-coast-228035>

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Lebovich, "'Sovereignty' means never having to say you're sorry: The Sahel's new geopolitics," *Clingendael*, June 2024 y., [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/CA\\_Sovereignty\\_means\\_never\\_having\\_to\\_say\\_youre\\_sorry.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/CA_Sovereignty_means_never_having_to_say_youre_sorry.pdf).



competitor to the United States and the West, Russia benefits from their declining power.<sup>86</sup> However, another rising power, China, has also been expanding its influence in Africa. While, at the moment, Russia is not an obvious antagonist to China, the dynamics may change if it feels threatened by this relatively new and rising power in the region.<sup>87</sup>

The ongoing war in Ukraine has not deterred Russia from taking decisive action in the Sahel. Since February 2022, Russia has intensified its efforts to strengthen its position in the region.<sup>88</sup> For instance, the Russia–Africa Summit held in July 2023 highlighted Russia's strategy to counterbalance its diplomatic and economic isolation resulting from its invasion of Ukraine by reinforcing its influence in Africa. Although fewer heads of state attended compared to the first summit in 2019, Russia's engagement aims to solidify its geopolitical stance and advance its interests in mining, energy, and military presence. However, the summit did not adequately address African concerns about the economic repercussions of the Ukraine conflict, which have contributed to economic instability in the Sahel (e.g., disruptions in trade and investment flows). Russia's strategic maneuvers include expanding military cooperation, including with private military firms like Wagner, and pursuing significant investments in Africa's mining and energy sectors, despite its trade with the continent remaining relatively modest.<sup>89</sup>

These actions do not directly result from the war in Ukraine but instead reflect Russia's broader imperial ambitions and opportunistic strategies to exploit areas where Western powers face challenges.

### ***China in the Sahel***

China has become a key player in the Sahel, with its involvement expanding significantly in recent years. Its policy in the region is driven primarily by economic interests but is increasingly shaped by security concerns. As Africa's strategic importance grows, China views the Sahel not just as an economic opportunity but as a crucial element of its broader geopolitical ambitions.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Iain Richardson, "Still Scrambling: Russia, France and the Sahel: A Case Against Great Power Competition," 2023–2024y., <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/950/305/Richardson.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Kurylo, "The Limits of the 'No Limits' Russian-Chinese Partnership: The Case of Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, published online May 20, 2024 y., <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2024.2353262>.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Stronski, "Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa's Sahel Region," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 February, 2023 y., [y.https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region?lang=en](https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region?lang=en).

<sup>89</sup> European Parliament, *Russia in Africa: An Atlas*, Briefing 13-02-2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS\\_BRI\(2024\)757654\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757654/EPRS_BRI(2024)757654_EN.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> Dara Cheik, "China's Foreign Policy in the Sahel," Organization for Research on China and Asia, 25 May, 2024 y., <https://orcasia.org/public/article/208/chinas-foreign-policy-in-the-sahel>.

Economically, China has made substantial investments in the Sahel. In Mali, the joint venture SUKALA, formed between the Malian government and the Chinese Light Industry Company for Techno-Economic Cooperation, has become one of the country's largest industrial entities.<sup>91 92</sup> In Niger, China's presence is even more pronounced, with significant investments in energy, mining, and real estate. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) plays a pivotal role in exploiting Niger's oil fields, while other state-owned enterprises are involved in uranium mining, reflecting China's strategic interest in securing critical resources. Beyond resource extraction, China's influence is further cemented through infrastructure projects such as stadiums, schools, and medical facilities.<sup>93</sup>

China's economic ambitions in the Sahel are closely tied to its security concerns. Regional stability is crucial for the safety of Chinese nationals and the continuity of its investments. This has led to an evolving security dimension in China's Sahel policy. China has contributed to United Nations peacekeeping operations, deploying 403 peacekeepers to MINUSMA, and in 2019, it pledged over \$45 million to support the G5-Sahel joint force.<sup>94 95</sup> China has also taken a more active role in regional security discussions, sometimes aligning with Russia to block United Nations Security Council resolutions that conflict with its interests in Mali.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, China's need to protect sea lines of communication, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, has influenced its security approach. Securing these maritime routes is vital for the uninterrupted flow of resources from Africa to China. To this end, China has considered establishing deep-water facilities along the Atlantic coast, similar to its military base in Djibouti, to protect its economic interests and enhance its military presence in the region.<sup>97</sup>

China's involvement in the Sahel is also connected to its global ambitions, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Sahel's strategic location makes it a key link in

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<sup>91</sup> Lina Benabdallah and Daniel Large, *China's Development-Security in Practice: The Case of Mali*, Working Paper No. 2020/40 (China Africa Research, 2020 y.).

<sup>92</sup> Dara Cheik, "China's Foreign Policy in the Sahel," Organization for Research on China and Asia, 25 May, 2024 y., <https://orcasia.org/public/article/208/chinas-foreign-policy-in-the-sahel>.

<sup>93</sup> Laura Rajosefa Maj., "The Future of Strategic Competition in the Sahel Region – Placing Partnership First," Air Command and Staff College, Air University Press, no. 93. April 2023 y., [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF\\_93\\_Rajosefa\\_The\\_Future\\_of\\_Strategic\\_Competition\\_in\\_the\\_Sahel\\_Region.pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF_93_Rajosefa_The_Future_of_Strategic_Competition_in_the_Sahel_Region.pdf).

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Jack Duffield, "The Sahel Will Define the Next Decade of Counterterrorism Operations," RUSI, 12 September, 2023 y., <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/sahel-will-define-next-decade-counterterrorism-operations>.

<sup>96</sup> Lina Benabdallah, "China's Conflict Resolution and Mediation Approach in Mali," Stimson, 26 January, 2024 y., <https://www.stimson.org/2024/china-conflict-resolution-and-mediation-in-mali/>.

<sup>97</sup> Alex Vines OBE, Armida van Rij and Henry Tugendhat, "Is China eyeing a second military base in Africa as the US struggles to maintain one in Niger?" Chatham House, 25 March, 2024 y., <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/china-eyeing-second-military-base-africa-us-struggles-maintain-one-niger>.

connecting China's economic interests from the Gulf of Aden to the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>98</sup> China's investments in infrastructure projects across the region are designed not only to facilitate trade but also to integrate the Sahel into its broader geopolitical framework.<sup>99</sup>

In recent years, China has adopted a carefully calculated approach to developments in the Sahel, emphasizing its principle of non-interference while subtly expanding its influence. China's response to the series of coups in the region has been notably restrained, avoiding direct condemnation of the coup leaders. Instead, the Chinese government has consistently called for peaceful solutions, allowing it to establish a growing presence in the region.<sup>100</sup>

In terms of great power dynamics, Beijing has long taken a cautious and indirect approach, often engaging from a distance to avoid alarming France, the United States, and other Western actors.<sup>101</sup> However, with the recent withdrawals of French and U.S. military forces from the region, which have created a significant power vacuum, China now has the opportunity to expand its influence. One of the best illustrations of which is the most recent Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), where President Xi Jinping declared that ties with Africa were at their "best period in history." Xi pledged over \$50 billion in financing for Africa over the next three years and promised to create a million jobs on the continent. Analysts note that this increased economic engagement is partly driven by China's need to secure critical minerals, such as copper, lithium, and rare earth elements, which are vital to its economy. The summit, attended by over 50 African leaders and the UN Secretary-General, highlights China's strategy to solidify economic partnerships, even in areas with delayed returns, reflecting its broader geopolitical objectives amidst growing global rivalries, particularly with the United States.<sup>102</sup> This development could potentially deepen China's involvement beyond economic cooperation, possibly paving the way for future military collaborations, though this remains to be seen.

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<sup>98</sup> Laura Rajosefa Maj., "The Future of Strategic Competition in the Sahel Region – Placing Partnership First," Air Command and Staff College, Air University Press, no. 93. April 2023 y., [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF\\_93\\_Rajosefa\\_The\\_Future\\_of\\_Strategic\\_Competition\\_in\\_the\\_Sahel\\_Region.pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/WF_93_Rajosefa_The_Future_of_Strategic_Competition_in_the_Sahel_Region.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> John J. Chin and Haleigh Bartos, "Rethinking U.S. Africa Policy Amid Changing Geopolitical Realities," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 2, 2024 y., 114-132, <https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/52237>.

<sup>100</sup> Sizo Nkala and Khensani Ntlemo, "China's Non-Interference Principle and the Military Coups in Africa: A Clash with the African Union?" SOAS University of London China Institute, 28 February, 2024 y., <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/china-institute/2024/02/28/chinas-non-interference-principle-and-the-military-coups-in-africa/>.

<sup>101</sup> Asia Jane Leigh, "The Dragon's Game in the Sahel," ACCORD, 10 December, 2021 y., <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-dragons-game-in-the-sahel/>.

<sup>102</sup> DW, "China's Xi Pledges to Deepen Africa Investment, Trade Ties," *DW*, September 5, 2024 y., <https://amp.dw.com/en/chinas-xi-pledges-to-deepen-africa-investment-trade-ties/a-70137471>.

Regarding the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on China's role in the Sahel, while a direct link between the two is difficult to establish, the war has undeniably intensified global geopolitical competition, in which China is a key player, including in the Sahel.

### **Conclusion**

The great power dynamics in the Sahel region have shifted significantly in recent years, driven by both regional developments and broader global competition. This research has examined the roles of France, the United States, Russia, and China, highlighting how these powers have been increasingly influenced by the evolving landscape in the Sahel.

France, once a dominant force in the region, has faced setbacks, largely due to the rise of anti-French sentiment, which has been fueled by strategic rivals like Russia. As France's influence waned, a power vacuum emerged, creating opportunities for other actors, particularly Russia and China, to assert their presence more effectively. Russia's actions in the Sahel have been opportunistic, capitalizing on the challenges faced by Western powers, while China's involvement, though primarily economic, is likely to deepen as geopolitical competition intensifies.

The United States, with its long-standing focus on counterterrorism and regional stability, has found its influence challenged by recent developments in the Sahel. Like France, the U.S. has experienced a decline in its role and presence, a reflection of the broader geopolitical struggle where authoritarian powers like Russia and China are contesting the liberal international order. This struggle raises concerns about the future stability of the region.

The redistribution of great power dynamics in the Sahel, especially since the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine, reflects a complex interplay of regional and global factors. While the war in Ukraine has undoubtedly influenced the broader geopolitical environment, the shifts in the Sahel are primarily driven by internal regional dynamics and the strategic ambitions of the great powers involved. As the situation continues to evolve, the Sahel is likely to remain a critical arena with far-reaching implications for the region's stability and the international security.

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# The Vital Role of EU and NATO in Georgia's Geopolitical Landscape

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## Abstract

Georgia's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia underscores its geopolitical significance, serving as a gateway for trade, energy routes, and cultural exchange. Amidst regional tensions and unresolved conflicts, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) play pivotal roles in shaping Georgia's trajectory towards stability, security, and prosperity.

The EU and NATO's engagement in Georgia transcends mere geographical considerations, encompassing multifaceted dimensions of conflict resolution, human rights protection, and socio-economic development. Through diplomatic efforts and peacekeeping missions, they facilitate dialogue and negotiation to address longstanding conflicts, such as those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Furthermore, the EU and NATO initiatives in Georgia extend beyond security concerns to encompass the promotion of human rights, fostering democratic values, and enhancing socio-economic development. They actively support initiatives aimed at advancing agriculture, education, and infrastructure, fostering sustainable growth and resilience.

However, misconceptions persist regarding the extent of EU and NATO influence in Georgia, often fueled by myths and misinformation. These myths and true facts will be thoroughly discussed in the paper, shedding light on the reality of EU and NATO engagement in Georgia, their role and importance in Georgia's stability and integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.

**Keywords:** EU, NATO, Geopolitical significance, Conflict resolution, Human rights, Socio-economic development, Misconceptions, Stability, Integration

## Introduction

### *Georgia's Geostrategic Location*

Geopolitics, in its general sense, refers to the influence of physical geography on a state's domestic and foreign factors, as well as on state governance. More precisely, geopolitics is a combination of geographical and political factors that impacts a country or region. The Caucasus region, and naturally Georgia, from a geopolitical perspective, lies at the threshold of continental and oceanic worlds. This region serves both as a barrier and a centuries-old zone of interaction among Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Significant trade routes passed through here, making the Caucasus, including Georgia, a frequent battleground among the great powers of ancient, medieval, and modern times. These powers sought not only to advance their military-strategic and economic interests but also to spread their cultural and civilizational values.

This positioning has historically made Georgia a significant cultural and strategic bridge between different civilizations, leading scholars to emphasize its complex, multidimensional geopolitical role.<sup>1</sup> The country's location enables it to play a pivotal role in regional energy transit, especially through critical routes such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which reinforces energy diversification away from Russia.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Georgia's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative and its position along the Middle Corridor exemplify the strategic importance of its infrastructure in fostering Eurasian trade.<sup>3</sup> Recently, the significance of this transit corridor has grown amid regional tensions, further highlighted by projects such as the planned Black Sea undersea power cable, which aims to link Georgia's energy grid directly with Europe.<sup>4</sup>

If we look at the world political map, Georgia is positioned at the crossroads of all four directions of the Earth, not only geographically but also chronologically—between the old, totalitarian world and the new, democratic one. Both of these crossroads are intertwined; to the north of the South Caucasus lies a country that is still largely totalitarian, while to the west and south are societies with a more or less democratic way of life or on the path of democratic transformation.

Scholars note that Georgia's geopolitical location places it within a dynamic zone between diverging political and economic systems, allowing it to act as a cultural bridge and

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<sup>1</sup> N. Kemoklidze, *The Geopolitical Role of Georgia in the South Caucasus*. 2021 y.

<sup>2</sup> E. Souleimanov, M. Černý, "Energy Politics in the Caucasus: Georgia's Transit Role for Caspian Oil and Gas." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2012 y.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sarkhanidze, M. Bejanidze, "The Middle Corridor and Georgia's Transport Infrastructure Development." *Caucasus Review of Transportation Studies*, 2023 y.

<sup>4</sup> R.Mousavi, et al. "Strategic Shifts in Eurasian Transit and the Impact on the South Caucasus." *Journal of Energy and Transportation Analysis*, 2021 y.

as a buffer state amid contrasting spheres of influence.<sup>5</sup> The country's position between totalitarian and democratic systems has shaped its foreign policy and internal political reforms as it seeks alignment with Europe while managing pressures from northern powers.<sup>6</sup> These geographical and political tensions are further amplified by Georgia's ambition for NATO and EU membership, situating it at the forefront of regional democratization efforts in a space characterized by historical, ideological, and economic conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

A country with such a complex yet highly advantageous geopolitical location stands at a turning point in its foreign policy direction, both on the international stage and in domestic decision-making.

Recently, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, Georgia's importance as a transit corridor for energy resources has increased even more significantly, highlighted by the recently announced project to transport electricity directly to Europe via the Black Sea seabed. As regional energy demands shift due to the war and Europe's reduced reliance on Russian energy, Georgia's transit potential is increasingly vital to energy security in Eurasia.<sup>8</sup> The proposed Black Sea transmission line, linking Georgia directly to Romania, is viewed as an essential diversification project that enhances both European and Georgian energy independence while fostering regional stability.<sup>9</sup> Experts argue that this project, along with other critical infrastructure like the Southern Gas Corridor, places Georgia in a unique position to facilitate the movement of energy resources between Asia and Europe, advancing its geopolitical significance.<sup>10</sup> These developments underscore Georgia's strategic role as an energy transit hub, aligning its national interests with broader European energy and security objectives.<sup>11</sup>

### *Why the European Union and NATO?*

The prospect of Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is supported by the plebiscite held on January 5, 2008, which asked whether people supported Georgia's

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<sup>5</sup> S. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014 y., Make sure there's no space below

<sup>6</sup>G. Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest Over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017 y.

<sup>7</sup> O. Chkhikvadze, "Georgia's EU and NATO Ambitions: Challenges and Prospects." *European Policy Analysis*, no. 3, 2020 y., 45–60.

<sup>8</sup> M. Emerson, N. Kovziridze, "Energy Security in the South Caucasus: Implications of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict." *European Policy Analysis* 10, no. 2, 2023 y. 55–67.

<sup>9</sup> N. Chitadze, "The Black Sea Energy Corridor: Prospects and Challenges for Georgia." *Caucasus Review of Energy Studies*, 2023 y.

<sup>10</sup> A. Riley, "Shifting Energy Politics in the Black Sea Region." *International Journal of Energy Studies* 9, no. 1, 2022 y. 34–49.

<sup>11</sup> L. Grigalashvili, "Georgia's Growing Role in European Energy Security." *Caucasus Energy Journal*, 2023 y.

membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, in which 77% of the population supported Georgia's membership in NATO (CEC, 2008)

Membership in NATO means stability and security for us, a further successful step for the citizens of Georgia on the path of building and developing a democratic state, as well as the irreversibility of the process of strengthening democratic values.

Analysts emphasize that NATO membership would provide essential security assurances for Georgia, acting as a deterrent against regional conflicts and contributing to the overall stability of the South Caucasus.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, scholars argue that Georgia's alignment with the European Union (EU) would bolster its economic growth, promoting modernization and sustainable development, essential for long-term stability.<sup>13</sup> EU and NATO membership could also facilitate conflict resolution, enhancing integration efforts in occupied territories by creating conditions favorable to peaceful coexistence and economic progress.<sup>14</sup> This alignment with Euro-Atlantic institutions underscores Georgia's aspirations for a secure, democratic, and economically robust future.

In our opinion, Georgia's membership in the European Union and NATO will play a crucial role in conflict resolution. Regaining occupied territories by force is out of the question. EU membership means a sustainable and modern economy, while NATO membership means peace, which will further advance our country. This will increase interest and facilitate the integration of citizens living in the occupied territories with the Georgian state.

## **Main Part**

### ***The Role of the European Union and NATO in the Country's Economy and the Protection of Human Rights***

The potential integration of Georgia into the European Union and NATO has substantial implications for both economic development and human rights protection. The EU, with its principles of open markets and sustainable growth, promotes economic modernization and resilience among its member and partner countries. For Georgia, the promise of eventual EU membership offers not only expanded trade opportunities but also access to EU investment funds aimed at infrastructure and regional development. These economic incentives encourage the development of a more diversified and competitive

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<sup>12</sup> M. Tsereteli, "Georgia's Security and NATO: The Strategic Importance of Membership." *South Caucasus Review*, 2016 *y.*

<sup>13</sup> K. Kakachia, Lebanidze, B. *Georgia's Foreign Policy in the Context of EU Aspirations: Opportunities and Challenges*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021 *y.*

<sup>14</sup> F., Miller, D. Klopfer, "The Role of Euro-Atlantic Integration in Resolving Territorial Conflicts." *Journal of Peace Studies* 29, no. 2, 2022 *y.* 99–117.

economy, moving Georgia away from traditional reliance on sectors like agriculture towards modern industries that can thrive in the global market. For example, the EU's Eastern Partnership program, under which Georgia participates, has facilitated projects like the rehabilitation of Georgia's transport infrastructure, including the construction of new highways and the modernizing of its railway system, which boosts both domestic trade and Georgia's integration into European transport corridors. In addition, the EU's funding for Georgia's agricultural modernization, such as the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), has helped the country enhance its agricultural exports by improving productivity and introducing new technologies. Furthermore, the EU's economic aid has been crucial for fostering the development of Georgia's energy sector, including the construction of renewable energy projects, which align with EU sustainability goals while bolstering Georgia's energy security.

In terms of economic stability, the EU provides frameworks that drive regulatory alignment and encourage transparent governance, which is crucial for Georgia's investment climate. By following EU standards, Georgia benefits from enhanced investor confidence, which attracts foreign direct investment and opens the door to business partnerships across the continent. Additionally, EU programs, such as the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), allow Georgian businesses to access European markets with fewer trade barriers. This integration supports the growth of Georgia's exports and strengthens its economy, which, in turn, promotes job creation and reduces poverty. Moreover, the increase in exports has had a positive impact on job creation and poverty reduction, with an estimated rise in employment rates and a reduction in poverty levels since the implementation of the DCFTA.<sup>15</sup> The economic impact of these agreements has been particularly evident in sectors like agribusiness, where Georgian produce now enjoys greater access to EU markets, leading to expanded exports and the creation of new business opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

One example of the tangible benefits of Georgia's alignment with EU frameworks is the country's agricultural sector, where the DCFTA has led to increased exports of Georgian wine, vegetables, and fruit to the EU market. Georgian wine exports to the EU grew by more than 30% after the DCFTA agreement came into force, highlighting the country's strengthened access to European markets and the removal of tariff barriers. Furthermore, the agreement has facilitated a modernizing of production standards, aligning Georgian

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<sup>15</sup> A. Caviedes, "Economic Integration and Trade Liberalization in the South Caucasus: The Case of Georgia." *Journal of European Integration* 42, no. 5, 2020 *y.*, 677-693.

<sup>16</sup> K. Gogolashvili, "EU-Georgia Relations: Economic Impacts of the Association Agreement and DCFTA." *Georgia Journal of International Affairs* 12, no. 1, 2018 *y.*, 88-104.



agricultural products with EU regulations, which in turn boosts consumer confidence in the quality of Georgian exports. Another example is the expansion of Georgia's renewable energy sector, which is also supported by EU funding under the Eastern Partnership program. Projects like the Namakhvani Hydro Power Plant have received significant EU investment, promoting the country's energy independence and facilitating integration into the European energy market.<sup>17</sup> These sectors not only benefit from increased market access but also contribute to Georgia's broader economic transformation by creating jobs, enhancing regional development, and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Human rights protection is a fundamental value of both the EU and NATO, and Georgia's alignment with these organizations promotes improvements in this area. Through the EU, Georgia is encouraged to uphold high standards in human rights and democracy, aligning its laws and institutions with European standards. This commitment is not only beneficial for fostering a more just and inclusive society but is also essential for attracting international support and investment. EU membership prospects place expectations on Georgia to ensure the protection of minority rights, freedom of expression, judicial independence, and rule of law. Such reforms create a more democratic society that respects citizens' rights, fostering trust between the government and its people.

The European Court of Human Rights has also highlighted Georgia's progress in the protection of minority rights, particularly in terms of improving the legal framework for the rights of ethnic minorities and ensuring their participation in public life.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Georgia's commitment to freedom of expression has been reinforced through media reforms supported by the EU, which have increased the transparency of the media sector and safeguarded the rights of journalists.<sup>19</sup> These examples reflect Georgia's ongoing transformation in line with European values, fostering a society where the rights of citizens are better protected and respected.

NATO, while primarily a defense alliance, also champions democratic principles and human rights among its member and partner states. Georgia's desire for NATO membership strengthens its resolve to reform military and governance structures to meet NATO standards, which emphasize civilian control over the military, anti-corruption efforts, and respect for individual freedoms. This commitment to democratic governance helps create a stable environment where human rights are respected, contributing to internal stability and

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<sup>17</sup> G. Kobalia, "Energy Security and Renewable Resources: Georgia's Strategy Towards European Integration." *Caucasus Energy Review*, 2020 y.

<sup>18</sup> Council of Europe. "Georgia's Human Rights Reforms: Advancements and Challenges." *European Commission for Democracy Through Law*, 2020 y.

<sup>19</sup> Freedom House. "Freedom of the Press in Georgia: Challenges and Progress." *Freedom House Annual Report*, 2021 y.

reducing the risk of authoritarian tendencies. Furthermore, NATO's focus on security provides Georgia with a sense of protection that allows the nation to focus on social and economic development, creating conditions for prosperity and respect for human rights.

Lastly, EU and NATO alignment supports Georgia's resilience against external threats, both economic and territorial. EU economic ties and NATO's security framework offer Georgia a support system that strengthens its sovereignty, reducing the influence of external pressures from neighboring countries. This protection allows Georgia to prioritize internal reforms and focus on the well-being of its citizens. Overall, the EU and NATO play critical roles in promoting Georgia's economic growth, safeguarding human rights, and providing a stable foundation for democratic and social development.

### ***Myths and Reality***

The relationship between Georgia and the European Union, particularly in the context of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), has been a subject of much debate and speculation. While these agreements are viewed as crucial steps in Georgia's European integration, numerous myths persist regarding their impact on the country's economy, sovereignty, and foreign relations. These misconceptions often overshadow the true benefits that these agreements offer, including economic growth, enhanced trade opportunities, and stronger democratic institutions. In this context, it is essential to address these myths and examine the reality of Georgia's path toward deeper integration with the EU, which ultimately supports its long-term stability, security, and development.

**Myth 1:** "Signing the Association Agreement threatens Georgian culture and traditional values."

**Fact:** This is not true. The European Union does not aim to change the culture of any country; rather, it strives to protect the diversity of cultures within Europe. The EU is an organization that strongly supports cultural diversity, and its motto is "Unity in Diversity." The EU respects Georgia's cultural values, and the Association Agreement is seen as a tool that will help safeguard and promote these values. The agreement encourages the preservation of Georgia's unique cultural heritage while also facilitating its integration into broader European cultural and economic frameworks.

**Myth 2:** "The Association Agreement could lead to the isolation of national minorities living in Georgia, including Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and push them toward separatism."

**Fact:** This is a misconception. The Association Agreement actively supports the absence of discrimination and promotes the protection of minorities. It acknowledges the

significant role of minorities in enhancing national unity and cohesion. The agreement ensures that all citizens, including national minorities, benefit from improvements in living standards and access to opportunities, contributing to stronger national unity. The EU's commitment to human rights and the protection of minorities is one of its core principles, and the agreement aligns with this, fostering inclusivity and integration rather than division. The implementation of the agreement enhances the rights of minorities, promoting their active participation in the country's development and strengthening Georgia's unity as a whole.

**Myth 3:** "The Association Agreement undermines the authority of the Georgian Orthodox Church."

**Fact:** This is incorrect. The European Union holds deep respect for the Georgian Orthodox Church and acknowledges its significant role in Georgia's national life. In March 2014, European Commissioner Stefan Füle met with Patriarch Ilia II, where they discussed Georgia's political association and economic integration with the EU. During the meeting, the Patriarch expressed his unconditional support for Georgia's European choice. The EU has consistently emphasized its commitment to the cultural and religious heritage of Georgia, recognizing the importance of the Church in maintaining national identity and values. The Association Agreement does not interfere with the Church's authority but rather respects its role in Georgian society, ensuring that European integration complements rather than conflicts with Georgia's religious and cultural traditions

**Myth 4:** "The agreement will bring minimal benefits to Georgia, while imposing additional obligations."

**Fact:** This is incorrect. The Association Agreement offers Georgia numerous significant benefits. Over time, the agreement is expected to result in substantial improvements in the lives of Georgian citizens, particularly through enhanced democracy, increased political, economic, and institutional stability, as well as a more robust and thriving economy. The projected economic growth is estimated at 4.3% per year, contributing to greater prosperity for the population. The agreement also provides access to European markets, technical support, and funding for development projects, which will drive modernization in various sectors of the economy, making Georgia more competitive globally (European Commission, 2014). The agreement's benefits far outweigh the responsibilities it brings, creating a win-win situation for the country's future.

**Myth 5:** "Signing the agreement will harm Georgia's economy."

**Fact:** On the contrary, Georgia will gain substantial benefits from new trade opportunities and improved access to the European Union's market—the largest market in the world. The Association Agreement will allow Georgia to enhance its competitiveness in

relation to the EU and, over time, secure a stronger position in the global economy. This will open new opportunities not only in trade between Georgia and the EU but also in international trade, thanks to the global recognition of EU standards and norms. As a result, Georgian products and services will have greater market access, leading to economic growth and development, and positioning Georgia as a more competitive player in global markets. The agreement enhances Georgia's integration into global economic structures, encouraging investment, modernization, and increased trade volumes.

**Myth 6:** "Georgian farmers will suffer as a result of reforms."

**Fact:** Georgia's agricultural sector holds immense potential but requires modernization to improve efficiency. This includes the need for investments, increased professionalism, and the development of modern skills among those working in agriculture. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) will assist in achieving these objectives by introducing the necessary tools and support. However, any restructuring may mean that some farming activities may no longer be profitable for certain farmers. In such cases, it may be more beneficial for them to undergo retraining and shift to new employment opportunities. EU projects will provide the needed support for these transitions by offering resources for skills development and alternative career paths. Many countries that modernized their agricultural sectors have seen similar shifts, where farmers adapted to new realities through retraining and by adopting new practices that contributed to economic growth and development.

**Myth 7:** "It is unclear what reforms Georgia must undertake."

**Fact:** The reforms Georgia needs to implement are clearly outlined in the annexes of the Association Agreement. These reforms, designed with Georgia's current situation in mind, focus on several key sectors crucial to improving trade capacity and business operations. Areas of reform include public procurement, food safety and sanitary controls, customs procedures, and intellectual property regulations. In addition, the agreement addresses the regulatory frameworks for services and manufacturing standards, as well as ensuring transparency in legal and business processes. These reforms are essential for improving Georgia's access to the EU market, which is directly linked to their successful implementation. Furthermore, specific political and legal reform goals are outlined in the agreement, such as the development of democratic institutions, strengthening the rule of law, and improving human rights protection, judicial independence, and the capacity of law enforcement agencies

While the myths surrounding the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between Georgia and the EU are numerous, it is clear that these misconceptions do not reflect the reality of the situation. Many of the

concerns raised are based on misunderstandings or lack of information about the true nature of these agreements. In fact, the reforms and opportunities provided by the agreement are designed to promote economic growth, social development, and democratic stability in Georgia. While there may still be some myths and uncertainties, the benefits of the association and trade agreements, such as increased trade opportunities, improved governance, and strengthened human rights, far outweigh the concerns. As Georgia continues its journey towards deeper integration with Europe, it is essential to focus on the positive outcomes and the long-term advantages these agreements bring to the country.

### Conclusion

To conclude, Georgia's position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia is made even more important by the roles of the European Union (EU) and NATO in supporting the country's future. Both organizations have played key parts in improving Georgia's security, stability, and development. Their efforts in resolving conflicts, promoting democracy, and protecting human rights have helped Georgia move closer to becoming part of the European and transatlantic community. Despite some myths about their influence, this paper shows the real and positive impact the EU and NATO have had on Georgia's growth and stability. Continued cooperation with these organizations is essential for Georgia's goal of peace, prosperity, and integration into the Western world.

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# Application of Stochastic Mathematical Models in Cybersecurity Issues in the South Caucasus and Black Sea Countries

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## **Abstract:**

This article explores the application of stochastic mathematical models in enhancing cybersecurity across the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. With increasing cyber threats influenced by regional geopolitical tensions and expanding digital infrastructures, countries in these regions face unique challenges in securing cyber networks. Stochastic models provide a powerful approach for modeling the randomness and uncertainty inherent in cyber threats, offering predictive insights that support more resilient security strategies. This paper reviews various stochastic models, their applications in cybersecurity, and case studies relevant to the unique context of these regions. The application of stochastic mathematical models in cybersecurity can provide vital predictive capabilities to the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. By understanding the probabilities of attack patterns, threat actors' behaviors, and system vulnerabilities, these models enhance regional cyber resilience. As access to cybersecurity resources and data collection improves, stochastic models will play an even more significant role in these regions.

**Keywords:** Stochastic models, cybersecurity, South Caucasus, Black Sea, Markov chains, Poisson processes, Monte Carlo simulations.



## Introduction

Cybersecurity is a pressing issue worldwide, with the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions particularly vulnerable due to geopolitical complexities, under-resourced cyber defenses, and a rising number of attacks targeting national infrastructure. This paper investigates the role of stochastic mathematical models in providing predictive capabilities to address these cybersecurity challenges. By applying probability-based models, stochastic processes account for the random and unpredictable nature of cyber-attacks, enhancing the ability to model, anticipate, and mitigate threats.

The South Caucasus and Black Sea regions are witnessing an increase in cyber threats, targeting sectors ranging from finance and government to energy and telecommunications. This escalation in threats is partially driven by geopolitical conflicts and regional instabilities, which exacerbate vulnerabilities. For instance, tensions among nations can increase the probability of state-sponsored cyber-attacks, affecting critical infrastructure and compromising sensitive information. Additionally, cyber defenses in these regions often lack resources, making it challenging to adopt and implement advanced cybersecurity frameworks.

## Main Part

### *Overview of Stochastic Mathematical Models in Cybersecurity:*

Stochastic models employ random variables and probabilistic methods to predict possible outcomes in scenarios with inherent uncertainty. In cybersecurity, these models are invaluable in analyzing patterns of cyber threats, enabling organizations to assess risks even in unpredictable environments. Cybersecurity threats are inherently unpredictable due to the diverse motives, methods, and targets involved. Stochastic models help mitigate this unpredictability by enabling probabilistic forecasting of attack patterns, likely vulnerabilities, and potential system responses to attacks. By analyzing these variables, these models can estimate threat likelihood, predict the timing of future incidents, and assess potential damages.

This section reviews several stochastic models widely applicable to cybersecurity issues and highlights their particular relevance to the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions.

### **Markov Chains**

Markov Chains model systems where transitions occur between different states, with the likelihood of each transition dependent on the current state alone. In cybersecurity, Markov Chains can model system states (e.g., secure, compromised, breached) and provide insights into the probability of moving from one state to another. For example, in a network monitoring system, a Markov Chain can estimate the likelihood that a secure system will

experience a breach within a certain period, helping administrators prepare defenses in advance.<sup>1</sup>

### **Poisson Processes**

Poisson processes are useful in modeling the frequency of random events, such as the occurrence of cyber-attacks over a given period. In regions like the South Caucasus and Black Sea, where cyber-attacks may cluster during periods of heightened geopolitical tension, Poisson processes help model and predict these clusters of activity, aiding in better resource allocation for cyber defense.

### **Monte Carlo Simulations**

Monte Carlo simulations involve running numerous scenarios based on probabilistic inputs to understand the range of possible outcomes and assess system vulnerabilities. In cybersecurity, Monte Carlo simulations are valuable for assessing the likelihood of various attack scenarios, allowing decision-makers to visualize potential impacts and develop mitigation strategies. For instance, a Monte Carlo simulation could simulate a large-scale phishing campaign to estimate the probability of critical breaches across key systems.

### ***Case Studies and Applications in the South Caucasus and Black Sea Regions***

Due to the uniqueness of these regions, adaptation of these models requires attention to specific geopolitical, infrastructural, and cultural factors. Some case studies, as well as hypothetical scenarios, demonstrate the application of stochastic models in these regions.

A hypothetical case study involves applying a Markov Chain to assess risk to national energy infrastructure across several Black Sea countries. By modeling each stage of vulnerability—uncompromised, compromised, fully breached—this approach allows cybersecurity teams to evaluate the likelihood of progressing to a breach based on previous states.<sup>2</sup>

In the South Caucasus, cyber-attack frequency may spike during periods of political tension. Using Poisson processes, analysts could model expected attack frequencies across various industries, allowing targeted increases in cyber defense resources during sensitive periods.<sup>3</sup>

Reliable data is essential for building effective stochastic models, yet cybersecurity data in the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions is often limited. Data sharing across

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<sup>1</sup> Stochastic Modeling of Data Networks by Demetres D. Kouvatsos, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Security Dynamics in the Black Sea Region: Geopolitical Shifts and Regional Orders edited by Kornely Kakachia, Stephan Malerius, and Stefan Meister (2024).

<sup>3</sup> Stochastic Models in Reliability and Maintenance by Shunji Osaki, 2002.

borders is restricted due to political concerns, while some countries lack the infrastructure for consistent data collection.

Stochastic models, while powerful, struggle to fully capture the intricacies of political and social factors that influence cybersecurity. Adapting these models requires careful consideration of how regional tensions impact the risk landscape.

Stochastic models, especially Monte Carlo simulations, demand significant computational resources. Developing nations in the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions may face difficulties in allocating sufficient resources to run these models effectively.

### **Conclusion**

The application of stochastic mathematical models in cybersecurity can provide vital predictive capabilities to the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. By understanding the probabilities of attack patterns, threat actors' behaviors, and system vulnerabilities, these models enhance regional cyber resilience. As access to cybersecurity resources and data collection improves, stochastic models will play an even more significant role in these regions.<sup>4</sup> Future research should explore integrating artificial intelligence with stochastic models, enabling real-time adaptability to evolving threats. This article acknowledges the ongoing support of regional cybersecurity institutions and academic partners contributing to a deeper understanding of cybersecurity issues in geopolitically sensitive areas.

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# Enhancing Nuclear Transit Security in the Black Sea Region: Challenges, Case Studies, and Collaborative Strategies

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## **Abstract**

The Black Sea region's geopolitical volatility, intensified by the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict, poses significant challenges to the secure transit of nuclear materials—a matter of global security concern. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the geographical and geopolitical factors influencing nuclear security risks in the region, emphasizing how past and current conflicts disrupt transit dynamics and complicate security strategies. Through detailed case studies on the repercussions of Crimea's annexation and Georgia's nuclear security enhancements following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, we contextualize current challenges and extract valuable lessons. Recognizing the complexities of expanding the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) mandate, we explore alternative strategies to reinforce nuclear transit security. We propose collaborative approaches that include reinforcing the IAEA's role within existing frameworks, establishing internationally recognized nuclear security corridors, leveraging technological innovations, and strengthening national capacities. By integrating geopolitical analysis, legal examination, technological assessment, and policy evaluation, we offer an insightful roadmap aimed at improving nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region while navigating the intricate legal and political landscape.

**Keywords:** Black Sea, Russo-Georgian War, IAEA.

## Introduction

The secure transit of nuclear materials is a critical component of global nuclear security, particularly in regions characterized by geopolitical volatility. The Black Sea region, serving as a strategic intersection connecting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, has historically been a focal point of geopolitical interest and conflict.<sup>1</sup> Its significance is underscored by its role as a major transit route for energy resources, goods, and, importantly, nuclear materials used for civilian purposes such as energy generation and medical applications.

Recent escalations, especially the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict that intensified with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, have heightened concerns over the secure transit of nuclear materials.<sup>2</sup> The complex geopolitical landscape, marked by overlapping interests, historical tensions, and territorial disputes, poses unique challenges to nuclear security. These challenges are compounded by the region's diverse political systems, economic disparities, and varying degrees of adherence to international nuclear security standards.

With the rise in nuclear power projects and intensified regional conflicts, securing the transit of nuclear materials has become an imperative global security issue. Nuclear materials are distinct from other goods due to their potential use in nuclear weapons and the catastrophic consequences of their misuse.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring their safe and secure transit is essential to prevent nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of nuclear transit security challenges in the Black Sea region, evaluate the geographical and geopolitical factors influencing nuclear security risks, and propose innovative collaborative strategies for enhancement. Our research integrates geopolitical analysis, legal examination, technological assessment, and policy evaluation to offer an insightful roadmap for improving nuclear transit security while navigating the intricate legal and political landscape of the region.

## Main Part

### Geographical and Geopolitical Context

The Black Sea region encompasses six littoral states: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine. This enclosed sea serves as a critical maritime corridor, connecting the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus Strait and providing access to global

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<sup>1</sup> C. King, *The Black Sea: A History*, Oxford University Press, 2004 y.

<sup>2</sup> A. E. Kramer, „Ukraine Reports Russian Invasion on Crimea Peninsula,“ *The New York Times*, 2 March, 2014 y.

<sup>3</sup>IAEA, Nuclear Security Recommendations on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities, (INFCIRC/225/Revision 5). International Atomic Energy Agency, 2011 y.

shipping lanes.<sup>4</sup> The region's geography includes vital ports such as Odessa in Ukraine, Novorossiysk in Russia, and Constanta in Romania, which are essential for international trade and the transit of goods, including nuclear materials.

The strategic importance of the Black Sea is further enhanced by its role in energy transportation. Pipelines and shipping routes carry oil and natural gas from the Caspian region to European markets, making the area a focal point for energy security concerns.<sup>5</sup> The transit of nuclear materials, both for energy generation and medical uses, relies on secure and efficient routes through this region, necessitating robust security measures to prevent incidents and unauthorized access.

The Black Sea region has a long history of conflicts and shifting alliances that continue to shape its geopolitical landscape. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of newly independent states and a reconfiguration of regional power dynamics.<sup>6</sup> This period of transition was marked by several conflicts that have left lasting impacts on regional stability and security arrangements, including the Transnistria conflict in Moldova (1990-1992), the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia (1992-1993, 2008), and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine that began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea.<sup>7</sup>

The contemporary geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea region is characterized by intensified rivalries and a lack of unified security frameworks. NATO's eastward expansion, with Bulgaria and Romania joining in 2004, has altered the security architecture, provoking concerns from Russia over its traditional sphere of influence.<sup>8</sup> Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its military support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine have further escalated tensions, leading to sanctions and a deterioration of relations with Western countries.<sup>9</sup>

These developments have direct and significant impacts on nuclear security in the region. The erosion of trust between key stakeholders complicates collaborative efforts to secure nuclear materials. The increased militarization raises the risk of accidents or incidents involving nuclear material transit. Conflicting interests and the absence of unified

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., C. King, 2004 y.

<sup>5</sup> R. Andrei, Energy security: Challenges and opportunities in the Caspian-Black Sea Region – Doaj. Bezbednosni Dijalozi, June 1 2016 y. <https://doaj.org/article/9b92a937c9d74991aa1d25e671126360>.

<sup>6</sup> R. Allison Russian 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: How and why Russia broke the rules. *International Affairs*, 90 (6), 2014 y.. 1255-1297.

<sup>7</sup> , R Menon, E. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*. MIT Press, 2015 y.

<sup>8</sup> J. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2012 y.

<sup>9</sup> T. Kuzio, „Ukraine between a constrained EU and assertive Russia“, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53 (5), 2015 y., 1026-1043.

security protocols among Black Sea states make the establishment of comprehensive security measures challenging.<sup>10</sup>

### **Nuclear Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region**

The transit of nuclear materials through the Black Sea region presents unique and significant risks that distinguish it from the movement of conventional goods. The potential for these materials to be used in nuclear weapons and the severe consequences of any security breach necessitate extraordinary security measures.<sup>11</sup> The primary risks associated with nuclear material transit in the Black Sea region include theft and diversion, illicit trafficking, and the potential for sabotage or accidents.

Non-state actors, including terrorist groups and organized crime networks, pose a significant threat to nuclear material security. The high value and potential for misuse make nuclear materials attractive targets for theft or diversion.<sup>12</sup> The complex geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea region, with its porous borders and areas of weak governance, increases the vulnerability to such threats.

The Black Sea region has been identified as a transit route for the smuggling of nuclear and radiological materials.<sup>13</sup> Weak border controls, corruption, and insufficient resources in some areas of the region exacerbate this risk. The presence of unresolved conflicts and disputed territories further complicates efforts to combat illicit trafficking, as these areas often serve as hotspots for illegal activities.

The risk of sabotage during transit is a significant concern, as such acts could lead to the release of radioactive materials, resulting in environmental contamination and public health crises. Additionally, accidents due to human error, technical failures, or natural disasters pose persistent threats to the safe transit of nuclear materials.<sup>14</sup> The Black Sea's maritime environment adds another layer of complexity to these risks, with the potential for shipping accidents or deliberate attacks on vessels carrying nuclear materials.

The ongoing conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the Black Sea region have tangible and significant impacts on nuclear material transit. Conflicts can lead to the closure or increased insecurity of key transit routes, necessitating the rerouting of nuclear materials through less

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<sup>10</sup> J. A. Larsen, „Nuclear security in the Black Sea region: Contested spaces and national strategies“ *Contemporary Security Policy*, 39 (2), 2018 y., 234-256.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. IAEA, 2011 y.

<sup>12</sup> M. Bunn, M. B. Malin, „Progress on Securing Nuclear Weapons and Materials: The Four-Year Effort and Beyond,“ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2011 y.

<sup>13</sup> L. Zaitseva, F. Steinhäusler, „Nuclear trafficking issues in the Black Sea region,“ *European Security*, 23 (1), 2014 y. 24-44.

<sup>14</sup> IAEA, „Nuclear Security Fundamentals,“ International Atomic Energy Agency, 2015 y.



secure or longer paths.<sup>15</sup> This not only increases the time nuclear materials are in transit, thereby extending their vulnerability, but also may force the use of routes that are less familiar or less equipped to handle such sensitive cargo.

In conflict zones or disputed territories, government control and oversight may diminish, increasing the vulnerability of nuclear materials to theft or diversion.<sup>16</sup> The lack of clear jurisdiction in these areas can create security vacuums that malicious actors may exploit. Diplomatic tensions hinder information sharing and collaborative security efforts among states, weakening the overall security architecture.<sup>17</sup>

While international frameworks provide guidelines for nuclear security, several limitations exist in their application to the Black Sea region. Adherence to instruments like the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) and its 2005 Amendment varies among states due to differing capacities, resources, and political will.<sup>18</sup> This inconsistency creates vulnerabilities in the regional security framework, as the chain of security is only as strong as its weakest link.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), while playing a crucial role in promoting nuclear security, has a mandate that is primarily advisory. It lacks enforcement authority over member states, limiting its ability to ensure compliance with international standards.<sup>19</sup> This limitation is particularly problematic in regions like the Black Sea, where geopolitical tensions may make states reluctant to fully engage with international oversight mechanisms.

## Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach to analyze the complex issue of nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region. Our methodology integrates various analytical techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions.

We conduct an examination of historical and current geopolitical dynamics in the Black Sea region, including reviewing historical conflicts, assessing current political relationships, and evaluating the impact of regional power dynamics on nuclear security. A thorough review of international treaties, conventions, and legal frameworks governing

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<sup>15</sup> A. Polyakova, „Black Sea Security: Reviving US policy toward the region,“ CEPA, 12 July, 2023 y. <https://cepa.org/external-appearance/black-sea-security-reviving-us-policy-toward-the-region/>.

<sup>16</sup> A. N. Pamir, „Energy and pipeline security in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions: Challenges and solutions,“ *The Black Sea Region: Cooperation and Security Building*, 2004 y. 137–169.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Allison, 2014 y.

<sup>18</sup> IAEA, „Nuclear Security Series. International Atomic Energy Agency,“ 2016 y.

<sup>19</sup> T. Findlay, „Unleashing the Nuclear Watchdog: Strengthening and Reform of the IAEA,“ *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 2011 y.

nuclear security is undertaken, including analyzing the IAEA's mandate, the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and its Amendment, and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

We evaluate emerging technologies and innovations that have the potential to enhance nuclear security, considering their applicability and potential impact in the Black Sea context. Existing policies and strategies related to nuclear security in the Black Sea region are critically reviewed, including analyzing national security strategies, regional cooperation initiatives, and international policy frameworks.

Two detailed case studies are presented to provide concrete examples of the challenges and potential solutions in nuclear transit security: the repercussions of Crimea's annexation on nuclear transit routes and Georgia's nuclear security enhancements post-2008 Russo-Georgian War. These case studies are developed through a combination of document analysis, expert interviews, and review of official reports and academic literature.

Our data sources include academic literature and peer-reviewed journals, official documents from international organizations, government reports and policy documents, legal texts of relevant treaties and conventions, expert assessments and policy briefs from think tanks and research institutions, and technical reports on nuclear security technologies. Data analysis involves comparative analysis of policies and legal frameworks, trend analysis of security incidents and geopolitical developments, qualitative assessment of expert opinions and policy recommendations, and synthesis of technological capabilities and their potential applications.

This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region. By integrating geopolitical, legal, technological, and policy perspectives, we aim to develop feasible and effective solutions that are sensitive to the region's complex dynamics.

## **Case Studies**

### **A. Repercussions of Crimea's Annexation on Nuclear Transit Routes**

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 serves as a critical case study in understanding the profound impact of geopolitical events on nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region. This event not only altered the political landscape but also significantly disrupted established nuclear material transit routes, creating new security challenges and legal ambiguities.

Prior to the annexation, Ukrainian ports in Crimea, particularly Sevastopol, played a crucial role in the transit of nuclear materials.<sup>20</sup> The sudden change in control led to immediate and far-reaching consequences for nuclear transit security. Legal uncertainties regarding jurisdiction over territorial waters and ports complicated the enforcement of nuclear security protocols in the region. The loss of access to Crimean ports necessitated the rerouting of nuclear materials through alternative channels, often involving less familiar and potentially less secure paths, increasing transit times and exposure to risks.<sup>21</sup>

The annexation severely strained relations between Russia and Western countries, hindering joint security initiatives and information sharing crucial for effective nuclear material transit security.<sup>22</sup> The heightened military presence in and around Crimea following the annexation raised the risk of accidental engagements or deliberate provocations involving vessels potentially carrying nuclear materials. The rerouting of nuclear transports imposed significant economic costs and logistical challenges, while conflicting claims over territorial waters created uncertainties in the enforcement of security protocols.

This case study underscores the vulnerability of nuclear transit security to rapid geopolitical changes. It highlights the need for flexible and adaptable security strategies that can respond quickly to alterations in the political landscape. The lessons drawn from this case emphasize the importance of developing contingency plans for sudden geopolitical changes, enhancing the resilience and flexibility of nuclear transit security systems, strengthening international cooperation and information sharing mechanisms, and addressing legal and jurisdictional challenges in disputed territories to ensure consistent application of nuclear security measures.

## **B. Georgia's Nuclear Security Enhancements Post-2008**

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War serves as a pivotal moment in Georgia's approach to nuclear security, offering valuable insights into how a country can enhance its nuclear security infrastructure in the aftermath of a conflict. Prior to 2008, Georgia's nuclear security infrastructure was largely a legacy of its Soviet past, with outdated systems and protocols. The conflict with Russia exposed significant vulnerabilities in Georgia's overall security apparatus, including its capacity to secure nuclear and radiological materials.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Kramer, 2014 y.

<sup>21</sup> I. Anthony, V. Fedchenko, „Nuclear security in the Black Sea region: Contested spaces, national capacities and multinational potential,“ SIPRI Policy Paper, 2018 y. p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Allison, 2014 y.

<sup>23</sup> IAEA, „Establishing a National Nuclear Security Support Centre,“ International Atomic Energy Agency, 2013 y.

In response to the identified weaknesses, Georgia established the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Agency, a centralized body that ensured consistent implementation of security protocols across the country, addressing the previous fragmentation of oversight.<sup>24</sup> With assistance from international partners, particularly the U.S. Department of Energy's Second Line of Defense Program, Georgia undertook substantial upgrades to its detection equipment at border crossings and ports.<sup>25</sup>

Georgia actively engaged in international nuclear security initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to global non-proliferation efforts. This included participation in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), cooperation with the IAEA on various nuclear security programs, and bilateral agreements with the United States and European Union countries for technical assistance and training.<sup>26</sup> The country updated its legal framework to align with international nuclear security standards, including amending national laws on nuclear and radiation safety, developing new regulations for the physical protection of nuclear materials, and strengthening export control laws to prevent illicit trafficking.

Recognizing the importance of human resources in nuclear security, Georgia invested heavily in training programs for security personnel, customs officers, and first responders. These programs focused on detection and interdiction of nuclear and radiological materials, response procedures for nuclear security events, and forensics and investigation techniques for nuclear security incidents.

The enhancements made by Georgia resulted in several positive outcomes, including improved detection capabilities, enhanced response mechanisms, international recognition of its efforts, and increased resilience against potential future security challenges. However, challenges remained, including resource constraints, ongoing geopolitical complexities with Russia, and the need to ensure long-term sustainability of these enhancements.

This case study demonstrates that significant improvements in nuclear security are possible even in a challenging geopolitical environment when there is strong national commitment coupled with international support. It highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach that includes regulatory reforms, infrastructure upgrades, international collaboration, and capacity building.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> NNSA, Second Line of Defense Program Overview. National Nuclear Security Administration, 2015 y.

<sup>26</sup> M. B. Nikitin, „Securing Nuclear Materials: The 2016 Summit and Issues for Congress,“ Congressional Research Service. 2016 y.

## Reinforcing the IAEA's Role and Establishing Nuclear Security Corridors

While expanding the IAEA's mandate presents significant legal and political challenges, reinforcing its role within existing frameworks offers a practical path forward for enhancing nuclear security in the region. We propose innovative approaches to strengthen the IAEA's role in conflict-prone areas of the Black Sea region, including the establishment of IAEA-led "nuclear security zones" and the development of rapid response teams.

The concept of IAEA-led nuclear security zones in conflict-prone areas draws inspiration from the UN's peacekeeping operations but focuses specifically on nuclear security. These zones would be internationally recognized neutral areas where the IAEA could maintain a continuous presence, conduct regular inspections, and facilitate the safe transit of nuclear materials.<sup>27</sup> Implementation would require negotiation of new international agreements addressing issues such as jurisdiction, liability, and the rights and responsibilities of the IAEA and host countries.

We also propose the creation of specialized IAEA rapid response teams trained and equipped to deal with nuclear security emergencies in conflict zones. These teams would have the capability to deploy quickly to assess and mitigate risks to nuclear facilities or materials in areas of active conflict.<sup>28</sup> Challenges in implementing these teams include ensuring the safety and neutrality of IAEA personnel in conflict zones, negotiating access and operational freedoms with conflicting parties, and integrating these teams into existing emergency response frameworks.

To address the challenges of reduced cooperation in conflict zones, we propose the development of enhanced information sharing mechanisms under IAEA auspices. These would facilitate the exchange of critical nuclear security information even between parties in conflict, utilizing secure, encrypted communication channels for real-time information sharing and regular regional nuclear security briefings facilitated by the IAEA.

The concept of "Nuclear Security Corridors" represents an innovative approach to enhancing the security of nuclear material transits in the Black Sea region. These corridors would be designated maritime and land routes specifically designed for the safe and secure transit of nuclear materials, drawing inspiration from humanitarian corridors used in conflict zones but applied to the realm of nuclear security.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> T. Findlay, „Safeguards for the Future,“ In Nuclear Law. T.M.C. Asser Press. 2022 y.

<sup>28</sup> J. Boureston, T. Ogilvie-White, Expanding the IAEA's nuclear security mandate. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 66 (5), 2010 y., p. 55–64.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Polyakova, 2023 y.

Key features of Nuclear Security Corridors would include specific maritime and land routes agreed upon by all regional stakeholders, enhanced security measures along these routes, formal agreements between Black Sea states facilitated by organizations like the IAEA and potentially the UN Security Council, deployment of state-of-the-art detection systems, and collaborative security operations involving personnel from multiple regional states.

The establishment of Nuclear Security Corridors offers several benefits, including risk reduction by providing secure and predictable routes, confidence building among states, standardization of security measures across different jurisdictions, and improved efficiency in the transit process for nuclear materials. However, implementation challenges include diplomatic negotiations to reach agreements on corridor routes and protocols, securing necessary funding and resources, ensuring technological integration across different national infrastructures, and maintaining the corridors' neutral status in the face of regional conflicts.

### **Innovative Technological Solutions**

The rapidly evolving landscape of technology offers promising avenues for enhancing nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region. Implementing cutting-edge technologies can significantly improve detection, monitoring, and overall security of nuclear materials in transit. We focus on two key areas of technological innovation: advanced detection technologies and secure communication and documentation systems.

Advanced detection technologies are crucial for identifying and intercepting illicit nuclear materials and ensuring the integrity of legitimate transports. Next-generation radiation portal monitors (RPMs) offer significantly improved sensitivity and specificity compared to older models, more accurately distinguishing between naturally occurring radioactive materials and potential threats (Lovering et al., 2020). These systems feature enhanced spectroscopic capabilities for isotope identification, improved algorithms for threat discrimination, and network connectivity for real-time data analysis and reporting.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) equipped with radiation detectors and imaging systems can provide flexible and extensive coverage of transit routes and facilities.<sup>30</sup> This technology is particularly useful for monitoring large areas or inaccessible terrains, enabling aerial surveys of ports, border crossings, and transit routes, as well as real-time monitoring of ship movements in the Black Sea. However, regulatory issues surrounding UAV

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<sup>30</sup> J. Tupa, J. Simota, F. Steiner, „Aspects of risk management implementation for Industry 4.0,“ *Procedia Manufacturing*, 11, 2017 y., p. 1223-1230.

operations in different jurisdictions and ensuring secure control and data transmission present challenges to implementation.

Muon tomography offers a revolutionary approach to cargo inspection, using naturally occurring cosmic rays to create 3D images of container contents. This technology can detect shielded nuclear materials that might evade traditional X-ray systems.<sup>31</sup> While it offers advantages such as the ability to penetrate dense materials and no additional radiation exposure, high initial setup costs and the need for specialized expertise in data interpretation are significant hurdles.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning algorithms can significantly enhance the capabilities of detection systems by improving pattern recognition, reducing false positives, and enabling predictive analytics.<sup>32</sup> These technologies can be applied to automated analysis of sensor data from multiple sources, predictive modeling of potential security risks, and anomaly detection in transit patterns and cargo manifests.

In terms of secure communication and documentation systems, blockchain technology offers a decentralized, tamper-resistant method for recording and tracking nuclear material movements. Implementing a blockchain-based system for nuclear material transit documentation could significantly enhance transparency and trust among stakeholders.<sup>33</sup> Key benefits include an immutable record of all transactions and movements, enhanced traceability and accountability in the nuclear material supply chain, and the potential for smart contracts to automate and secure regulatory compliance.

Establishing highly secure, encrypted communication channels for sharing real-time information on nuclear material transits is crucial for coordinated security efforts.<sup>34</sup> Features of such systems should include end-to-end encryption for all communications, multi-factor authentication for access control, and resilient network architecture to prevent disruptions.

To effectively implement these technological solutions in the Black Sea region, a phased approach is recommended. This would begin with a comprehensive evaluation of existing technologies and infrastructure in each country, followed by small-scale pilot projects to test the effectiveness and integration of new technologies. Developing regional standards and protocols for the use of these technologies would ensure interoperability and consistent application. Extensive training programs for personnel at all levels are crucial to ensure effective utilization of new technologies. Finally, mechanisms for ongoing

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<sup>31</sup>A. Abdulla, M. G. Morgan, M. J. Ford, „Expert assessments of the cost of light water small modular reactors,“ Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114(13), 2017 y., E2470-E2476.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. (Tupa et al., 2017)

<sup>33</sup> D. Tapscott, A. Tapscott, Blockchain Revolution: How the Technology Behind Bitcoin Is Changing Money, Business, and the World. Portfolio. 2016 y.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Tupa et al., 2017 y.

assessment and upgrading of technological solutions should be established to address emerging threats and capitalize on new innovations.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Based on our comprehensive analysis of the challenges facing nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region, we propose a set of policy recommendations designed to address the unique geopolitical, technological, and operational challenges while leveraging existing frameworks and innovative approaches.

We recommend reinforcing the IAEA's role within existing frameworks by encouraging Black Sea states to invite the IAEA to provide additional assistance in nuclear security, respecting state sovereignty while enhancing regional security.<sup>35</sup> Advocating for increased funding and resources for IAEA nuclear security programs specifically tailored to the Black Sea region is crucial. Collaboration with the IAEA to establish specialized teams equipped to handle nuclear security emergencies in conflict zones should be prioritized.<sup>36</sup>

The establishment of Nuclear Security Corridors is a key recommendation. This involves facilitating discussions among Black Sea states to designate secure transit routes for nuclear materials and developing clear protocols for the notification, verification, and security of nuclear material transports using these corridors. Implementing enhanced monitoring along these corridors through investment in advanced detection technologies is essential.

Strengthening regional cooperation is vital. We recommend leveraging platforms like the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) for collaboration on nuclear security issues<sup>37</sup> and creating a specialized working group within BSEC focused on nuclear transit security. Regular regional training exercises and drills should be organized to improve preparedness and build trust among Black Sea states.

Leveraging technological innovations is crucial. We recommend implementing state-of-the-art technologies such as next-generation radiation portal monitors and muon tomography at critical transit points.<sup>38</sup> Developing secure communication networks for real-time information exchange on nuclear material movements and implementing blockchain

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<sup>35</sup> T. Findlay, „Unleashing the Nuclear Watchdog: Strengthening and Reform of the IAEA,“ Centre for International Governance Innovation. 2011 y.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Boureston & Ogilvie-White, 2010 y.

<sup>37</sup> M. Aydin, „Europe's new region: The Black Sea in the wider Europe neighbourhood,“ Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 5(2), 2005 y., p. 257-283.

<sup>38</sup> J. R. Lovering, , A. Abdulla, G. Morgan, „Expert assessments of strategies to enhance global nuclear security,“ Energy Policy, 2020 y., 139, 111306.



technology for documentation of nuclear material transits can increase transparency and trust.<sup>39</sup>

Enhancing national capacities is another key area. Assisting Black Sea states in aligning their national laws with international standards on nuclear security and allocating resources for comprehensive personnel training programs in nuclear security are important steps.<sup>40</sup> Establishing a regional nuclear security training center can facilitate knowledge sharing and standardization of practices.

International assistance should be sought through engaging with international partners and organizations for funding and expertise in upgrading nuclear security infrastructure. Developing a coordinated regional approach to seeking international assistance can maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts. Participation in and expansion of initiatives like the IAEA's Nuclear Security Support Centres should be encouraged.<sup>41</sup>

Addressing geopolitical tensions is crucial. Establishing a regular forum for Black Sea states to discuss nuclear security issues, separate from broader political tensions, and encouraging track II diplomacy efforts focused on nuclear security can help build trust and identify common ground. Implementing transparency measures in nuclear material transits and creating mechanisms for joint threat assessments can foster a shared understanding of regional security challenges.

### Conclusion

Securing the transit of nuclear materials in the Black Sea region presents a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive and innovative approach. Our analysis has revealed the significant impact of geopolitical complexity, varied capabilities and commitments among regional states, technological opportunities and challenges, limitations of existing frameworks, and the crucial importance of regional cooperation.

The implementation of our recommendations will undoubtedly face significant challenges, including political will, resource allocation, and overcoming deep-seated mistrust. However, the potential consequences of a nuclear security incident in the Black Sea region are so severe that they demand urgent and concerted action.

Looking forward, several areas warrant further research and attention, including the long-term impacts of ongoing conflicts on regional nuclear security arrangements, the potential role of emerging technologies in enhancing nuclear material tracking and security, the legal and regulatory challenges of implementing "nuclear security corridors," and the

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<sup>39</sup> D. Tapscott, A. Tapscott, *Blockchain Revolution: How the Technology Behind Bitcoin Is Changing Money, Business, and the World*. Portfolio, 2016 y.

<sup>40</sup> C.Stoiber, A. Baer, N. Pelzer, W. ,Tonhauser, *Handbook on Nuclear Law*,“ IAEA, 2010 y.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. IAEA, 2013 y.

psychological and social factors influencing the development of a robust nuclear security culture in the region.

Enhancing nuclear transit security in the Black Sea region requires a delicate balance between respecting state sovereignty, fostering international cooperation, and implementing innovative technical solutions. The proposed strategies in this paper offer a roadmap for navigating these complex challenges. However, their success ultimately depends on the commitment of all stakeholders to prioritize nuclear security as a shared regional and global responsibility.

As the geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, so too must our approaches to nuclear security. The Black Sea region, with its unique challenges and strategic importance, can serve as a model for developing comprehensive, adaptable, and cooperative security frameworks. By addressing these challenges head-on, the international community can work towards not only a more secure Black Sea region but also contribute to global efforts in nuclear non-proliferation and security.

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# **Psycho-emotional consequences of conflict situations and science as a bridge in the peace building process**

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## **Abstract**

The present report discusses a brief history of scientific diplomacy in the international space, theoretical models and scientific research conducted on the basis of these models. Current situation in scientific diplomacy in Georgia, steps taken and western experience. Work on deepening the relationship between the West and Georgia in this field. Care for greater involvement of stakeholders. The role of the scientific community in the development of scientific diplomacy and the process of peace building. What do the researchers suggest?

The impact of conflicts between individuals, groups and countries on mental health. Dynamics and types of conflicts. Cold and hot conflicts in interpersonal relations and international space. Importance of preventive measures. Constant cooperation and exchange of views to avoid tension and conflict.

The need for psychological stress risk assessment required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Constant tension, which is a prerequisite for conflict. Unwanted psycho-emotional condition of individuals as a result of crises. A step forward in this direction in Georgia (4283-II. Law on labor safety. 2019). Index created and published by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). The so-called "Normandy Index" is intended to measure the level of conflict in the world.

**Keywords:** conflict, peace building, psycho-emotional state.

## **Introduction**

Science diplomacy involves the use of scientific cooperation and exchange to strengthen international relations and solve global challenges.

In the face of global issues such as climate change and pandemics, science diplomacy is critical to collaborative problem solving.

Conflicts - whether interpersonal or international - can seriously affect mental health, causing stress, anxiety and other psychological problems.

The aim of the work is to get to know the current situation better. To the extent possible, explore the relationship between science diplomacy and mental health and how they can contribute to peace building. <sup>1</sup>

## **Main Part**

### **The evolution of science diplomacy**

An early example in this direction is post-World War II collaborations such as the founding of CERN.

Scientific cooperation was going through certain stages. Even during the Cold War there was cooperation between the scientific community. Initiatives such as the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs aimed to reduce nuclear tensions through dialogue.

Theoretical models such as the 'Science Diplomacy Triad', which include science in foreign policy, international scientific cooperation and capacity building.

The current state of scientific diplomacy in Georgia is promising. Georgia's inclusion in EU programs such as Horizon Europe is noteworthy. Also, steps taken for cooperation to establish partnerships with Western universities and research institutions.

Contrasting the efforts of Georgia with countries such as Estonia, which has successfully integrated science into its diplomatic strategy, is exemplary for comparison with the Western experience.

The role of interested parties in science diplomacy is great. The main stakeholders are: government agencies, universities, students, non-governmental organizations and international organizations such as UNESCO, etc.

It is important to create joint research initiatives and public-private partnerships to strengthen cooperation.

A good example is the cooperation between Georgian institutions and the US National Science Foundation on environmental research.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://home.cern/>

## **Contribution of the scientific community to peace building**

With the help of the scientific community, it is possible to reduce the division of different societies. through shared research goals and joint projects.

There are programs, such as the Global Challenges initiative, which encourage scientists to look at issues such as poverty and conflict. Proposals for funding joint projects and support for international scientific exchange are needed.

The impact of conflicts on mental health is great. There are statistics that point to mental health problems such as PTSD and depression in conflict zones.

It is important to explore how interpersonal conflicts can escalate into larger social or national issues. What are the dynamics of conflicts?

Examples of intergovernmental forums such as the United Nations facilitate dialogue and conflict resolution. Also, the ASEAN Regional Forum and its role in maintaining peace in Southeast Asia through dialogue.

There is a correlation between workplace stress and conflict, and research on employee mental health is important. This issue needs constant development. Georgia has a labor safety law since 2019. The law aims to improve working conditions and support mental health. <sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the Normandy Index is to provide a quantitative measure of conflict potential and existing tensions globally. <sup>3</sup>

## **conclusion**

The relationship between science diplomacy and mental health in conflict contexts is important.

Areas of study such as the impact of scientific collaboration on regional stability are recommended for future research.

Studies highlight the need for ongoing dialogue between the scientific and diplomatic communities to promote peace.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://asean.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4486188>

# The Black Sea and South Caucasus: Regional Security Dilemmas

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## **Abstract**

The Black Sea and South Caucasus region has emerged as an important point of geopolitical interest and security dilemmas in the contemporary international landscape. This region, strategically situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, faces a myriad of complex challenges that stem from historical legacies, unresolved territorial disputes, and the strategic ambitions of both regional and external powers. The aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 left the South Caucasus nations-Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia-grappling with national identity, territorial integrity, and foreign influence, particularly from Russia and Western nations like NATO and the EU.

The historical context of the region is marked by ethnic tensions and unresolved conflicts, notably the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, which has fueled nationalism and violence, complicating the regional security landscape.

In addition, the Black Sea has attracted the attention of global powers due to its significance as a strategic energy transit route. In light of circumstances where countries like Azerbaijan are trying to use its energy resources for its geopolitical ambitions, the country is very important in the energy landscape of Europe and in this case in the context of EU's steady desire to limit reliance on Russian gas.

More specifically, the involvement of NATO in military operations and drills in the Black Sea, such as the American Georgia military maneuvers, and the Crimea incursion for example, has worsened relationships.

Furthermore, when considering the impact of emerging powers such as China through Belt and Road initiatives, among many other variables, western and eastern bloc cross cutting impact are equally felt by these countries in the explanations drafted regarding why countries engage in these actions.

Notwithstanding these hindrances, there is room for engagement, for example, on matters of energy transition and environmental protection. The transition to renewable energy opens a new avenue for what regional countries could do to help reduce tensions whilst promoting economic growth in the region.

This paper explores complex security issues of the Black Sea and South Caucasus Region given its history and conflict, and also tries to figure the prospects for the future, in order to understand better its important geopolitical significance.

**Keywords:** Security dilemmas of the black sea and south Caucasus regions; Regional and external powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran, USA, EU, NATO); Regional conflicts; Energy security

## **Introduction**

The Black Sea has immense geopolitical relevance due to its position, its power resources and the impact of regional and global actors. Below are the notable reasons which makes this region very important. The Black Sea is located at the geographical crossroad of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It opens into the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus Strait off the Turkish territory thus being a significant waterway with numerous military and trading advantages. Control over the Black Sea is necessary for both trade and defense purposes. For Russia, it gives access to warm water ports which are critical for conducting naval activities throughout the year. Sevastopol and Novorossiysk ports provide direct sea route access to the Mediterranean Sea to Russia for extending its military presence in the Middle East and beyond. Members and allies of NATO in particular Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria also need the Black Sea for their security system.

The Legacy of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 led to many conflicts among young democracies, especially between Armenia and Azerbaijan about the region of Nagorno Karabakh. Patriotism has increased as the conflict has been inflamed, often by outside powers trying to exert control over the area. The South Caucasian states adopted different foreign directions: Georgia pursued integration into Europe, while Armenia was able to maintain a strong relationship with Russia. Baku, providing energy resources, tried to keep balance in relations out of two axes, with Russia and Western states.<sup>1</sup> These particular developments have led to the formation of a relatively complex security trend within the region which comprises both of elements of rivalry and cooperation. The Black Sea Region comprises all the countries surrounding it as well as the Black Sea itself. Besides, it is of great military importance both for NATO Block and Russia.

## **Main Part**

The energy potential in the Black Sea region is significant and particularly Azerbaijan is one of Europe's key oil and gas suppliers. The Southern Gas Corridor project is an illustration of this Western policy of energy diversification of security from Russian dominance. Major territorial conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Abkhazia/South Ossetia still exist. Such disputes do not simply threaten peace in the area but invite meddling from outside the region making matters worse. Russia's foreign policy behavior in the region over the years, especially after the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and its backing of separatist sentiments have made the situation unbearable. Military bases and troops in Armenia and South Ossetia are a leverage over NATO. Although Ukraine and other

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<sup>1</sup> CaspianReport, "Get More from Caspianreport on Patreon," Patreon, April 12, 2015 y., <https://www.patreon.com/CaspianReport>.



members of the NATO have been in a partnership with Georgia which also includes military training in the Black Sea area, these have provoked criticism from Russia which regards these as infiltrations into her territory. In the same way, western efforts towards supporting democratic changes in the region have been resisted causing a delicate shift in the equilibrium of power.

The importance of the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions from Russia's point of view may be explained by security issues, influential positions in the region's countries, as well as the need to control local resources and transport routes. For Moscow, the ability to project military power in the Black Sea remains important, especially after the losses in the conflict regarding Ukraine. Russia has contested control over Georgian waters, specifically around the stormy fortress of Ochamchire, in order to supplement its loyalty to the Kremlin in Crimea by constructing a new base over Georgian territory. This provides Russia with a strategic and defensible geolocation within the Black Sea theater while signaling a longer-term willingness for Russia to retain dominance over the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within Georgia. These further strains aspiration of Georgia to get deeper into the Western block since it attempts to become one of the Central and Eastern European countries and Moscow keeps tightening the ring around these areas.

In the South Caucasus, Russia's interests also come from the fact they want to maintain some influence over Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia but also must prevent NATO and EU expansion. This is especially true in the case of Armenia, which has strategically positioned Russia as its security successor owing to its conflict with Azerbaijan. However, Armenia's recent inability to receive adequate assistance from Russia in the recent Armenian-Azerbaijani hostilities has aggravated these relations, making the government in Yerevan seek additional venues of security. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has forged a more moderate stance to the north and south by balancing its relations with Russia within the framework of the 2022 Declaration on Allied Interaction within the CSTO.<sup>2</sup>

Besides its military might, Russia has also employed energy politics and economic statecraft with the ambition of seizing, or preventing alternative energy transportation routes that do not go through post-Soviet territory. Threats like these stems, for instance, from the Middle Corridor that passes through the South Caucasus and proceeds without Moscow's supervision. Operational tactics include blocking harbors, including Ukrainian ones, or seizing commercial maritime channels through which trade and energy travels such as the Black Sea. These strategies help in sustaining Russian control over the imperative

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<sup>2</sup> "Strategic Erosion: Russia and the South Caucasus after the Invasion Of," Stanford University, accessed November 12, 2024 y., <https://fsi.stanford.edu/sipr/strategic-erosion>.

nodes of energy and commercial traffic that affect concomitant actors like Kazakhstan that depend on the Black Sea.

Apart from it, Russia's continued activities in the Black Sea and in the South Caucasus are framed by its broader aim of securing its borders, maintaining domestic influences, and averting the West, through military and economic means in these strategically important regions.

All of the above has put Turkey in a difficult position as she balances between NATO on one hand and Russia on the other. For instance, Turkey has attempted to walk a thin line where it has backed Ukraine in its fight but at the same time, the country has not joined the West and imposed sanctions on Russia bulk. However, the durability of the current strained relationships may force Turkey to either step up or consolidate her non-committal position. In addition, Turkey's ability to handle the Bosphorus Strait is also important for the Russian navy base which makes Tehran's position, a salient factor in Turkish regional security policies quite important.

Unlike most of the existing academic works, Iran's expansionist interests in the South Caucasus are basically aimed at preventing the influence of Turkey as well as the influence of Azerbaijan. The Islamic Republic of Iran wishes to support the regions of this country rather than export stability, and promote economic systems integration especially in the spheres of energy and transportation.

To that end, NATO has taken a number of measures to meet the changes occurring in the Black Seas and South Caucasus security environment. Below are the main components of NATO's policy. Improved Situational Awareness and Activism: NATO has evolved its position with respect to the militarization of the Black Sea region by placing two multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria and Romania. Also, there has been an increase in sea patrols by maritime patrol aircraft and drones intended to monitor Russian forces and secure important oceanic routes after Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea initiative.

Infrastructure Denial: After events such as the Nord Stream, countries like NATO, which consider the security of governing structures of undersea facilities as important, have switched tactics. The block states intend to build such a maritime center that will deal with the protection of the underwater fiber optic cables and pipelines crates a backbone of communication and energy supply. This center will facilitate the nexus of NATO and telecommunication and energy infrastructure owners and other solutions providers that

will enhance operational and regional preparedness against the above-mentioned vulnerabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Help to Ukraine: Ukraine's armed forces remain dependent on military, financial, and humanitarian assistance from NATO countries. NATO-Ukraine council aims to enhance engagement and cooperation on sea security and addressing the threats of Russian militarism pervasive on both ends. NATO partners have been encouraging steps to establish new routes for the export of Ukrainian grain, which has become essential for food security.

Coordination with Regional and International Partners: The strategy pursued by USA, India, EU, Turkey and Japan plays crucial role respectively in increasing energy development in the region and working on the delivery of energy sources to the consumers. Each country has something to offer – e.g., Georgia in terms of hosting the EU undersea cable power connector to the Romanian National energy system.

These programmers show that NATO is paying attention to the increased threats in the Black Sea and South Caucasus, including urgent defense needs and long-term protection of infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that, as a result of the Ukrainian-Russian War, there have been changes in the dynamics of security in the region or zone of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus that shaped alliances, military operations and aggressions of the players of that zone.

The war brought about an increased response capability of NATO in the Black Sea as member states especially Romania and Bulgaria tried to improve the regions defenses against Russia's anticipated threats. In this context, NATO has maintained a series of joint military training exercises in the area, implying a commitment to secure its eastern flank. That, of course, has made the Black Sea area an all the more critical theater in this East-West struggle, with the possibility of a further deterioration as both sides increase their military presence in the area.

Ukrainian-Russian War impacted state's foreign policies and alliances in the region of Black Sea and South causes. There are countries like Georgia, which have shown an inclination towards the membership of NATO which they see as a key to their protection against the Russian threats. At the same time, Turkey has sought to be more active and cooperative with Russia and NATO where it has also assisted Ukraine with military

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine Walla, "The Biden Administration Finally Has a Black Sea Security Strategy. It's What Comes next That Matters.," Atlantic Council, December 6, 2023 y., <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-biden-administration-finally-has-a-black-sea-security-strategy-its-what-comes-next-that-matters/>.

<sup>4</sup> Yuri Lyashenko, Syed Mohammad Ali, and Samuel Ramani, "The Impact of the War in Ukraine on Russian-Turkish Relations and Black Sea Security: Three Potential Scenarios," Middle East Institute, November 5, 2024 y., <https://www.mei.edu/publications/impact-war-ukraine-russian-turkish-relations-and-black-sea-security-three-potential>.

equipment including Bayraktar drones which have been important in the war. These indicate how the alliance arrangements and realignment strategies are changing within the region.

The war is a reminder of Europe's need to source for different varieties of energy as the EU has pursued ways in which to minimize its use of Russian gas actively. The South Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan, has become a much more meaningful energy supplier for Europe with more importance given to the Southern Gas Corridor. This move not only affects economic cooperation, but also increases the South Caucasus's significance in energy security of Europe and increases the region's significance on the geopolitical map.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude the black sea and the south Caucasus region continues to be the focus of strategic interest and remains beset by layers of security aspects due to energy dependency and regional geopolitics. And still territorial disputes over South Ossetia and Abkhazia are worsening the situation. The outdated but persistent standoff between NATO and Russia in the Black Sea adds more peril into the situation thus rendering it a possible theatre of war. Moreover, the presence of other nations, great powers such as Turkey, Iran and China create other circles of contention.

Energy considerations should also be taken into account, particularly in discussions of regional energy interdependencies. Energy corridors such as the Southern Gas Corridor, and recent announcements of projects, like the Black Sea underwater electricity cable remain central to EU's objectives of decreasing dependency on Russian energy. The region's energy-transition spark ambitions - one more step towards Europe's modernization which is important in terms of stability but has to do with many geopolitical concerns.

In the future, however, the way events will unfold will be complicated determined by regional actors in terms of bilateral relations and resolution of security issues. Building or limiting these approaches are likely to effect an armed confrontation, even if such opportunities exist, given the situation at present. Good prospects also include addressing joint problems such as environmental diplomacy. A balance between regional autonomy and constructive engagement with international organizations will be essential for fostering long-term stability and sustainable development in this strategically significant area.

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# Transformation of the strategy of the Russian Federation in the war in Ukraine

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## Abstract

The article analyses the factors contributing to the transformation of the strategy of the Russian Federation in the war in Ukraine, along with its implications for international relations. The first part of the article discusses the theoretical aspects of the strategy. The second part examines the practical implementation of the strategy and its outcomes. The analysis includes a discussion on how the Russian Federation's initial goals in the war have shifted over time. Overall, the evolving strategy of the Russian Federation in the war in Ukraine highlights the complex and dynamic nature of modern warfare and international relations.

In the first stage of the war, Moscow made mistakes both at the level of grand strategy and military strategy. His assessment of the military-political situation was based on incorrect intelligence data. Because of this, his fast war plan failed. In response, Russia changed its political goals and, accordingly, its military strategy. The war in Ukraine has become a battle of attrition. Ukraine and Russia have established trench systems and deployed heavy artillery. Since the fall of 2022, the Russian General Staff has built an entire network of defensive installations in the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine.

After the failure of the quick win, Russia went back to its usual strategy of attrition. It has large mobilization resources and also enough armaments to continue the fight. Although the sanctions have caused significant economic problems, but its rich resources (territory, energy, and agriculture) make it reasonably self-sufficient and can wage a prolonged war. Therefore, the Ukrainian General Staff is trying to shift its focus to coordinating fire and mobility by bypassing well-fortified areas through maneuvers to find weak points, destroying supply and logistics facilities with Western precision missiles. As well as destroying command and control centers.

**Keywords:** politics, grand strategy, military strategy, attrition strategy and hypermodern strategy.

## **Introduction**

The invasion of Russian Federation in Ukraine has destabilized the security landscape in Europe. The result will dictate the future security of the EU and its eastern flank. The aim of the paper is to examine Russia's grand and military strategy in Ukraine. Modern theory of strategy outlines three degrees of warfare. The first aspect is strategy, including the establishment of goals, resources, and ways. The second aspect is operational art. It is a series of tactical actions with a unified goal. The third level encompasses tactics, which involves the art of combat. By its nature, it is a review article. The paper refers to the period from February 24, 2022, to the present.

The subject is significant that it addresses the pivotal event in contemporary world politics and security. The advancement of strategic studies in Georgia is crucial, since this discipline remains in embryonic phase. The work consists of two main parts. The first is the theoretical part, in which I provide a brief overview of the origin and nature of theory of strategy. It is important to understand the role theory. I chose the general theory because it examines strategy's universal features. It likewise explains the elements that define specific historical strategies. The general theory corresponds to the strategy of all countries and times.

The second section has two chapters. The first chapter is on the strategy of the Russian Federation throughout the early phase of the war. This section analyses both grand strategy and military strategy. The following chapter addresses the evolution of the original plan. Modifications the political and military aims of the Russian Federation. He also studies the Ukrainian counterattack and the reasons for its failure. It highlights the problems and challenges faced by the offensive forces.

From the beginning of the Ukraine conflict, Russia had strategic, operational, and tactical setbacks. The article tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the strategy of the Russian Federation in the early stages of the war?
2. What mistakes were made?
3. What is Russia's current strategy?

## **Main Part**

### **Theory of Strategy**

A specific strategy is developed taking into account its context. While the general theory transcends cultural influence, specific strategies emerge and function primarily under its influence. The general theory of strategy includes both grand strategy and military

strategy<sup>1</sup>. The literature already has everything necessary for a general theory of strategy. Some of the main concepts of strategy theory were discovered by ancient writers (Sun Tzu, Thucydides) and the principles may be found in the writings of Machiavelli, Clausewitz, and Jiminy. In the 20th century, the examination of grand strategy and military strategy has been advanced by writers such Liddell Hart, Bernard Brodie, Michael Earle, and Edward Luttwak. Colin Grey systematically organizes these principles. He divides the theory into four parts. The first part is the nature and character of strategy, in which he describes the basic concepts. The second part deals with the process of strategy development, the third part with the implementation phase, and the fourth part with the results of strategy<sup>2</sup>.

"The Grand strategy is the direction and use made of many or all the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for policy decided at a political level.<sup>3</sup>". Any strategy is by its very nature a grand strategy. According to Liddell Hart, Grand Strategy deals not only with war, but also with the "peace" that must be created after war<sup>4</sup>.

"A military strategy is the use of force or the threat of force by a security community to achieve political goals<sup>5</sup>." The military strategy must be subordinated to the grand strategy. The strategy represents a bridge between politics and military power. Also, it is a policy tool that creates a strategic effect<sup>6</sup>.

Classical (inductive) military strategy consists of destroying the enemy's forces in one or more general battles and occupying the enemy's territory. The task of classical strategy is to transform the initial situation into a new desired reality<sup>7</sup>. After World War I, this strategy began to erode. Opinions arose as to whether the war could be won directly at the strategic level. Such a strategy is called the hypermodernist (deductive) strategy.<sup>8</sup> The essence of strategy is that in the initial phase of war, military-political actions destroy the warfare capability of the enemy. At this stage, operations are carried out with the air force, missiles and other precision weapons. At this point, complete dominance is established in all dimensions of the adversary (air, land, sea, and cyber). Such wars have taken place at the end of 20th and beginning of the 21st century, namely the NATO campaign in the former Yugoslav Republic, first and second Gulf War. At the initial stage, the Russian strategy

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<sup>1</sup> S. Gray Colin, „The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice. Oxford,“ Oxford University Press, 2010 y. P20.

<sup>2</sup> S. Gray Colin, L. Johnson Jeannie, *The Practice of Strategy*, [book auth.] James J. Wirtz, Colin S. Gray John Baylish. Strategy in the Contemporary World. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013 y., pp. 358-377.

<sup>3</sup> S. Gray Colin „Theory of Strategy. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018 y., p44

<sup>4</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *strategy*, New Yourk : Meridian book, 1991 y.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. S. Gray Colin 2010. P30

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. S.Gray Colin, L. Johnson, Jeannie, Oxford University Press, 2013 y., pp.364-365.

<sup>7</sup> Kakha Katsitadze, Basics of strategy. Tbilisi: Cisartkela, 2007 y. 191

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., P 363



contained elements of a hypermodern strategy, but it did not have the means to implement them. It also made a significant mistake, which will be discussed below.

### **Russia's strategy at the beginning of the war.**

In February 2022, the strategic objective of the Russian Federation was to seize Kiev, the political capital of Ukraine, oust the Zelensky administration, and incapacitate the Ukrainian military forces. The purpose of the operation was to convey several hundred individuals by helicopter to the Antonov Airfield, some 20 km from central Kyiv. Once the airstrip was cleared, thousands of troops were expected to arrive by military transport aircraft (IL-76). Following this, rapid vehicles from Belarus were expected to advance into Kyiv, forcing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski to evacuate<sup>9</sup>. But the events went against this plan.

Several mistakes were made at the level of grand strategy. Russian diplomacy failed to isolate the Zelensky government, weakening its allies. The psychological information attack to portray Zelensky and his team as Nazis also failed completely. In comparison, in the second Gulf War, led by the United State, American diplomacy succeeded in forming a war coalition and isolating Saddam diplomatically and politically, despite the lack of a UN Security Council mandate. Who is Russia's ally in this war? Iran, which is only supplying weapons, and Belarus, which to this day cleverly avoids involving its units in the fight. Russia has little support. Major Asian nations have agreed to additional export restrictions on semiconductors. Even among the post-Soviet autocracies, Russia has little apparent support.<sup>10</sup>

At the level of grand strategy, the unity of a nation to wage war is also important. Clausewitz, in his book "On War," speaks of the trinity of war, which includes the government, the armed forces, and the people. In order to achieve political goals, it requires the unity of the people. „Power = mass x cohesion. Even a great mass is not strong if there is no cohesion“<sup>11</sup>. Putin misjudged the unity and resistance of the Ukrainian people. He called Ukrainian soldiers to disarm but they fought selflessly. Many people died rather than give in. Zelensky's popularity, which had fallen to 25% before the war, was transformed by the invasion into that of a heroic war leader who had united his country and won Western support<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Luttwak, RFE/RL Interview [Online] 06 07, 2023 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024.] <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-luttwak-interview-putin-russia-plebiscite/31893485.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Putin's Strategic Failure. Gould-Davies, Nigel. 2, 2022 y., Vol. 64. P8

<sup>11</sup> LUTTWAK, EDWARD. Vladimir Putin's failed strategy. Unherd. [Online] 11 1, 2022 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024.] <https://unherd.com/2022/11/vladimir-putins-failed-strategy/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Putin's Strategic Failure. 2022 v., Vol. 64.

On the military strategy level the main mistake of the Russian Federation was to attack the largest European state with an army of 130,000 soldiers. During the First Persian Gulf War, when the United States of America and its allies liberated Kuwait, approximately 500,000 troops were mobilized. Moreover, in the early stages of the war, Russia completely lost the element of surprise. The intelligence services of the Western countries knew when the attack would begin, and Kyiv was warned beforehand.<sup>13</sup>

It should be underlined that the false assumptions and conclusions of the Russian intelligence services about the behavior of the military and political elite of Ukraine was the main cause of the unsuccessful action. They assumed that Zelinsky and his team would flee the country and the Ukrainian army would give up resistance. And the Ukrainian people would meet them as liberators. It is also interesting that the Central Intelligence Agency, British and German intelligence had the same predictions. The Western intelligence agencies claimed that Kyiv would fall in a few days<sup>14</sup>

In order to create appropriate strategy, it is necessary to have correct Intelligence data. A strategy based on false data is doomed to fail. During the war, Clausewitz had little confidence in intelligence. According to him, information of intelligence is incomplete and the military leader must rely on massive military forces.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Russia, neither the intelligence data was correct, nor the forces involved in the battle had the adequate mass.

### **Attrition strategy**

The attrition strategy, is an approach focused on wearing down the enemy's strength and resources through continuous engagement and erosion of their capabilities. The primary objective of this strategy is to gradually diminish the enemy's ability to fight effectively by inflicting casualties, causing material damage, and depleting their resources. The attrition strategy relies on maintaining continuous pressure on the enemy to force them into a protracted conflict, wearing down their forces over time. This involves constant engagement, utilizing firepower, and maintaining a persistent presence. Rather than seeking a decisive victory in a short period, the attrition strategy aims to gradually chip away at the enemy's capabilities. The focus is on incremental gains and attrition rather than capturing or controlling specific territory. The side employing an attrition strategy typically requires sufficient resources and manpower to sustain the extended conflict. It relies on leveraging superior resources, such as better equipment, logistics, and reinforcements, to maintain a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., LUTTWAK, EDWARD. 11 1, 2022 y.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Sciutto and Katie Bo Williams. US concerned Kyiv could fall to Russia within days, sources familiar with intel say. CNN. [Online] 02 25, 2022 y.. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y..] <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/25/politics/kyiv-russia-ukraine-us-intelligence/index.html>.

<sup>15</sup> C. v. Klauzewitz, *On War*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1984 y.

steady offensive and wear down the enemy. The attrition strategy often aims to demoralize the enemy and undermine their will to fight by continuously inflicting losses and demonstrating the futility of resistance. Psychological warfare and propaganda may be employed to further weaken the enemy.

After the first stage failed, Russia had to withdraw from northern Ukraine in the spring of 2022, enter Belarus, and focus on the eastern and southeastern fronts. This move was damaging to Russia's image but strategically correct. In the fall of 2022, the Ukrainian side liberated the Kharkiv region and the left bank of Kherson through a counterattack. From late autumn to June 2023, the situation on the fronts did not change significantly. The winter offensive announced by the Russians had no particular results. There was heavy fighting around Bakhmut, where the Russians tried for several months to capture the city with heavy losses<sup>16</sup>. Eventually, the private military company „Wagner“ managed to capture the city, which it soon abandoned, handing over the occupied territories to the Russian Ministry of Defense. In the fall of 2022, Putin announced mobilization. About 300 thousand military personnel were recruited. He began to prepare for a long war, and the military strategy focused on exhausting the enemy.

The Russian General Staff aimed at breaking the will of the inhabitants of the main centers of Ukraine, which would lead to the abandonment of resistance. Therefore, in the late autumn and during the winter, the emphasis was placed on the destruction of energy installations in Ukraine. Russia, however, did not achieve the desired effect. Civilian infrastructure were attacked with the same goal. Intentional attack on civilians is a significant violation of the Geneva Conventions. This is a violation of the norms of humanitarian law. But if we look at the wars that the Russian Federation has waged in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, and finally in Ukraine, we will see that violating the rules and traditions of war is part of its tactics. The strategic focus of Ukraine today is the will of the population to fight the occupier. The Russians seem to have understood this and have changed their tactics. That is why they are now deliberately destroying cities, inciting fear, attacking clinics, refusing to open the siege so that children and women can escape, and so on. In addition, there is, for example, the blackmail of nuclear power plants. Today, Russia is trying to break the Ukrainian people's will to resist through terror.

Since the fall of 2022, the Russian General Staff has built an entire network of defensive installations in the occupied territories of eastern Ukraine. Edward Luttwak believes that historically the Russians started the war very badly. Instead of unprofessional

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<sup>16</sup> The Moscow Times. [Online] Russia Takes Stock After Winter Offensive Fails to Deliver Gains, 04 8, 2023 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y.] <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/08/russia-takes-stock-after-winter-offensive-fails-to-deliver-gains-a80762>.

generals, they promoted new colonels who know the job well and fight better. In his opinion, the Russian army is already showing progress<sup>17</sup>.

Russia tries to reach the administrative borders of the annexed districts, which is more a political task than an act of military necessity. The war in Ukraine has become a battle of attrition. Ukraine and Russia have established trench systems and deployed heavy artillery. Russia has attacked Ukrainian positions through human assaults, including frontal assaults that attempt to gain terrain through sheer human strength rather than superior placement or effective use of combined arms. The weapons systems of both sides have been significantly damaged. For example, since the beginning of the war, Russia has lost nearly half of its current T-72B3 and T-72B3M main battle tanks and about two-thirds of its T-80BV/U tanks<sup>18</sup>.

Russia seeks to weaken Ukraine's morale, economy, and military capabilities through the use of missiles and drones. When Russia ended its campaign against Kyiv in April, it reduced its focus on attacks on Ukrainian military airfields and air defense installations and instead turned its attention to logistical and economic targets. In addition to attacks on bridges and rail infrastructure, Russia also attacked Ukraine's oil sector in an effort to hamper the country's ability to produce fuel. Since the beginning of the conflict, attacks on civilians have been a recurring aspect of the Russian campaign. However, the summer of 2022 saw a marked increase in long-range missile attacks on civilian targets (17 p. 9). Between October 10 and the end of 2022, Russia launched about 600 cruise missiles from the air and the sea. Waves of one-way attack drones, principally Shahed-136s, which Ukraine claims Russia launched approximately 700 of, between September 2022 and early January 2023, have been interspersed with these cruise missile strikes<sup>19</sup>.

One of the goals of these attacks is also to force Ukraine to start negotiations with Russia. The occupied territories of Ukraine represent a powerful leverage in the hands of Russia at the negotiating table. Control of the occupied districts on the territory of Ukraine is also of great importance for the economic component of Russia's strategy. The occupied territories of the South-East represent an important part of the economy of Ukraine. Metal and hardware enterprises are concentrated in the Zaporizhzhia region. Kherson region was a major producer of vegetable products and vegetable oils. For example, the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant accounted for almost half of Ukraine's nuclear energy production

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Luttwak, RFE/RL. [Online] 06 07, 2023 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y..] <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-luttwak-interview-putin-russia-plebiscite/31893485.html>.

<sup>18</sup> G. Jones Seth, McCabe Riley and Alexander Palmer, „Ukrainian Innovation in a War of Attrition,“ s.l. : Center for Strategic and International Studies., 2023 y..

<sup>19</sup> Ian Willams, „Putin's Missile War,“ New York : Roman and Littlefeld, 2023 y..

before the conflict.<sup>20</sup> While 40 percent of Ukrainian steel was produced in Mariupol.<sup>21</sup> The Russian advance in southern Ukraine also led to the takeover of a number of the country's vital ports, most notably Mariupol and Berdyansk. Russian efforts to establish a naval blockade were made easier by this<sup>22</sup>. The blockade of Ukrainian ports created a food crisis in Asian and African countries. In July 2022, with the intervention of the UN and Turkey, an agreement was reached on the unblocking of Ukrainian ports and grain transportation, which somewhat weakened Russia's strategy. Because Russia failed to capture the city of Odessa and thus its seaport, it prevented the full realization of its strategic goals.

At the beginning of the 2023 summer offensive of Ukraine, Russia responded by blowing up the Kakhovka Dam. This allowed them to reduce the length of the front. This was because for some time the Kherson direction had been unsuitable for moving manpower and armored vehicles due to flooding. The blowing up of the hydroelectric power plant is a gross violation of the norms of international humanitarian law. There was no military necessity to blow up the Kakhovka Dam. In the first days of the offensive, the Ukrainians lost a number of pieces of equipment, including German supplied Leopard tanks and an American Bradley armored vehicle, which is normal in a direct attack on well-fortified positions. Ukrainian President Zelensky, speaking to the BBC, said that progress on the battlefield has been "slower than desired."<sup>23</sup> The main reason for the slow progress is probably Russian air force activity. Helicopters are opening fire on Ukrainian convoys, impeding their advance. Apparently, the West made a mistake by not handing over the F16s to the Ukrainians before the counterattack began.

The transition of the battle to attrition creates huge military and political issues for Russia, especially because the Russian military has not seen the number of injuries since World II. According to CSIS estimates, during the first year of the conflict, Russia had between 200,000 and 250,000 overall casualties (people injured, killed, and missing). These casualty figures also include regular Russian forces, militia fighters, and private Wagner Group contractors. So far, Vladimir Putin is ready to accept a huge number of Russian

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<sup>20</sup> Andrian Prokip, „Why the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant Matters...for the Whole World,“ Wilson Center. [Online] 09 18, 2022 y. [Cited: 06 12, 2023.] <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/why-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant-mattersfor-whole-world>.

<sup>21</sup> Jasper Jolly, „Boss of devastated Azovstal plant: „Steel is as key to Ukraine’s victory as soldiers,““ The Gurdiane. [Online] 06 1, 2022 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y.] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/01/ukraine-steel-boss-at-heart-of-mariupol-defence-says-economy-is-key-to-war-effort>.

<sup>22</sup> Marnix Provoost and Pieter Balcaen, „WHAT IS RUSSIA’S STRATEGY IN UKRAINE? Modern War Institute,“ [Online] 06 05, 2023 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y.] <https://mwi.usma.edu/what-is-russias-strategy-in-ukraine/>

<sup>23</sup> Byalda Hakim, „Ukraine war: Zelensky admits slow progress but says offensive is not a movie,“ BBC.com. [Online] 06 21, 2023 y. [Cited: 06 10, 2024 y.] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65971790>.

fatalities and wounded in exchange for its political goals. However, it is uncertain if he will be allowed to do so indefinitely.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

Thus, the paper analyzed the strategy of the Russian Federation during the war between Russia and Ukraine. The study asked the following research questions: 1. What was the strategy of the Russian Federation in the initial phase of the war? 2. What mistakes were made? 3. What does Russia's strategy look like today? At the beginning of the war, the Russian Federation tried to fight like a Western army, with a hypermodern strategy. But the attacks of its air and missile forces did not bring Russia the desired success, as they lost the surprise effect and the Ukrainian side was prepared for the attack. Also, the mobilized mass was not enough to break through the defensive line of the capital and capture it. Due to bad weather and terrain, the Russian Federation units had to advance via the central roads. Thus, Ukrainian artillery and infantry could easily destroy these forces. The Russian Federation, despite its air superiority, could not achieve dominance in the Ukrainian airspace, which also made it impossible to implement a hyper-modern strategy.

After the failure of the quick win, Russia went back to its usual strategy of attrition. It has large mobilization resources and also enough armaments to continue the fight. Although the sanctions have caused significant economic problems, its rich resources (territory, energy, and agriculture) make it reasonably self-sufficient and can wage a prolonged war. Since the fall of 2022, the Russian Federation has been intensively attacking Ukraine's economic and energy infrastructure with its air and missile forces.

The size of Russian resources challenges Ukrainian strategists, and if the weak use the same strategy as the strong, their chances of success decrease. Therefore, the Ukrainian General Staff is trying to shift its focus to coordinating fire and mobility by bypassing well-fortified areas through maneuvers to find weak points, destroying supply and logistics facilities with Western precision missiles. As well as destroying command centers. However, the Ukrainian army needs air superiority for a successful attack. Otherwise, losses will be high.

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<sup>24</sup> G. Jones Seth, Riley McCabe, and Alexander Palmer, „Ukrainian Innovation in a War of Attrition,“ s.l. : Center for Strategic and International Studies., 2023 y.

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# **Emerging power structure in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea: The case of Turkiye's stance on the recent wars in the region**

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## **Abstract**

The South Caucasus and the Black Sea region is of strategic importance due to its energy resources, transit routes and political cleavages. The shifts in the global and regional power structure over the past decade have raised new concerns about peace and stability in the region. On a global scale, American pivot to Asia-Pacific created new power vacuums in the region. Additionally, the changing balance of power among the regional powers has reframed the political dynamics in the region. In this new era, Turkiye has embraced a role as a proactive regional power in pursuit of strategic autonomy. Two test cases for this new role have been Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 and the ongoing Russio-Ukraine War since 2022. Turkiye took proactive positions in both cases. It supported the territorial integrity of the countries deprived of it due to foreign occupation, respectively by Armenia and Russia. Turkiye's diplomatic activism supported this position in a consistent matter in both cases. While the flourishing Turkish defense industry was a key ingredient in Azerbaijan's capture of its occupied territories in 2020, Turkiye is playing an active role for the finalization of the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Since military measures have been proven insufficient for a quick resolution for both Russia and Ukraine, Turkiye's main contribution for Ukraine's struggle to gain its territorial integrity has remained primarily diplomatic such as hosting the first and only post-war face-to-face meeting between the ministers of foreign affairs from Ukraine and Russia, helping the exchange of prisoners of war between the two countries, and coordinating the operation of the grain corridor.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, Black Sea, Russio-Ukraine War, Nagorno-Karabakh War.

## Introduction

The South Caucasus and the Black Sea region is of strategic importance due to numerous reasons. It has vast energy resources, hosts transit routes connecting the rising Asia to the developed Europe, and is entangled with political cleavages which makes it vulnerable to internal and international conflicts. The shifts in the global and regional power structure over the past decade have raised new concerns about peace and stability in the region. On a global scale, American pivot to Asia-Pacific created new power vacuums in the region. Additionally, the changing balance of power among the regional powers has reframed the political dynamics in the region. In this new era, Turkiye has embraced a new role as a proactive regional power in pursuit of strategic autonomy. Two test cases for this new role have been Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War since February 2022. Turkiye took a proactive position and pursued autonomous policies in both cases.

Turkiye has supported the territorial integrity of the countries deprived of it due to foreign occupation, respectively by Armenia and Russia. Turkiye's diplomatic activism supported this position in a consistent matter in both cases. However, it could project a heavier influence in Azerbaijan due to closer ties with this country and power configuration in this conflict case. While the flourishing Turkish defense industry was a key ingredient in Azerbaijan's capture of its occupied territories in 2020, Turkiye is playing an active role for the finalization of the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. On the other hand, military measures have been proven insufficient for a quick resolution in the war between Russia and Ukraine, Turkiye's main contribution for Ukraine's struggle to retain its territorial integrity has remained primarily diplomatic. Such diplomatic initiatives range from hosting the first and only post-war face-to-face meeting between the ministers of foreign affairs from Ukraine and Russia, helping the exchange of prisoners of war between the two countries, and hosting and coordinating the operation of the grain corridor. This paper outlines Turkiye's proactive and autonomous foreign policy positioning in the cases of Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

### **The South Caucasus and Black Sea as geopolitical hot spots**

The South Caucasus and the Black Sea region are of great geopolitical importance. The region is located at the intersection of Europe, Asia and the Middle East and has attracted the attention of great powers throughout history due to its strategic location. Sea and land routes between these regions are of vital importance for both trade and energy transmission lines. The Black Sea region is at a key point in terms of energy resources and transportation of these resources to the world regions in need. The region is home to large reserves of

natural gas and oil and is an important transit point for transporting these resources to Europe, which is trying to reduce its natural gas dependency on Russia. In particular, pipelines and ports passing through the Black Sea are of great strategic value in terms of Russia's energy policies and the energy security of the West. Therefore, the Black Sea region plays a critical role in terms of energy security and continuity of international trade not only in the region but on a global scale. Azerbaijan's rich oil and natural gas reserves also play a key role in energy supplies to the West. Projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the South Caucasus gas pipeline including TANAP help Europe diversify its energy supply and reduce its dependence on Russia.

Finally, the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus also plays a critical role in terms of regional security and stability. Ongoing disputes, frozen conflicts, ethnic tensions and geopolitical competition between major powers in the region complicate the security dynamics of the region. NATO's presence in the Black Sea and Russia's military activities in the region constitute an important part of international security panorama. In this context, developments in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region have direct effects on global geopolitical developments.

The region is of significant geopolitical value for Türkiye as well. Türkiye, a regional power with problematic but growing economy and flourishing defense industry, is coming forward in the region to influence the outcomes of ongoing disputes. As the American influence over Türkiye has partly eroded due to the divergences in their foreign policies (particularly over the future of Syria) and American repivoting to Asia-Pacific, Türkiye is willing to take more initiative in the region in its own terms.

### **Turkish strategy of autonomy seeking, power projection and proactive foreign policy:**

This part of the paper discusses the current Turkish foreign policy in broader terms before delving deeper into its application in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region. Strategic foreign policy, in a similar sense to grand strategy, is the set of diplomatic, military, and economic activities carried out in a conscious and planned manner by a country in order to protect and develop its long-term national interests. In other words, it is a way of prioritization of policy objectives in harmony with the available resources. It lays out “the full range of goals that a state should seek in the world and then determine how all of the instruments of statecraft - political power, military power, economic power, ideological power - should be integrated and employed with one another to achieve those goals”.<sup>1</sup> This level of foreign policy, or simply the grand strategy, is shaped by taking into account factors

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Art, „*A Grand Strategy for America*.“ Cornell University Press, 2003.

such as the state's geopolitical position, economic capacity, military power and role in the international system.

Although liberal and constructivist discussions are quite vivid in academic circles and even in policy circles at a discursive level, states generally adopt a realistic approach in their strategic foreign policy practices. Realism, in its all variants, argues that states should follow rational, power-centered policies to keep their own security and interests at the highest level. Kenneth Waltz's canonical theory of neorealism emphasizes that states constantly seek power to survive in the international system.<sup>2</sup> In this context, strategic foreign policy includes the effective use of various diplomatic, economic and military tools to protect national security and ensure the balance of power. Along such realist lines, Türkiye has also incrementally placed “a strong emphasis on security and is shaped by realist strategic thinking, by which it becomes proactive and assertive in its regional engagements”.<sup>3</sup> Türkiye’s growing population (on the brink of 90 million), economy (now over 1 trillion USD), and defense industry (80% self-provided and with 5 Turkish defense companies in the global top 100) were the factors that enabled such an ambitious endeavor.

Strategic foreign policy requires flexibility and adaptability. Rapid changes and uncertainties in the international system require states to constantly review their strategic goals and policies. States and other strategizing actors continuously adjust their strategies to accommodate the pressures and opportunities that emerge from changes in the international environment.<sup>4</sup> In this context, strategic foreign policy includes a flexible approach that can quickly adapt to changing conditions and use various power elements in a balanced manner.

The first dimension of Türkiye’s strategy comes in terms of its objectives as well as its style, which is autonomy-seeking.<sup>5</sup> Autonomous foreign policy, or strategic autonomy is defined as “the ability to set priorities and make decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or if need be alone”.<sup>6</sup> Strategic autonomy is especially important but quite rarely observed for medium-sized secondary powers, as such countries tend to be under the influence of great powers. Autonomous foreign policy

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw-Hill, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> E. Keyman, “A New Turkish Foreign Policy: Towards Proactive ‘Moral Realism.’” *Insight Turkey* 19 (January): 2017 y., 55–69. When describing Turkish foreign policy practices, Keyman calls his version of realism moral realism. This paper focuses on the empirically observable realist policy practices rather than the normative dimension.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan, and Richard Little. “International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations, 2000 y.” <https://philpapers.org/rec/BUZISI>.

<sup>5</sup>Şener Aktürk, „Turkey’s Grand Strategy and the Great Powers.“ *Insight Turkey* 23 (4), 2021 y. 95–118.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Lippert, Nicolai von Ondarza, and Volker Perthes, “European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests.” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*. 2019.

defends the rights of states to protect their sovereignty and self-determination and aims to resist external pressures and fierce dictates from greater powers.

Autonomous foreign policy allows states to focus on their own national interests. This policy approach requires states to have strong domestic political will, in some cases a high level of state autonomy, and also sufficient economic capacity to bear the costs of acting independent of great powers. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's asymmetric Interdependence theory argues that states' interdependence on each other can be asymmetrical,<sup>7</sup> giving some states more autonomy, which tends to be to the advantage of greater powers. Nevertheless, even the weaker parties pursue strategic autonomy by utilizing a number of strategies from hedging to hiding.

Autonomous foreign policy also enables states to have greater maneuverability in the international arena.<sup>8</sup> This type of policy makes it possible for states to maintain their independence by pursuing balancing policies between different centers of power. As criticized by Bull,<sup>9</sup> the anarchic structure in the international system places the responsibility of states on themselves to protect their own security and interests. Therefore, autonomous foreign policy represents the quest of states to determine their own destiny and maintain their existence as an independent actor in the international system.

Autonomous foreign policy also encourages states to be more active and creatively adapt to the new international challenges.<sup>10</sup> In this context, states can defend their interests more effectively by taking a more proactive role in regional and global issues, which brings us to the second dimension of Türkiye's strategic foreign policy: proactive foreign policy.

Proactive foreign policy refers to a state's effective and determined action to defend its national interests and achieve its goals in the international arena. This type of policy requires states to take on a role that is not only responsive but also directive and initiative-taking. Proactive foreign policy enables states to adapt quickly and effectively to changing international dynamics and includes the effective use of various diplomatic, economic and military tools in this direction. Proactive foreign policy requires states to identify opportunities and threats in the international system in a timely manner and develop strategies accordingly.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph S. Nye, and Robert O. Keohane. 1977. *Power and Interdependence*. Harper Collins Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> Morneau, Louis-Philippe. 2024. "Theory of Strategic Autonomy: US Foreign Policy between 1823 and 1921." PhD Thesis, Concordia University.

<sup>9</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=SZIGEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR34&dq=bull+anarchical+society&ots=r mMKbPdvff&sig=THxA6nc3pmdeqq\\_CcYK1ZdSqkJQ](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=SZIGEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR34&dq=bull+anarchical+society&ots=r mMKbPdvff&sig=THxA6nc3pmdeqq_CcYK1ZdSqkJQ)

<sup>10</sup> Tullo Vigevani, and Gabriel Cepaluni, "Lula Da Silva's Foreign Policy: Autonomy Through Diversification Strategy." *Relations Internationales Du Brésil*, 91, 2007.

Proactive foreign policy also enables states to anticipate crises and conflicts and take preventive measures. When preventive policies prove to be insufficient due to the power constraints of secondary powers such as Türkiye, they turn to policies that initiate policies to mitigate the negative side effects of such threats. This proactive approach helps states take a more responsible and effective role in maintaining stability and peace in the international arena.

### **Two test cases for Turkish approach to regional crises**

#### **Second Nagorno-Karabagh War**

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia started on September 27, 2020 and lasted only 44 days. The war emerged as tensions and regional disputes flared up once over the border skirmishes in 2020. The war was fought for control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding regions. Azerbaijan made significant gains with its modernized military equipment, strategic military planning, and support from its allies.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Azerbaijan retook its occupied territories from Armenia. The ceasefire agreement, brokered by Russia and signed on November 10, 2020, recognized Azerbaijan's significant territorial gains and led to Armenia's withdrawal.

After the war, there were serious changes in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijan started reconstruction and infrastructure works in the territories it won after the war. At the same time, this victory strengthened Azerbaijan's geopolitical position in the region. Armenia, on the other hand, entered a difficult period politically and economically, struggling with the internal political crisis and social unrest caused by the war. Russia deployed peacekeepers to the region as a guarantor of the ceasefire agreement, which consolidated Russia's influence in the South Caucasus but its forces in the region has been diminished due to the war in Ukraine.

As of today, the consequences of the Second Karabakh War still have current effects. Although complete peace cannot be achieved in the region, diplomatic efforts continue to maintain the ceasefire and ensure border security. Difficulties in peace talks and implementation of agreements between Azerbaijan and Armenia continue. Unresolved issues such as the opening of Zengezur corridor still remain significant obstacles to achieving long-term peace in the region.

#### **When diplomacy fails, force seems more appealing**

The status of Karabakh under the Armenian occupation remained unchanged for almost thirty years after the first Karabagh War (1988-1994), during which time OSCE

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the war, see (Askerov and Ibadoghlu 2022).

Minsk Group preferred to freeze the problem rather than find an effective solution. The process, which started with the occupation of Armenia in the early 1990s, resulted in the Armenian control of a significant part of Azerbaijani territory in violation of international law. Although the Minsk Group was established in 1992 with the aim of ending this occupation and ensuring a permanent peace, it has not been able to make concrete progress in years of negotiations and has not taken sufficient steps to reduce tensions in the region. The Minsk Group has been co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States, three effective countries with all sorts of power and influence over the parties to the conflict. Nevertheless, the inability and unwillingness of the group to find a final resolution has been an indicator of a process in which Azerbaijan has turned to other methods.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly expressed the injustice of its lands being occupied and called on the international community to take action on this issue. However, diplomatic efforts carried out under the leadership of the Minsk Group were often inconclusive and Azerbaijan's patience was tested. When Azerbaijan realized that it cannot return to Karabagh through diplomacy, it decided to use the right of self-defense granted to it within the framework of international law. The Second Karabakh War, which started in 2020 and lasted 44 days, ended with Azerbaijan's military victory.

### **Türkiye's policy in the Second Nagorno-Karabagh War**

Türkiye provided strong support to Azerbaijan during and after the Second Karabakh War. With the beginning of the war, Türkiye openly sided with Azerbaijan, and this support manifested itself in various ways. In particular, Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) played a key role in the Azerbaijani army's successful operations against Armenia. These UAVs targeted Armenia's military infrastructure, allowing Azerbaijan to advance rapidly and changing the course of the war.

The military support that Türkiye provided to Azerbaijan was not limited to technology alone.<sup>12</sup> Turkish military advisors and instructors made significant contributions to the modernization and war preparations of the Azerbaijani army. High-ranking Turkish officers played important roles in shaping Azerbaijani military strategy. Türkiye also provided various ammunition and logistical support to Azerbaijan, which was an important factor in the war ending in Azerbaijan's favor. This is a dramatical change compared to the first Karabagh War, in which Türkiye was unable to assist Azerbaijan in any meaningful way. At the time, Türkiye was almost exclusively dependent on international suppliers for

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<sup>12</sup> Alkan, Mustafa Nail, and Mahsa Mehdizadehyoushanlouei. 2023. "Türkiye-Azerbaijan Relations in The First and Second Karabakh Wars." *Upa Strategic Affairs* 4 (2): 204–27.

its defense needs and was also orienting its foreign policy in a way to bandwagon the United States, which was a Cold War habit that proved hard to change.

While Türkiye embraced a more proactive and autonomous foreign policy in the second Nagorno-Karabagh War, in the post-war period, Türkiye continued to deepen its strategic relations with Azerbaijan. The Shusha Declaration, signed in 2021, further strengthened the military cooperation between the two countries and envisaged Türkiye's active participation in the reconstruction process of the previously occupied regions of Azerbaijan. Following this declaration, various infrastructure projects were launched in Karabakh with the technical and economic support of Türkiye. Additionally, Türkiye continued its diplomatic efforts to ensure lasting peace and stability in the Caucasus and encouraged normalization steps with Armenia. These policies aim to strengthen Türkiye's geopolitical position in the South Caucasus and increase its influence in the overall region.

### **Russian invasion of Ukraine**

The war between Russia and Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, when Russia launched a large-scale military attack on Ukraine. This attack is a continuation of the events of 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine. The war began with Russia's attack on several Ukrainian cities, including Kiev, and efforts to capture important strategic points. Ukraine demonstrated strong resistance and received widespread support from the Western world. While Western countries provided military, economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, they imposed heavy economic sanctions against Russia.

The consequences of the war have had significant impacts both regionally and globally. There have been great destruction and human losses in Ukraine, and millions of people are currently displaced. The war, which caused an energy crisis in Europe, also negatively affected global energy and food markets. European countries sought alternative energy sources to reduce their energy dependency on Russia. On the military side, NATO increased its military presence on its eastern flank, and the membership processes of Finland and Sweden were accelerated, leading to the expansion of the alliance.

As of today, the war is still ongoing and a permanent solution for long-term peace has not yet been found. While Ukraine continues its military operations to take back its territory, Russia is trying to maintain control over the regions it occupied. Although diplomatic efforts and peace talks are on the agenda from time to time, no concrete progress has been made. While the continuation of the war continues to create great costs for both Russia and Ukraine, the international community is making efforts to manage the consequences of this conflict. While such efforts have so far been proven insufficient to stop



the war, the new objective seems to be contaminate the war if a full resolution is not in the horizon.

### **Russia-Ukraine war turning into protracted conflict**

The Russia-Ukraine war, after over two years of fighting, shows signs of becoming a protracted conflict largely because the international community could not provide Ukraine with the level of support necessary for a decisive victory. Despite significant military aid from Western countries, including advanced weaponry and financial assistance, these contributions have often been incremental and insufficient to shift the balance of power decisively in Ukraine's favor. The piecemeal nature of this support has allowed Russia to regroup and adapt, prolonging the conflict and causing immense humanitarian and economic damage.

There seems to be a significant disparity between the assistance pledged and what has actually been delivered. For example, while NATO allies have committed billions of dollars in aid, there have been delays and logistical challenges in getting critical supplies to the front lines. The bureaucratic hurdles and strategic hesitations have undermined the potential impact of these aids. Analysts have noted that without a continuous and overwhelming flow of advanced military hardware, Ukraine, as outgunned and outmanned as it has been for months, is currently unable to mount the large-scale offensives necessary to reclaim significant territory from Russian forces. Inventory is not the only weak spot of Ukraine. As one company commander said to Reuters, "The weather is rain, snow, rain, snow. People get ill with simple flu or angina as a result. They're out of action for some time, and there is nobody to replace them".<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, political dynamics within contributing countries have also played a role in limiting the scope and scale of support. In many Western nations, public and political will to sustain high levels of aid to Ukraine is waning due to domestic economic pressures and shifting priorities. While many Western countries are in the election year, this situation leads to a more cautious approach in terms of military support, further hampering Ukraine's ability to achieve a swift and decisive victory. The ongoing debate over the extent and nature of support underscores a lack of unified strategy among Ukraine's allies, contributing to the protracted nature of the conflict.

Finally, the geopolitical implications of an outright victory for either side complicate the level of support provided. The fear of escalation has made some countries reluctant to

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<sup>13</sup> Hunder, Max. 2024. "Ukraine Outnumbered, Outgunned, Ground down by Relentless Russia | Reuters." *Reuters*, February 21, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-outnumbered-outgunned-ground-down-by-relentless-russia-2024-02-21/>.

provide the full range of support needed, leading to a situation where Ukraine is kept afloat but not empowered to win decisively. Recent Russian tactical nuke drills near the Ukrainian border led to the escalation of such worries in the neighboring countries of the region and motivates them to pursue a cautious approach.<sup>14</sup> As long as this cautious approach prevails, the conflict is likely to drag on, inflicting prolonged suffering on the Ukrainian people and contributing to global instability.

### **Türkiye's policy in the Russian invasion of Ukraine**

Türkiye followed a balanced and versatile foreign policy during the Russia-Ukraine War. While Ankara supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, it also took care to maintain its strategic and economic relations with Russia. This balance policy of Türkiye was clearly seen in both its diplomatic mediation initiatives and its attitudes on international platforms.

Since the beginning of the war, Türkiye has carried out diplomatic efforts to end the conflict and ensure peace. At the Diplomatic Forum held in Antalya in March 2022, the foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine met under the mediation of Turkey. This meeting was the first high-level meeting between the parties since the beginning of the war and demonstrated the proactive role Türkiye plays for peace in the international arena. Additionally, Türkiye attracted attention with its mediation on the prisoner swap. In September 2022, with the initiatives of Türkiye, 215 Ukrainian and 55 Russian prisoners were mutually released.<sup>15</sup>

One of Türkiye's most important diplomatic achievements during the war is the Grain Corridor Initiative. The agreement, signed in Istanbul in July 2022, enabled 33 million tons of grain stuck in Ukrainian ports due to Russia's occupation to reach world markets.<sup>16</sup> This agreement was of great importance in preventing the food crisis, especially in Africa and the Middle East. This initiative, carried out by Türkiye in cooperation with the UN, contributed to global food security and reinforced Türkiye's role as a mediator in the international arena.

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<sup>14</sup> Ali Walker, and Laura Kayalı, "Putin Starts Tactical Nuke Drills near Ukraine." Politico. May 21, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/putin-starts-tactical-nuke-tests/>.

<sup>15</sup> Beyza Binnur Dönmez, "Russia-Ukraine Prisoner Swap Another Example of Türkiye's Important Role." Anadolu Agency. September 23, 2022. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/russia-ukraine-prisoner-swap-another-example-of-turkiyes-important-role/2692815>.

<sup>16</sup> Sarp Özer, "Nearly 33M Tons of Grain Transported by over 1,000 Ships through Black Sea Grain Corridor." Anadolu Agency. July 17, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/nearly-33m-tons-of-grain-transported-by-over-1-000-ships-through-black-sea-grain-corridor/2947765>.

Although some studies claim that Türkiye's position on the war is neutral,<sup>17</sup> Türkiye showed its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and international law by voting in favor of Ukraine in the votes held at the UN General Assembly. For example, Türkiye sided with Ukraine in the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's military attack on Ukraine in March 2022. However, Türkiye did not close the door to dialogue with Russia and continued its trade. Especially in the field of energy, natural gas imports from Russia and projects such as the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant showed that the economic relations between the two countries continue.

As a result, Türkiye both clearly expressed its support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and maintained its strategic relations with Russia with the multifaceted policy it followed during the Russia-Ukraine War. Although Türkiye's open communication channels with Türkiye has drawn certain critiques, this nuanced policy has strengthened Türkiye's mediation role between regional and global actors and enabled it to gain the trust of the warring parties, an asset that can be vital for future prospects of peace.

### **Conclusion**

This paper argued that Türkiye tested its influence over two conflict zones over the past years. In the Russia-Ukraine and Second Nagorno-Karabakh Wars, Türkiye embraced a consistent role to declare its support for the territorial integrity of occupied countries. It used its diplomatic instruments to mitigate the regional effects of the war in Ukraine as its own power was not enough to call an end to the war. Nevertheless, Türkiye's influence was more visible and decisive in the war in Azerbaijan. With its years-long military support for Azerbaijan, Türkiye played a significant part in the quick ending of the war. In both cases, Türkiye faced criticisms from some Western circles due to its autonomous policies. Nevertheless, as Türkiye's local defense industry flourishes, it seems to be taking more and more initiative in shaping the conflict zones in its immediate environment. Furthermore, American pivot to Asia-Pacific creates new power vacuums in Türkiye's immediate neighborhood, which Türkiye has no shyness to fill in itself. Hence, what we see in these two cases is a demonstration of a more proactive and autonomous Turkish foreign policy.

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<sup>17</sup> Duran, Burhanettin, and Kemal İnat. 2024. "The Ukraine War: Impacts on the International System and Türkiye." *Insight Turkey* 26 (1): 207–28.

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# Implications of Turkey-Iran Relations on Black Sea Security Environment

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the dynamic shifts in Turkey and Iran's diplomatic and security stances towards the Black Sea region, tracing their historical rivalries and alliances. It analyzes pivotal events that have reshaped their interactions and policy adjustments, emphasizing the importance of understanding these historical layers for analyzing contemporary geopolitical strategies. The study reveals how past conflicts, treaties, and diplomatic engagements have influenced current security dynamics and political alignments in the region, shaping their modern foreign policy. The research delves into the pivotal role of energy resources in Turkey and Iran's influence in the Black Sea, with both countries' involvement in the transit and supply of oil and gas. It explores how their energy policies serve as geopolitical tools, affecting the security landscape and regional stability. The analysis covers major pipelines and energy exports, assessing the implications on regional power balances and the behavior of neighboring countries.

Turkey's NATO membership adds a unique dimension to its relations with Iran, affecting regional alliances and security strategies. The research explores how Turkey's NATO commitments intersect with its regional policies towards Iran. It also considers the influence of major powers like Russia and the United States, analyzing how their strategic interests and actions shape Turkey and Iran's policies in the region.

In conclusion, this article offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of international relations, with a particular focus on implications of the Turkey-Iran strategic competition and cooperation in the Black Sea.

**Keywords:** geopolitical dynamics, energy security, military strategy, alliances, rivalries, Turkey-Iran relations, Black Sea, NATO, Russia, security architecture

## Introduction

The evolving Turkey-Iran geopolitical dynamics have been a subject of increasing academic and policy-oriented interest, particularly in relation to their implications for the Black Sea regional security. Positioned at the intersection of critical global and regional powers, both states navigate a complex relation that oscillates between pragmatic cooperation and strategic rivalry. While historical factors, energy interdependence, and military alignments have always been pivotal in shaping this relation, the contemporary context brings heightened significance due to emerging geopolitical challenges, especially in the security architecture of the Black Sea.

This article seeks to explore the intricate balance between Turkey and Iran's cooperation and competition, focusing on their influence over Black Sea security through energy routes, military cooperation, and strategic alliances.

Turkey and Iran are key actors in a broader geopolitical framework that includes significant relations with Russia, NATO, and other regional actors in the Black Sea-Caspian corridor. Some studies on Eurasianist Relations highlight how Turkey and Iran, despite the absence of formal alliances, collaborate with Russia to challenge Western influence, particularly through efforts to resist NATO's presence in the Black Sea. These informal trilateral arrangements shape regional security, influencing maritime access and military strategy.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, several papers on economic and energy relations emphasize that the energy corridors from the Caspian and Black Seas remain key arenas of competition. Turkey, reliant on both Russian and Iranian energy supplies, navigates a delicate balance between securing its energy needs and preserving strategic autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

This paper underscores the multidimensional nature of Turkey-Iran relations, where their mutual dependence on energy security and geopolitical ambitions in the Black Sea significantly affect regional stability. Iran's ambitions, according to some scientific works on South Caucasus Security, extend into the Caucasus and Black Sea through its control over energy transit routes, complicating Turkey's influence in the region.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, certain research on Black Sea Strategy highlights how Turkey's control of the Turkish Straits and its role as a NATO member impact Black Sea security. Moreover, Iran's cooperation with

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Avdaliani. "Iran, Russia, and Turkey: A Eurasianist Model of Foreign Relations." *BESA Center Perspectives Paper* 2078, 2021. <https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2078-Iran-Russia-and-Turkey-Eurasianist-Model-Avdaliani-English-final.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Flanagan. "Drivers and Strategy in Turkey, Russia, Iran Economic and Energy Relations." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (2012): 29. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/drivers-and-strategy-turkey-russia-iran-economic-and-energy-relations>.

<sup>3</sup> Nika Chitadze. "Geopolitical Interests of Iran in South Caucasus and Georgian-Iranian Relations." *Journal of Social Sciences* 1, nr. 2 (2012): 5-12. <https://jss.ibsu.edu.ge/jms/index.php/jss/article/view/40>.

Russia, including through the supply of drones in conflict zones like Ukraine, further deepens the security dilemma in the Black Sea.<sup>4</sup>

The interplay between Turkey and Iran in energy matters has far-reaching implications for both regional and international security. The research on the Black Sea-Caspian region shows how Turkey's role as an energy transit hub for European markets, combined with Iran's strategic positioning in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, creates a nexus of competition that is central to understanding the region's stability.<sup>5</sup> Turkey's growing reliance on Iranian energy supplies, particularly natural gas, forms an essential component of its broader strategy in the Black Sea region. This energy dependence, according to several studies on competition in the Caspian, forces Turkey into a delicate balancing act between securing its energy needs and navigating the geopolitical rivalries with Russia and Iran.<sup>6</sup>

Military cooperation between Turkey and Iran is another critical dimension that shapes the security environment in the Black Sea. Opinions on Turkey's strategic challenges in the region highlight the delicate military alliances between Turkey, Iran, and Russia, especially concerning naval access and control.<sup>7</sup> Their trilateral security collaboration, aimed at counterbalancing NATO's presence, poses a significant challenge to the West's long-term security objectives in the Black Sea.

The *theoretical importance* of this article lies in its contribution to the growing literature on regional power dynamics and the role of informal alliances in shaping regional and global security. By analyzing the interactions between Turkey and Iran, with particular attention to Russia's involvement in specific areas within the framework of trilateral relations, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how regional powers, despite

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<sup>4</sup> Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoğlu. *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Hudson Institute, 2023. <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/A-New-Black-Sea-Strategy-for-a-New-Black-Sea-Reality.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Mamuka Tsereteli. "Economic and Energy Security: Connecting Europe and the Black Sea-Caspian Region." *Silk Road Studies Program*, 2008.

[https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/2008\\_04\\_MONO\\_Tsereteli\\_EnergySecurity.pdf](https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/2008_04_MONO_Tsereteli_EnergySecurity.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Şaban Kardaş. "Turkey-Russia Energy Relations: The Limits of Forging Cooperation Through Economic Interdependence." *International Journal* 67, nr. 1 (2012): 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201206700107>; Andrey Kortunov and Emre Erşen. "Introduction: Deepening Turkey-Russia Relations." *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 23, nr. 2 (2018): 1-3. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549658>; Mamuka Tsereteli. "Black Sea Connectivity and the South Caucasus." *Middle East Institute*, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/black-sea-connectivity-and-south-caucasus>; Stefan Meister. "Comprehensive Security in the Wider Black Sea Region: The Connection with the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea." In *Security Dynamics in the Black Sea Region*, Contributions to International Relations, ed. Kakachia, Kornely, Malerius, Stefan, and Meister, Stefan. Springer, Cham, 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-62957-0\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-62957-0_15).

<sup>7</sup> Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen. "Turkey's Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia?" *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 23, nr. 2 (2018): 72-92. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549667>.



being shaped by historical rivalries<sup>8</sup>, collaborate in the domains of energy security and military cooperation to counter external influences, especially from NATO. Theoretical frameworks that emphasize the role of energy geopolitics and military alliances are used to contextualize Turkey and Iran's implications in the Black Sea within broader global trends, such as the shifting balance of power between East and West.

Practically, this article holds significant relevance for policymakers in NATO, the EU, and neighboring states that are directly impacted by the security developments in the Black Sea. Understanding the strategic calculations of Turkey and Iran allows for more informed diplomatic engagements and defense strategies, particularly as both countries expand their influence through energy diplomacy and military cooperation.

The essence of this article revolves around the intersection of energy security, military dynamics, and geopolitical rivalry, demonstrating how Turkey and Iran's actions in the Black Sea have broader implications for regional and international stability. The growing militarization of the Black Sea, driven by both Turkish and Iranian ambitions, exemplifies the complex nature of regional security, where cooperation and competition often coalesce in unexpected ways. The article also delves into the implications of these dynamics on NATO's strategic posture, particularly as Turkey navigates its dual role as a NATO member and a regional power that cooperates with non-Western actors like Iran and Russia.

The *methodology* employed in this article integrates a multi-layered approach, combining qualitative analysis with a critical review of geopolitical dynamics and regional security literature. This research draws upon a diverse array of academic sources, policy reports, and regional security analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relations between Turkey and Iran and their impact on Black Sea security. Given the regional complexities and the involvement of various state and non-state actors, a broad geopolitical and strategic framework is employed to capture the multi-dimensional nature of Turkey-Iran relations.

The *theoretical framework* for this research rests on concepts of regional security complexes and geopolitical competition, particularly in contested regions like the Black Sea. By adopting a regional security approach, the article examines how Turkey and Iran's relations are influenced by both internal dynamics and external pressures, such as NATO's presence and Russia's strategic ambitions. The framework also emphasizes the role of energy diplomacy and military cooperation in shaping regional security, drawing on theories of strategic balance and regional hegemony. By employing theories from regional security

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<sup>8</sup> Suna Baş. "Pragmatism and Rivalry: The Nature of Turkey-Iran Relations." *Revolution* 17, nr. 3 (2010): 110-125. <https://journals.openedition.org/revolutionary/?-3/TurkeyIran>.

complexes, geopolitical competition, energy geopolitics, and strategic alliances, the framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in this contested region.

Developed by B. Buzan and O. Wæver, *Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)* provides a critical lens through which to examine the interaction between regional actors like Turkey, Iran, and Russia. RSCT posits that regions form distinct security complexes, where the security concerns of states are interlinked and cannot be fully understood without considering the entire regional context.

In the case of the Black Sea region, Turkey and Iran are both members of overlapping security complexes - Turkey as part of NATO and Iran within the Middle Eastern sphere, aligning itself with non-Western powers such as Russia. The Black Sea serves as a geographical and strategic bridge between these two security complexes, where the security concerns of Turkey, Iran, and Russia intersect. As a result, actions by one state, such as Turkey's enforcement of the Montreux Convention or Iran's military cooperation with Russia, have direct implications for the security of the entire region. RSCT is particularly useful in this context as it highlights how regional actors' security concerns are mutually constituted, emphasizing the interconnectedness of military, political, and energy-related decisions.

Drawing from *neorealist traditions* in international relations, particularly the works of K. Waltz, this article considers how the *balance of power* influences Turkey and Iran's behavior in the Black Sea. Neorealism focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system, where states are primarily concerned with survival and power. In the Black Sea region, Turkey and Iran both seek to maximize their influence while preventing any single state, particularly Russia, from tentatively achieving hegemonic control over the region.

Turkey's role as a NATO member is contrasted with its regional ambitions and cooperation with Iran and Russia, highlighting a classical balance of power dynamic. Both Turkey and Iran engage in strategic balancing - Turkey between NATO and regional actors, and Iran between Russia and Turkey. This framework explains why Turkey continues to maintain its NATO commitments while also engaging in pragmatic energy and military cooperation with Iran and Russia. Similarly, Iran leverages its relation with Russia to counterbalance Turkey's influence, particularly in the South Caucasus and Black Sea.

The *balance of power theory* also provides insight into why regional actors might shift alliances based on changing power dynamics, such as Turkey's growing energy dependence on Iran and its collaboration with Russia despite NATO's presence in the Black Sea. Halford Mackinder's *Heartland Theory* and N. Spykman's *Rimland Theory* are pivotal in understanding the strategic importance of the Black Sea within global geopolitics.

*Mackinder's Heartland Theory* argues that control over the Eurasian landmass, specifically the "Heartland" or central region, grants a state significant geopolitical advantage. *Spykman's Rimland Theory*, which complements Mackinder's ideas, posits that control over the coastal fringes of Eurasia (the Rimland) is key to global power. The Black Sea represents a vital part of this "Rimland," where Turkey and Iran compete for influence over energy corridors and naval supremacy.

The competition between Turkey and Iran, therefore, can be understood through the lens of *geopolitical pivot theory*, where both states aim to exert control over a strategic region that holds the key to broader regional and global dominance. Control over energy routes, military access, and alliances in the Black Sea serves as a strategic pivot for these countries in their larger geopolitical ambitions. Theoretical insights from *energy geopolitics* and *resource conflict theory* are essential for understanding the interplay between Turkey and Iran's energy strategies and their implications for regional security. *Resource conflict theory*, which posits that competition for scarce resources, such as oil and gas, often leads to geopolitical tensions and conflict, is particularly relevant in the context of Turkey and Iran's rivalry. Both states rely heavily on energy revenues and seek to secure energy transit routes that pass through the Black Sea-Caspian corridor. Drawing on *Stephen Walt's theory of alliances* and the concept of *security dilemmas*, this article explores how Turkey and Iran navigate complex alliance structures in the Black Sea. *Walt's theory* posits that states form alliances to counter external threats or to balance against rising powers. In this case, Turkey's alignment with NATO represents a traditional alliance to counterbalance Russia's influence, while its cooperation with Iran can be seen as a pragmatic, issue-based alignment focused on energy and regional security.

The *security dilemma*, a concept developed by John Herz, further explains how Turkey and Iran's military and strategic postures in the Black Sea contribute to regional insecurity. As both actors seek to enhance their security, whether through military buildups, alliances with external powers, or control over strategic waterways, they inadvertently increase tensions and provoke countermeasures from each other and from other regional actors, such as Russia and NATO. The article also incorporates elements of *complex interdependence theory*, as proposed by R. Keohane and J. Nye. This theory is particularly relevant in explaining the paradox of cooperation and competition between Turkey and Iran. Despite their geopolitical rivalry, both states are interdependent in key areas, such as energy security and regional stability. In the context of Turkey-Iran relations, complex interdependence helps explain why both states engage in energy cooperation (e.g., gas pipeline projects) while simultaneously vying for influence in military and geopolitical arenas like the Black Sea.

## Geopolitical rivalries and regional influence

The historical Turkey-Iran rivalry remains a defining element of their foreign policies, particularly in the context of their influence over the Black Sea region. While both countries have taken steps toward pragmatic cooperation in recent years, their underlying competition for regional dominance continues to manifest in various geopolitical arenas. This rivalry is rooted in centuries of political, economic, and military competition, with both actors vying for control over strategically important areas such as the Black Sea.<sup>9</sup>

Turkey's role in the Greater Black Sea region has evolved significantly in recent years, reflecting its broader geopolitical ambitions. Initially, Turkey focused on solidifying its leadership within the Turkic world, but over time, it expanded its influence to include deeper economic ties with Russia and other regional actors. Many authors elucidated the Turkey's expanding relations, particularly with Russia, underlining its influence in the region.<sup>10</sup> This shift in Turkey's foreign policy underscores the complexity of its strategic positioning, as it must balance its obligations as a NATO member with its regional ambitions.<sup>11</sup> Turkey's growing trade relationships, particularly with Russia, further complicate its balancing act, especially given that Russia and Iran often present alternative partnerships that challenge Western interests in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Iran's ambitions in the Black Sea, driven by energy security and military aspirations, have the potential to unsettle Turkey's influence in the region. Tehran has sought to expand

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<sup>9</sup> Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoğlu. *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Hudson Institute, 2023. <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/A-New-Black-Sea-Strategy-for-a-New-Black-Sea-Reality.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Şaban Kardaş. "Turkey-Russia Energy Relations: The Limits of Forging Cooperation Through Economic Interdependence." *International Journal* 67, nr. 1 (2012): 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201206700107>; Stephen J. Blank. "The Eastern Question Revived: Turkey and Russia Contend for Eurasia." In *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, ed. Stephen J. Blank, London: Routledge, 2013, 168-188; Stephen J. Flanagan. "The Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics." *The Washington Quarterly* 36, nr. 1 (2013): 163-178.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751656>; Hamidreza Aghaie Jobani and Mojtaba Mousavipour. "Russia, Turkey, and Iran: Moving Towards Strategic Synergy in the Middle East?" *Strategic Analysis* 39, nr. 2 (2015): 141-155.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09700161.2015.1023311>; Andrey Kortunov and Emre Erşen.

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<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549667>; Gareth M. Winrow. "Turkey and the Greater Black Sea Region." In *Contentious Issues of Security and the Future of Turkey*, ed. Nursin Atesoglu Güney, 121-136. London: Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 978075468459; Pavel Baev. "Russia and Turkey: Strategic Partners and Rivals." *Russie. Nei Reports* 35, 2021. [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/baev\\_russia\\_turkey\\_2021.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/baev_russia_turkey_2021.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Şaban Kardaş. "Turkey-Russia Energy Relations: The Limits of Forging Cooperation Through Economic Interdependence." *International Journal* 67, nr. 1 (2012): 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201206700107>; Stephen J. Flanagan. "The Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics." *The Washington Quarterly* 36, nr. 1 (2013): 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751656>;

<sup>12</sup> Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen. "Turkey's Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia?" *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 23, nr. 2 (2018): 72-92. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549667>.

its presence in the Black Sea by leveraging its energy diplomacy, particularly through initiatives like the Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport corridor, designed to circumvent international sanctions and project Iranian influence in new directions.<sup>13</sup> This initiative not only challenges Turkey's regional dominance, but also positions Iran as a key competitor in the race for control over the region's energy transit routes.

The resurgence of Russian influence in the Black Sea adds yet another layer of complexity to Turkey and Iran's geopolitical rivalry. Russia's superior military and strategic presence in the region forces both Turkey and Iran to navigate an increasingly volatile security environment. While both countries are eager to assert their influence, their efforts are often constrained by Russia's dominant position.<sup>14</sup> The challenge for Turkey and Iran lies in balancing their ambitions for regional dominance with the reality of Russia's overwhelming military capabilities and strategic alliances.

Turkey's strategic balancing act between NATO and Iran becomes even more tenuous as competition over energy routes in the Black Sea intensifies. Turkey remains committed to maintaining its status as a reliable NATO ally, yet its growing energy and trade ties with Iran complicate this positioning. This delicate balancing act creates an intricate web of competing priorities, where economic interests often clash with security imperatives. While some scholars argue that this strategy provides Turkey with short-term flexibility, others contend that it risks eroding Turkey's long-term geopolitical stability in the region.<sup>15</sup>

The historical rivalry between Turkey and Iran has long been a central element in shaping their foreign policies, particularly in relation to their influence over the Black Sea region. While recent efforts have been made toward pragmatic cooperation, this competition for regional dominance remains deeply rooted in political, economic, and military interests. Both countries have historically sought to assert control over strategically significant areas, including the Black Sea, as a means to extend their influence and power.

Turkey's evolving role in the Greater Black Sea region reflects its broader geopolitical aspirations. Initially focused on consolidating leadership within the Turkic world, Turkey has expanded its strategic influence to encompass stronger economic and political ties with regional actors, particularly Russia. This expansion underscores the complexity of Turkey's strategic positioning, as it balances its NATO membership with regional ambitions. The

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald H. Linden, Kemal Kirişci, and Thomas Straubhaar. *Turkey and Its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012. ISBN: 978-1588267719.

<sup>14</sup> Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoğlu. *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Hudson Institute, 2023. <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/A-New-Black-Sea-Strategy-for-a-New-Black-Sea-Reality.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Flanagan. "The Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics." *The Washington Quarterly* 36, nr. 1 (2013): 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751656>.

challenge for Turkey lies in managing these dual roles without undermining its long-term geopolitical stability.

Iran, driven by its energy security and military interests, has similarly sought to increase its influence in the Black Sea region. Through initiatives such as the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor, Iran aims to challenge Turkey's dominance in energy transit routes, asserting its presence in key geopolitical corridors.

### **Energy security and pipeline politics**

Energy security plays a central role in shaping Turkey and Iran's geopolitical competition in the Black Sea. Both countries are acutely aware of the strategic importance of the region's energy transit routes, which link the energy-rich Caspian and Middle Eastern regions with energy-hungry European markets. Turkey's geographic position as a key energy corridor connecting these regions has allowed it to establish itself as a critical transit hub for European energy supplies. However, Iran's competing energy projects, particularly its partnerships with Russia, complicate Turkey's efforts to dominate the region's energy landscape.<sup>16</sup>

The competition over pipeline routes, such as the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), the TurkStream pipeline, and Iran's proposed Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor - underscores the geopolitical rivalry between these two states. While Turkey has made significant progress in securing its role as a transit country for European energy markets, Iran's strategic ties with Russia present a formidable challenge.<sup>17</sup> Iran's influence over Caspian energy supplies, combined with its partnership with Russia, threatens to undermine Turkey's efforts to secure energy routes that bypass Iranian and Russian control.

Turkey's reliance on Iranian natural gas, despite their geopolitical differences, reflects the pragmatic nature of their bilateral energy relations. Although Turkey is a NATO member and maintains strong ties with the West, its energy needs force it to engage with Iran in ways that often contradict its broader geopolitical strategy.<sup>18</sup> This interdependence highlights the complexity of Turkey-Iran relations, where energy security concerns frequently override political differences. However, this dynamic places Turkey in a

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<sup>16</sup> Ole Gunnar Austvik, and Gulmira Rzayeva. "Turkey in the Geopolitics of Natural Gas." *M-RCBG Associate Working Paper Series* 66, (2016): 9-16. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ole-Gunnar-Austvik/publication/343008415\\_Turkey\\_in\\_the\\_Geopolitics\\_of\\_Natural\\_Gas/links/5f11866ea6fdcc3ed70e54c0/Turkey-in-the-Geopolitics-of-Natural-Gas.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ole-Gunnar-Austvik/publication/343008415_Turkey_in_the_Geopolitics_of_Natural_Gas/links/5f11866ea6fdcc3ed70e54c0/Turkey-in-the-Geopolitics-of-Natural-Gas.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen. "Turkey's Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia?" *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 23, nr. 2 (2018): 72-92. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549667>.

<sup>18</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein and Oles M. Smolansky. *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran*. London: Routledge, 1995.

precarious position, as it must balance its energy security needs with its commitments to Western alliances.

Iran's growing influence in the Black Sea energy landscape, particularly its efforts to establish new pipeline routes that bypass Turkish territory, further exacerbates tensions between the two countries. The Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor, in particular, is designed to reduce Iran's dependency on Turkey for energy exports while providing Tehran with greater leverage over regional energy markets.<sup>19</sup> This project threatens to displace Turkey's long-held dominance over key energy transit routes to Europe.

The energy security is the core of the geopolitical competition between Turkey and Iran in the Black Sea region. Both countries recognize the strategic importance of the region's energy transit routes, which link resource-rich areas like the Caspian and Middle East to European markets. Turkey's geographic position allows it to act as a key energy corridor, cementing its role as a critical hub for European energy supplies. However, Iran's competing energy projects, notably its partnerships with Russia, challenge Turkey's dominance. Pipeline projects like TANAP, TurkStream, and Iran's proposed Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor intensify this rivalry. Despite geopolitical tensions, Turkey's reliance on Iranian natural gas highlights the pragmatic side of their energy relations. This delicate balance forces Turkey to engage with Iran while navigating its broader geopolitical strategy. Iran's ambitions to bypass Turkish territory for energy exports, notably through the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor, further threaten Turkey's dominance over transit routes.

### **Military cooperation and strategic rivalry**

The military relations between Turkey and Iran in the Black Sea region reflects the broader complexity of their geopolitical interactions. Despite their divergent alliances and interests, both countries have found common ground in countering NATO's presence in the Black Sea. Military cooperation between Turkey and Iran is primarily driven by mutual security concerns, particularly the desire to limit Western military influence in the region. However, this cooperation is often accompanied by strategic competition, as both countries vie for greater influence over the region's security architecture.<sup>20</sup>

Turkey's strategic partnership with Russia, particularly in the area of defense, complicates its military relations with Iran. Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia, despite strong objections from NATO, underscores its willingness to

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<sup>19</sup> Mamuka Tsereteli. "Black Sea Connectivity and the South Caucasus." *Middle East Institute*, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/black-sea-connectivity-and-south-caucasus>.

<sup>20</sup> Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoğlu. *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Hudson Institute, 2023. <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/A-New-Black-Sea-Strategy-for-a-New-Black-Sea-Reality.pdf>.

prioritize regional security interests over its Western alliances when necessary.<sup>21</sup> This move also reflects Turkey's broader strategy of diversifying its military partnerships, including those with non-NATO powers like Iran.

The growing militarization of the Black Sea, fueled by both Turkish and Iranian interests, presents significant challenges to regional security. As Turkey and Iran adjust their military strategies in response to shifting alliances and external pressures, the region's fragile security environment becomes increasingly strained. The militarization of energy infrastructure, in particular, highlights the intersection of energy security and military strategy in the Black Sea.<sup>22</sup>

The Syrian civil war, in which Turkey and Iran support opposing factions, underscores the interconnectedness of regional conflicts, with direct implications for Black Sea security. Turkey and Iran's roles in the Syrian civil war illustrate the extent to which Middle Eastern conflicts can impact Black Sea security. While Turkey supports Syrian opposition groups and Iran backs the Assad regime, their rivalry in Syria has spillover effects that extend into Black Sea geopolitics, where regional alliances are further complicated by external powers such as Russia and NATO. In the opinion of other researchers, Turkey's military involvement in Syria is linked to its broader regional strategy, including securing influence over Black Sea security.<sup>23</sup>

The military relationship between Turkey and Iran in the Black Sea region is a delicate balance of cooperation and rivalry, reflecting their broader geopolitical interactions. While both nations collaborate to limit NATO's influence, strategic competition remains a constant undercurrent as they vie for dominance in regional security. Turkey's defense partnership with Russia, adds further complexity, highlighting a pragmatic approach to military alliances. Moreover, the Syrian civil war amplifies their rivalry, with spillover effects on Black Sea security, illustrating how regional conflicts intertwine and shape the evolving military dynamics in the area.

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<sup>21</sup> Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen. "Turkey's Black Sea Predicament: Challenging or Accommodating Russia?" *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 23, nr. 2 (2018): 72-92. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/549667>.

<sup>22</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, ed. *SETA Security Radar: Turkey's Security Landscape in 2021 – Strategic Flexibility Under Geopolitical Anxiety*. SETA, 2021. <https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2021/01/R181En.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoğlu. *A New Black Sea Strategy for a New Black Sea Reality*. Hudson Institute, 2023. <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/A-New-Black-Sea-Strategy-for-a-New-Black-Sea-Reality.pdf>; Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Esra Balta, Kerem Kılıç, Hüseyin Deniz Bilgin and Arne Strand. *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*. CMI Report, 2021. <https://open.cmi.no/cmi-xmlui/handle/11250/2761410>.



## Conclusion

The geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and Iran is not a simple binary of cooperation or competition, but a complex interplay that shapes the security architecture of the Black Sea region. Despite their historical antagonism and opposing alliances, both countries engage in pragmatic cooperation driven by mutual interests, particularly the need to counterbalance Western, and more specifically NATO, influence. However, this cooperation is inherently fragile and often overshadowed by the deeper strategic rivalry for regional dominance.

Turkey's role as a NATO member complicates its efforts to collaborate with Iran, a country that consistently opposes Western alliances. Yet, both countries find common ground in their desire to exert influence over the Black Sea, using their military and energy partnerships as leverage against external actors. This balancing act reflects Turkey's broader geopolitical strategy, where it must reconcile its Western commitments with its regional ambitions. However, this approach risks creating contradictions within Turkey's foreign policy, as its NATO obligations frequently clash with its partnerships with regional adversaries like Iran and Russia.

Iran, for its part, continues to challenge Turkey's regional hegemony, particularly in the energy sector. Tehran's ambition to circumvent sanctions and expand its influence through initiatives like the Persian Gulf-Black Sea transport corridor signals a clear attempt to erode Turkey's dominance in the Black Sea. The pursuit of these initiatives underscores Iran's long-term strategy of using economic partnerships to bolster its geopolitical standing, even as it grapples with international constraints. This growing economic and military involvement further intensifies the rivalry with Turkey, pushing both actors into a more competitive stance.

The resurgence of Russian influence adds another layer of complexity to this dynamic. Neither Turkey nor Iran can fully assert dominance in the Black Sea without navigating Russia's superior military presence and strategic alliances. Russia's role as a dominant power in the region forces Turkey and Iran to engage in a balancing act not just with each other, but also with Moscow, complicating their individual ambitions for regional control. There is opinion which emphasizes Turkey's preference for limiting external actors in the Black Sea and highlights its shared regional vision with Russia to maintain regional order without significant Western involvement. This idea of "regional solutions for regional problems" aligns with Turkey's broader strategic interests, including its relation with Iran.<sup>24</sup> In this

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<sup>24</sup> D. Isachenko. *Turkey in the Black Sea Region. Ankara's Reactions to the War in Ukraine against the Background of Regional Dynamics and Global Confrontation*. Berlin: SWP Research Paper, German Institute for International and

context, the Black Sea becomes a battleground of competing interests, where no single power can claim complete hegemony. One of the most significant consequences of this rivalry is the militarization of the Black Sea. Both Turkey and Iran are key players in this process, contributing to an increasingly fragile security landscape. Their military activities, while sometimes cooperative, are driven by a need to outmaneuver each other and external actors. The militarization of the region reflects a broader trend of shifting alliances and evolving geopolitical strategies, where a short-term cooperation masks long-term competition.

Furthermore, Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia, despite its NATO commitments, exemplifies the strategic flexibility that defines its relations with Iran and other non-NATO powers. This move highlights Turkey's willingness to prioritize regional security interests over Western alliance when necessary. However, this flexibility also underscores the precarious nature of Turkey's military strategy, as it must continuously balance conflicting priorities.

The rivalry between Turkey and Iran extends beyond the Black Sea into other regional conflicts, such as in Syria and the South Caucasus. These areas of competition have direct implications for Black Sea security, as both states seek to secure strategic access points and energy routes. Iran's involvement in these regions serves as a challenge to Turkey's influence, particularly through its support for Armenia in contrast to Turkey's backing of Azerbaijan. These intersecting rivalries demonstrate how interconnected regional conflicts contribute to the broader geopolitical competition between Turkey and Iran.

In conclusion, the relation between Turkey and Iran in the Black Sea is emblematic of the broader geopolitical struggles playing out across the region. While both countries cooperate, when necessary, their rivalry for regional influence remains a defining feature of the security dynamics in the Black Sea. As the militarization of the region continues, and external actors such as Russia and NATO remain influential, the fragile balance of power will likely continue to shift, with Turkey and Iran at the center of this evolving security landscape.

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## **New challenges in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region**

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### **Abstract**

Against the background of the current political processes in the modern world, the region of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea has come under great attention. Due to its location, this region is of strategic importance for the big players of world politics: Russia, Turkey, the USA and the European Union. Also, it is interesting that China, a new great world power, which is gradually gaining strength, has been closely following the processes in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region for the last few years and is trying to lobby its interests in this region. The well-known "Belt and Road" project considers the South Caucasus and the Black Sea as its area of influence, however, this project fails to utilize the full potential of the South Caucasus region. Due to the relevance of the issue, presenting the current political situation in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region is a challenge of time and therefore very relevant.

The aim of the presented paper is to present new modern challenges in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region based on the study/analysis of a number of official documents.

**Keywords:** Black Sea region, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, European Union, NATO.

## Introduction

At the modern stage, the growth of the strategic importance of the Black Sea region in international politics is a fact. Arguments/discussions about the interests of NATO, the European Union, as well as individual states in the Black Sea region have especially increased after Russia's military campaigns in 2008 (against Georgia) and 2014 (in Ukraine). The region has really come under the spotlight since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and increased its military activity in the Black Sea region in general.

The urgency of the issue is also increased by the agreement between the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary on "strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission" in early September 2024.<sup>1</sup> The Black Sea submarine cable project is important not only for Europe's energy security, but also increases Georgia's potential as an energy hub.<sup>2</sup> The implementation of the mentioned project will ensure the supply of renewable energy from the Caspian region to the European continent,<sup>3</sup> which will strengthen the sustainability of the European Union in the face of energy supply challenges and geopolitical tensions. Accordingly, based on the mentioned, the goal of the research was determined, the study/analysis of a number of existing documents and materials.

Based on the research goals of the paper, preference was given to the method of document study, situational analysis. It is important that the research question of the paper was formulated as follows: what are the interests of the great powers in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region.

### **Russian interests in the Black Sea and South Caucasus**

Due to its strategic location, the South Caucasus plays a very important role in world politics. After the 90s of the last century the South Caucasus region activated its strategic function, because before that it was controlled by the Russian Empire and served its interests. After gaining independence, the full use, utilization and implementation of this strategic function/profitable geographical location became one of the important foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Mammadli, S., Romanian President arrives in Azerbaijan, 02 February 2023, <https://www.today.az/news/politics/231237.html>

<sup>2</sup> The South Caucasus - Security, Energy and Europeanization (2017), Routledge, London, eBookISBN9781315717821, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315717821/south-caucasus-security-energy-europeanization-meliha-altunışik-oktay-tanrisever>

<sup>3</sup> The South Caucasus - Security, Energy and Europeanization (2017), Routledge, London, eBookISBN9781315717821, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315717821/south-caucasus-security-energy-europeanization-meliha-altunışik-oktay-tanrisever>

policy goals of the young states of this region.<sup>4</sup> „However, at the same time, Russian political goals were also developed, which came into sharp conflict with the interests of the states of the South Caucasus region. Both in the speeches of the political leaders of Russia and in the foreign policy doctrines of this country,<sup>5</sup> the importance of the South Caucasus region for Russia,<sup>6</sup> both regions, is constantly emphasized, because having an influence on these areas is so important that the strategic doctrine of the Russian foreign policy has a markedly rigid attitude towards this in relation to the region.<sup>7</sup> Russia, as one of the great actors of international politics, manages to realize its goals in these regions based on its political, economic and strategic interests. Therefore, these regions are facing difficult challenges - on the one hand, that the states of these regions want independence and to move on the path of development, progress, and on the other - due to Russia's ambitions, they constantly have to fight to somehow get rid of these influences. So far, neither with the support of the West nor, moreover, relying on their own forces, it is difficult for the states of the region and they are unable to choose a foreign political vector independently. Rather, they make this choice, but due to the successful operation of Russian hybrid methods, the means of their realization are not possible.<sup>8</sup> Russia is constantly working to change the imbalances that have arisen in the Black Sea and is constantly fighting this reality, both literally and with well-adapted methods of "soft power". The well-known tools of Russia's "soft power" in the political field of the region are: religion and a heavy emphasis on monotheism,<sup>9</sup> information war and well-prepared disinformation campaigns, pro-Russian political parties and intensive work of non-governmental organizations. Russia works with the same methods in Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus and everywhere where its interests are.

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<sup>4</sup> Alaverdovi, E., Amilakhvari, L., Russia's strategic interest in post-Soviet Countries, Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article, USBED 2023 5(8) Spring/Bahar, pp., 292, [https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg\\_aem\\_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w](https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg_aem_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w)

<sup>5</sup> Alaverdovi, E., Amilakhvari, L., Russia's strategic interest in post-Soviet Countries, Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article, USBED 2023 5(8) Spring/Bahar, pp., 292, [https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg\\_aem\\_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w](https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg_aem_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w)

<sup>6</sup> Alaverdovi, E., Amilakhvari, L., Russia's strategic interest in post-Soviet Countries, Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article, USBED 2023 5(8) Spring/Bahar, pp., 292, [https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg\\_aem\\_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w](https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2957828?fbclid=IwY2xjawGYkx9leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHcdS5U8C7i396nd6FQGKFW9Z8iNjQjbg4DlwVFZeKWLuTAyn-pe63Zn8Cg_aem_OzWOKqXUViTY-WwSjDiH2w)

<sup>7</sup> Bilanishvili, G. (2018). On Certain Aspects of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Tbilisi, Georgian Strategy and International Relations Research Foundation, <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/opinion-papers/102-expert-opinion-geo.pdf>, 01.07.2024

<sup>8</sup> Melikyan, G., Commentary: Navigating Hybrid Threats in the South Caucasus, 30 October, 2023, <https://www.commonspace.eu/commentary/commentary-navigating-hybrid-threats-south-caucasus>, Last view: 27.10.2023

<sup>9</sup> Giorgadze, L. (2014). Church Relations of Georgia and Russia in the Post-Soviet Period (1990-2004), TSU, [http://press.tsu.edu.ge/data/image\\_db\\_innova/Disertaciebi/lela\\_giorgadze.pdf](http://press.tsu.edu.ge/data/image_db_innova/Disertaciebi/lela_giorgadze.pdf), 02.08.2024



Where this is insufficient, Moscow takes extreme measures. In particular, Russia initiated a "special operation" in relation to Ukraine and is leading the process in accordance with his interests.<sup>10</sup>

Russia has always been very concerned about Armenia's efforts to get closer to the European Union.<sup>11</sup> Armenia is trying to turn its back on Russia and get closer to America and the European Union. Armenia's attitude towards Russia is completely fair as a result of the operation in Karabakh, because the expectations were different: the treaty renewed in 2010 obliged Russia to help Armenia. Moscow's failure to provide assistance to a country declared a strategic ally caused outrage in Armenia, and demonstrations were immediately held in Yerevan demanding that Armenia leave the Collective Security Treaty Organization.<sup>12</sup>

### **Turkey's interests in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region**

In addition to the big players of the world, Turkey also has its own interests in this region. It is a developed NATO member state that has long-term plans both in the Black Sea basin and with the states of this region; Two of the regional states - Georgia and especially Azerbaijan - are its strategic allies. As for Armenia, although diplomatic relations with it have been cut off, Turkey is making great efforts to restore relations with this state. In this regard, Turkey developed a special plan (so-called football diplomacy) and tried to correct these relations.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Russia, Turkey always uses "soft power" methods/instruments in the region, unlike the Middle East, where Turkey has to conduct military operations. These tools are: Turkish and Turkish-speaking population; Muslim community; international energy projects; non-governmental organizations; Educational centers and institutions (for example, TIKA, Suleiman Demirel College, Yunus Emre Turkish Culture Center and others); These tools are Turkey's potential resources for pursuing a "soft power" policy in the South Caucasus (this power does not work in Armenia). Here we would like to

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<sup>10</sup> Gotsiridze, A., The Kremlin has not yet decided what type of continuation it will choose in Ukraine - a full-scale war, a limited conflict or a hybrid war, but it seems that what is happening around Ukraine now is not a Russian bluff, 24.11.2021, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/685077-andro-gocirize-kremls-jer-ar-gadaucqveta-ira-tipis-gagrzelebas-airchevs-ukrainashi-srulmashtabian-oms-shezugdul-konplikts-tu-isev-hibridul-oms-magram-rogorc-chans-rac-axla-xdeba-ukrainis-irgvliv-rusuli-blepi-araa/> Last view: 02.11.2024

<sup>11</sup> Melikyan, G., Commentary: Navigating Hybrid Threats in the South Caucasus, 30 October, 2023, <https://www.commonspace.eu/commentary/commentary-navigating-hybrid-threats-south-caucasus>, Last view: 27.10.2023

<sup>12</sup> Dzamukashvili, S., Russia does not help Armenia - an opportunity for Washington, <https://forbes.ge/rusethi-somkheths-ar-ekhmareba-shesadzlebloba-vashingtonisthvis/> Last view: 20.10. 2022

<sup>13</sup> Manchkhvili, M. (2021). Two Turkish Models of South Caucasus Regional Security, Sul Khan-Saba Orbelian University Press, Tbilisi, Georgia.

emphasize that not all people connected with these institutions can be automatically considered as "soft power" tools (for example, the majority of the Muslim community in Georgia are patriots and good citizens of the country). Thus, the „Turkish authorities have sufficient military-political, socio-economic and cultural mechanisms to successfully implement the "soft power" strategy in the neighbour region.“<sup>14,15</sup>

In addition to the above, it should be emphasized that Turkish diplomacy has been very active in the past. For example, when Turkey came out with the initiative of the "Caucasus Security Platform". This model was pronounced during the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war,<sup>16</sup> in particular, on August 13, at a high-level meeting in Moscow, when the then former prime minister and current president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,<sup>17</sup> proposed cooperation between the South Caucasus states and Russia in the 3+2 format.<sup>18</sup> According to this model, a number of regional security issues of the South Caucasus should be regulated in the format of the so-called five, that is, Russia and Turkey would sit at the negotiating table together with the three states of the region (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia).<sup>19</sup>

Considering that Turkey has been conducting its foreign policy, including the South Caucasus policy, according to the new foreign policy doctrine since the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s,<sup>20</sup> coming out with such an initiative and claiming to be one of the influential political actors in the South Caucasus region was not unexpected.

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<sup>14</sup> Gbedava, M., Manchkhshvili, M., Main political actors in the South Caucasus, Politics around the Caucasus, Collection of reports of the III International Scientific Conference, 2018, pp. 33-39, in Georgian, Tbilisi, Georgia. [http://press.tsu.ge/data/image\\_db\\_innova/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A1%E1%83%99%E1%83%98%20I%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%9C%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%20%E1%83%A8%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%202015.pdf, 02.0102024](http://press.tsu.ge/data/image_db_innova/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A1%E1%83%99%E1%83%98%20I%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%9C%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%20%E1%83%A8%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%202015.pdf, 02.0102024)

<sup>15</sup> Gbedava, M., Manchkhshvili, M., Main political actors in the South Caucasus, Politics around the Caucasus, Collection of reports of the III International Scientific Conference, 2018, pp. 33-39, in Georgian, Tbilisi, Georgia. [http://press.tsu.ge/data/image\\_db\\_innova/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A1%E1%83%99%E1%83%98%20I%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%9C%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%20%E1%83%A8%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%202015.pdf, 02.0102024](http://press.tsu.ge/data/image_db_innova/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A1%E1%83%99%E1%83%98%20I%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A4%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%9C%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%20%E1%83%A8%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%20%E1%83%99%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%202015.pdf, 02.0102024)

<sup>16</sup> The South Caucasus - Security, Energy and Europeanization (2017), Routledge, London, eBook ISBN 9781315717821, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315717821/south-caucasus-security-energy-europeanization-meliha-altunışık-oktay-tanrisever>

<sup>17</sup> Expert says Turkey needs to develop win-win model of cooperation with EU, 14 June 2016, <https://www.azernews.az/region/97967.html>

<sup>18</sup> The South Caucasus ...

<sup>19</sup> Fotiou, E. (2009). "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform": What is at Stake for Regional Cooperation? [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104737/PB\\_16.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104737/PB_16.pdf), 21.09.2024

<sup>20</sup> Should we care about purple loosestrife? The history of an invasive plant in North America, 20 October, 2009, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10530-009-9600-7>

However, for Russia, a state for which it is unacceptable to realize Turkey's ambitions in any form in the region, with the desire to restore the empire, this initiative was unacceptable. Consequently, Russia has worked well with adapted propaganda methods and managed to create anti-Turkish sentiments.

The Turkish idea of seeking security with the 3+2 formula, caused dissatisfaction on the part of the countries and international organizations that were excluded from this format (EU, USA, IR of Iran, even the UN). However, all the big players were excluded from this format, except for Russia, which raised reasonable doubts about the deal between the two countries towards the region.<sup>21</sup>

Turkey's South Caucasus policy is constantly being reviewed by Turkish diplomats and analysts.<sup>22</sup> Every new challenge is perceived as an opportunity for Turkey. Turkey is responding to this new challenge by developing a new model, which if realized will help Turkey establish in the neighbourhood with a larger dose. Some of the projects or studies that are public and available to researchers contain many interesting details. Turkish researcher Mustafa Aydin writes in his works that after the end of the Cold War, „Turkey needed time to adapt to the new reality and only then began to form the South Caucasus policy and engage in the "big game" with Russia, Iran and the USA. Experts working on Turkey's foreign policy agree that the South Caucasus policy is critically strategic for it, especially after Turkey's drive towards Europe has not worked very well.“<sup>23</sup>

The Black Sea region, in particular, the South Caucasus, is important for Turkey due to several aspects:<sup>24</sup> 1) Azerbaijan factor - a related nation/state of Turkey, about which the Turkish press often mentions that in these relations, apart from kinship, the natural resources owned by Azerbaijan are no less important for Turkey. 2) South Caucasus is a bridge for Turkey to connect with Central<sup>25</sup> Asian countries. 3) Market place - South Caucasus - Georgia and Azerbaijan - represents a good market place for products of the Republic of Turkey, since tens of thousands of tons of different types of products enter the South Caucasus (if Armenia is not included) market every year. 4) Transit function -

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<sup>21</sup> Manchhashvili, M. (2021). Two Turkish Models of South Caucasus Regional Security, Sul Khan-Saba Orbelian University Press, Tbilisi, Georgia, p., 2.

<sup>22</sup> Manchhashvili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>23</sup> Aydin M., Turkey's Caucasus Policy; *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, № 23, May/2010, p., 178.

<sup>24</sup> Manchhashvili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>25</sup> Manchhashvili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

Turkey's goal is to be an integral part of the European security system,<sup>26</sup> Turkey should play an important role in the path of natural resources from Asia to Europe.<sup>27</sup>

„The fact that three states of the Black Sea region (Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania) are members of NATO is very uncomfortable for Russia.“<sup>28</sup> This has been particularly evident since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, as Russia had to deal with NATO member states (where their superiority was revealed). If, for example, Turkey considers that expectations of a certain objective threat will arise from Russia and the straits will be closed,<sup>29</sup> it will be difficult for Russia to quickly supply the Russian bases located in Tartus and Latakia, as well as the Novorossiysk, Tuapse and Sochi bases. The occupation of Crimea by Russia served the purpose of having an ice-free port in its possession in winter and summer and balancing Turkey's advantages on the Black Sea in this regard.<sup>30</sup> It is true that some researchers talk about the failure of American policy in the South Caucasus,<sup>31</sup> but if we take into account that America has 3 big allies in the Black Sea, which are also NATO member states, and at the same time, the US has moving nuclear arsenal in the Mediterranean Sea, the picture of the balance of power becomes completely clear.<sup>32</sup>

In recent years, NATO's interest in the Black Sea region has been significantly increased by the Ukraine factor.<sup>33</sup> For Turkey, this is only beneficial, as it will further strengthen and consolidate its positions in these regions.<sup>34,35</sup>

Georgia has the status of a candidate. Accordingly, the means of entry of European Union in this region is expressed. Eastern European countries are a means of access to

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<sup>26</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>27</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>28</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>29</sup> 1936 CONVENTION REGARDING THE REGIME OF THE STRAITS, Adopted in Montreux, Switzerland on 20 July 1936, <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits-1.pdf>, 09.07.2024

<sup>30</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>31</sup> Abrahamyan, E., Is US Engagement in the South Caucasus Doomed to Failure? 25 Sep 2024, last seen: 27.10.2024, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4936618](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4936618)

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wike, Moira Fagan, Sneha Gubbala, Sarah Austin, Growing Partisan Divisions over NATO and Ukraine, 8 May, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/08/views-of-ukraine-and-u-s-involvement-with-the-russia-ukraine-war/> Last view: 27.10.2024

<sup>33</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>34</sup> Manchkhavili, M., Football Diplomacy, International Journal of Literary and Art Studies, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

<sup>35</sup> Larsen, H. (2024). NATO-Ukraine: From Vilnius to Washington, Washington Summit Series No. 1, June, ICDS, [https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2024/06/No-1\\_NATO-Ukraine\\_Henrik-Larsen.pdf](https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2024/06/No-1_NATO-Ukraine_Henrik-Larsen.pdf), 02.11. 2024, Last view: 27.10.2024

alternative sources of energy resources for the European Union. It is fact, that a stable and developed region of Eats europe is an important for the European Union.

Evaluating these processes from the perspective of Georgia, we can note that due to its geographical location, Georgia can pursue a foreign policy course based on the optimizm. However, a strategic location does not automatically mean that a country has the capacity to implement such policies.<sup>36</sup> The current political processes in the region are adjusted to the interests of the leading political actors and determine the formation of the world order.

### Conclusion

From the materials discussed in the paper, it is clear that after the start of the war in Ukraine, the processes taking place in the neighbourhoods of Georgia still do not provide the opportunity to make final conclusions. The situation can change at any time. Naturally, all states of the region act according to their interests. This makes it difficult to draw conclusions, since the interests of the players in this region are different. First, it is a fact that the Georgian side is interested in the production of peace policy and acts based on these principles.

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<sup>36</sup> Manchkhshvili, M., Football Diplomacy, *International Journal of Literary and Art Studies*, March, 2017, No. 3, pp. 336-375. <https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/630707dea707c.pdf> Last view: 30.10.2024

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# Georgia's Place on the Brzeziński "Grand Chessboard" Amidst Growing Geopolitical Turbulence

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the evolving geopolitical landscape with a focus on the strategic significance of Georgia within the Eurasian region, framed through Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard" theory. It explores the dynamics between global powers - Russia, the West, Turkey, and China - highlighting the implications of recent geopolitical shifts, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent tensions. The study assesses how Western and revisionist powers navigate this complex environment, emphasizing Georgia's role as a critical geopolitical crossroads. Additionally, it discusses the competing narratives and strategies of these powers, considering the impact of historical ideologies, including Fukuyama's "End of History" and the "Empire of Trust," on contemporary political actions. The findings illustrate the challenges and opportunities Georgia faces amidst increasing global turbulence.

**Keywords:** Grand Chessboard, geopolitical interests, geopolitical environment, aggression, great powers, State Security.



## Introduction

Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard" theory suggests that Eurasia is the primary arena for global power, where great powers (conditionally called grandmasters or mastodons) compete for influence. Due to its location, Georgia plays a strategically important role on this "chessboard." In the context of growing geopolitical turbulence, Georgia's role becomes even more significant, especially in light of the war in Ukraine, which is tied to the relationship between Russia and the West. However, political actors in the global West may no longer be reading Brzezinski and instead operate within the paradigm of Fukuyama's "End of History."

The growing geopolitical interests in the Black and Caspian Sea regions (Trenin, 2011) make Georgia's security a pressing issue. NATO and the EU's excessive caution, Russia's revisionism, China's attempts to gain a foothold in the region, and the strengthening of Turkey's role all significantly impact Georgia's political vector.

## Main Part

### Actuality

In the modern world, there is such intense turbulence that it could potentially lead to unimaginable tectonic shifts. In a certain sense, there is an attempt to revise and reassess the rules of the game that were seemingly established permanently after the end of World War II and the creation of a new world order following the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>1</sup>

The new world order, or more accurately the new disorder, characterized by unique turbulence, exhibits distinct features: the most powerful—economically, technologically, and politically - are withdrawing from participation in geopolitics due to internal political or new cultural factors. The establishment and elites are largely represented by a generation raised on Fukuyama's "End of History" (a generation so enamored with Fukuyama's idea of the "end of history" that they failed to notice the "antagonists of democracy" Fukuyama himself warned of).<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, paves the way for much weaker revisionist powers.

In response to the aggressive and audacious actions of revisionists, the passive, conciliatory, appeasing, or otherwise similar reactions of the so-called *mastodons* (mastodon – an extinct, hudge, and ancient elephant; this term is sometimes used in the Soviet and post-Soviet space to describe old authorities in any given field, or giants of insurmountable size and influence, the "grand powers") only embolden the revisionists, pushing them toward greater audacity. Meanwhile, modern revisionists have learned from Hitler's and

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<sup>1</sup> Ikenberry, G. J. (2001). \*After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars\*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1992). \*The End of History and the Last Man\*. Free Press.

Japan's mistakes and do not directly challenge the *mastodons*. Instead, they have gradually been squeezing the *mastodons'* allies, who, due to *mastodons'* passive stance, are more inclined to find common ground with the aggressors. This, in turn, undermines Thomas Maden's concept of the "Empire of Trust."

Since February 24, 2022, Russia's open aggression against Ukraine first caused widespread shock and panic, followed by excitement, enthusiasm, and optimism. (It is almost inconceivable for any civilized and cultured citizen of a civilized and cultured country, who is not suffering from psychological issues or a crisis of values, not to have experienced shock, panic, solidarity with Ukraine, a desire to assist Ukraine, punish the aggressor as an example, and to restore a civilized order with hope and resolve). However, this was eventually followed by fatigue, disappointment, pessimism, and apathy, which could lead to moral relativism and nihilism - causing the degradation of civil and political systems. This, in turn, weakens the Western allies in peripheral countries and fuels the rise of revisionism on a global scale.

The international system is now represented by three conditional groups: the *grand powers*, the revisionists, and the peripheral actors. Until now, the peripheral actors had leaned more toward the West due to its geopolitical, economic, cultural, and military advantages. However, they are now gradually shifting toward the revisionists, driven by the increased risks resulting from the passivity of the grand powers and the active engagement of the revisionists.

In this context, Georgia's position in the global geopolitical intersection is particularly interesting in Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard," which includes the regions of the Balkans, the Black Sea littoral, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia, especially in light of the growing turbulence. Brzezinski's theory emphasizes the strategic importance of the Central Asian and Caucasian regions in global politics, with Georgia's geographic location giving it a unique role in the international balance of power.<sup>3</sup>

The increasing geopolitical turbulence, such as Russia's influence in the region, Western interests in energy resources and logistics security, as well as China's and Turkey's economic growth and geopolitical ambitions, presents new challenges and threats for Georgia, the Georgian people, Georgian civil society, and Georgian democracy. At the same time, it creates new opportunities for authoritarian-revisionist governments to disregard civil society and maintain power indefinitely, to the detriment of future generations.

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<sup>3</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, 1997.

Zbigniew Brzezinski's concept of the "Grand Chessboard" defines Georgia's role in the geopolitical landscape as a kind of "decisive frontier" where the interests of great powers intersect.<sup>4</sup>

### **Description of the Geopolitical Environment Around Georgia Against the Backdrop of the War in Ukraine**

The geopolitical environment surrounding Georgia has become increasingly complex and tense in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Georgia, strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is caught between major powers with conflicting interests: Russia to the north, Turkey to the south, the West (particularly NATO and the European Union) to the west, and the volatile Caucasus region. The war in Ukraine has significantly impacted Georgia's geopolitical position, highlighting both its vulnerabilities and the heightened importance of its role in regional stability.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, now fully unmasked (since the collapse of the USSR, Russia had been consistently carrying out hybrid operations of varying complexity, scale, and intensity, and had more or less formally concealed aggression against its neighbors, but February 24, 2022, represents a completely new manifestation of its foreign policy toolkit; this is the moment when quantity turned into quality, and quality transformed into essence), revealed not only Russia's intentions (the unmasking of the 2008 façade was not enough) in the former Soviet Union countries but also strengthened the threat of Russian influence in Georgia, particularly against the backdrop of the Georgian government's maneuvering and the collective West's wavering and inconsistent positioning.

At the same time, the significance of Western support for Georgia has increased, though the extent of this support is difficult to ascertain, especially considering the recent domestic political maneuvers by the Georgian government that carry geopolitical implications. Simultaneously, it is hard to criticize a government that is trying (or "trying") to avoid war, especially when powerful and large players do not offer guarantees with any real strength.

### **Russia's Geopolitics on the Grand Chessboard i.e. in the region of the Balkans, Caucasus, Black and Caspian Seas, and Central Asia, Interests, Goals, Strategy, Methods, Narratives, Rhetoric**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Z. Brzezinski, 1997.

The declared strategic goal of Russia is to "ensure a secure perimeter" (as if someone is attacking it, or as if the Russian political leadership truly believes that any European state would want or need Russian territory). In reality, however, the goal is not just to maintain "traditional" influence over former Soviet territories, but, where possible, to bring them under Russia's full military, political, economic, and cultural control. In this context, the Black and Caspian Seas, along with the surrounding regions, play a critical role.

However, "maintaining a secure perimeter" also extends to its distant approaches, such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. To ensure this "secure perimeter," Russia participates, in one form or another, in creating problems on a global scale.

If the "secure perimeter" narrative has any connection to reality, it is only in the sense that the current checklist-oligarchic-corrupt regime aims to create a "safe" environment shielded from society within the country, while expanding this perimeter beyond its borders.

Traditionally, when discussing the state and its leaders' policies, any researcher or ordinary voter automatically equates the state with the government, because the majority of people assess other individuals and the processes around them through their own paradigm. Moreover, psychologically, it is more comfortable to believe that those endowed with power - on whose decisions everyone's well-being and existence depend - are using that power for the good of the country, or at least trying to do so. There is also the belief that they are better informed, equipped with superior skills through competitive selection, experienced, organized, and goal-oriented and that they are adequately using their power. Those who think otherwise are often considered nihilists or incorrigible cynics.

Thus, when describing the dominant regime in Russia, a conscientious researcher often attempts to explain Russian politics and the decisions of Russian leaders through the lens of Russia's interests, or, in the best case, through the leaders' understanding of those interests. This leads to attempts to understand Russia and a willingness to seek logical compromises, which, in essence, is misguided. Therefore, it is both possible and necessary to clearly distinguish between Russia and the interests of its leaders.

Based on the above, Russia, as a theoretically collective defender of the interests of Russians in international relations, would primarily focus on the realization of the rare combination of its basic advantages (simultaneous abundance of mineral wealth, cheap yet qualified human resources, a developed entrepreneurial and scientific-technological base, and logistics infrastructure, as well as a high urban population - 80%) and its potential. The main concern would be protecting this potential from the expansionist ambitions and territorial claims of China, as well as from Islamist expansion and terrorism.

To achieve this, strengthening democratic institutions and procedures, building a rule-of-law state, securing rights and freedoms, and ensuring real democratic federalism would be necessary. All of this would transform Russia into a new America, with an enormous potential market and a base that could satisfy global market demands.

If Russia truly cared about the rights of Russian-speaking former Soviet compatriots, it would protect those rights not only in neighboring sovereign states but on its territory, without hindering the repatriation of fellow nationals or the migration of other former citizens. This, in turn, would have positioned Russia as a center of progress and attraction in the early 21st century, amidst the remarkable economic growth of the first decade (caused by the rare confluence of three factors: the liberal reforms of Yeltsin's team, the low starting point of transformation, and high energy prices - each of these factors on its own being a driver and accelerator of economic growth).

Such a path would have not only granted Russia international authority but would have also endowed its "soft power" with entirely different dimensions (Nye, 2004). It would have become, not only for the former Soviet Union, but for the entire socialist camp and the rest of the world, a center of investment, a destination for labor, technology, education, culture, and politics, as well as a hallmark of progress.

In such a situation, Russia could indeed have become an alternative to the West or China, or even to America for Europe and the Middle East (not necessarily, or perhaps not primarily, for its former satellites). This would have been possible if there had been a fundamental strategic geopolitical conflict between Russia and the West, or, if such a conflict did not exist in reality (as opposed to Russian propaganda), Russia would have behaved not as a challenger to global Western dominance but as an organic part of it, and a key actor in the process of westernization and modernization in its former satellites.

For this to happen, Putin's non-return in 2012 would have been enough; even better would have been if Putin himself had renounced confrontational rhetoric and the weakening of institutions for the sake of power usurpation.

But things unfolded as they did: Putin (or the collective Putin) may have initially attempted to reconcile personal interests with state interests, but in the end, the former was completely substituted for the latter. The intensity of confrontational rhetoric and the undermining of institutions increased in parallel, which indicates that the confrontational rhetoric was merely a tool to divert public attention and facilitate the usurpation of power. The war in Ukraine was an attempt to repeat the Crimea consensus, a strategy aimed at further cementing Russia's power through territorial expansion and nationalistic consolidation.

## **Western Geopolitics in The Region, Interests, Goals, Strategy, Methods, Narratives, Rhetoric**

Despite the differences within the collective West on various issues, it still represents a certain aggregate of geopolitical visions of major actors in global politics and geopolitics, paradigms of left-wing bureaucracies, and the advocacy vectors of commercial and public sectors. To avoid the dangers of another great war, it is necessary to:

- a) Maximize the economic integration of potentially threatening actors and opposing blocs;
- b) Ensure open markets, institutions, the rule of law, and functional democracy;
- c) Engage in collective efforts to address global challenges;
- d) Foster dialogue between cultures and promote multiculturalism;
- e) Ensure freedom, equality, solidarity, and well-being (high quality of life and security), both within countries and between them;
- f) Construct a shared political, legal, economic, ecological, scientific-technological, educational, and cultural space.

These principles would aim to create a more cohesive and stable global environment, mitigating the risk of large-scale conflict by promoting cooperation and shared values across nations and regions.

This paradigm and its strategies, or their paths to realization, may raise questions, but one thing is undeniable: in countries undergoing a second demographic transition, where governments are accountable to voters and dependent on their support, there is virtually no room for war and military expansion. This is because there is neither the benefit nor the resources to implement such a policy. In this sense, the collective West has practically abandoned geopolitics - there is no time for it, no one expects gains from it, and no resources exist for such an approach, at least within the paradigms in which Western establishments, economic, political, and social actors operate.

It is also significant that confrontational rhetoric with the collective West, general (or in some views, Western) humanist values, globalization, and the ideas of equality and cooperation, are characteristic of authoritarian and hybrid regimes. These regimes use such rhetoric (like Russia does) to consolidate their power and to counter Western narratives (on democracy and institutions), they attempt to demonize and marginalize their proponents. This is precisely because the above-mentioned values and vectors of the collective West, independently of its will, pose threats to authoritarian regimes. In other words, to divert public attention from power usurpation (and its disastrous consequences), these regimes resort to the image of an enemy and confrontational rhetoric - not to "save traditional values," but to solidify their control and establish dictatorship.

## **Turkish Geopolitics Interests, Goals, Strategy, Methods, Narratives, Rhetoric**

Turkey's geopolitics, from Atatürk's era until the collapse of the Soviet Union, was primarily focused on preserving the national (secular) state and pursuing modernization and westernization. It felt relatively comfortable under the NATO umbrella, but due to internal challenges and less-than-peaceful neighbors, it did not fully rely on the alliance.<sup>5</sup> As a result, at the end of the Cold War, Turkey emerged with the largest, best-equipped, and most trained military in Europe, under competent leadership.

Over the years and generations, the military became the most westernized, modern, and progressive force within Turkish society and the state, defending (or positioning itself as defending) Atatürk's legacy from the reactivity of patriarchal society's potential political expression. Meanwhile, within both the military and the political establishment, as well as certain segments of society (though it's difficult to define exactly due to the lack of real sociological data), ideas of Pan-Turkism, Pan-Ottomanism, and Pan-Islamism were growing, which Turkey tried to avoid openly manifesting.<sup>6</sup>

This situation persisted until the collapse of the Soviet Union, after which Turkey gradually lost both the perceived threat from Russia and the sense of Western superiority or progressiveness.

In this context, Turkey's military, economic, political, and international confidence grew. Ideas of Pan-Turkism, Pan-Ottomanism, and Pan-Islamism were complemented by the concept of „Islamic democracy“ (as a democratic-progressive alternative to Iranian, Saudi, or other radical-fundamentalist Islamist ideologies).<sup>7</sup> These ideologies, combined with Turkey's military and economic appeal, play a role as soft power in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Moreover, Turkey's geopolitical ambitions are evident in Syria and Libya.

It is difficult to say whether these ideologies are driven by Turkish society and the government or if they are a tool used by the authoritarian-leaning government for social consolidation. What is clear is that the Turkish government uses these ideologies to consolidate society internally and to craft a positive image among "historical allies" or "co-nationals."

From a geopolitical standpoint, Turkey sees the weakening of Russia and the expansion of China and seeks to maintain and expand its influence in these regions.

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<sup>5</sup> Barkey, H. J., & Fuller, G. E. (1998). \*Turkey's Kurdish Question\*. Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>6</sup> Cagaptay, S. (2021). \*Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East\*. I.B. Tauris.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## **China Geopolitics Interests, Goals, Strategy, Methods, Narratives, Rhetoric**

From Kissinger's visit to China until Xi Jinping's election for a third term, China was viewed as a unique but deeply integrated and, therefore, reliable actor in the global economy. However, today, increasing concern is being raised by China's collective (global) strategies, which remain largely unknown to the West and appear to be alternatives to long-term global strategies.<sup>8</sup> It is a fact that China is increasingly invoking the narrative of the "century of humiliation." Formally, it adheres meticulously to the provisions of its obligations, but often not to its spirit if there is room to maneuver. Globally, China is implementing infrastructure projects that, unlike similar projects carried out by the West, are not linked to the recipient country's commitment to human rights, democracy, or the rule of law. According to some analysts, this economic expansion may have far-reaching goals and could be part of a broader, long-term global strategy, likely involving future confrontation with the West.

One area where Chinese expansion is notably visible is Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans - regions where the West has not effectively capitalized on the weakening of Russian influence. In this context, Turkey emerges as a potential competitor to China's influence.

## **Conclusion**

In the geopolitical configuration described above, Georgia finds itself in an extraordinarily difficult and vulnerable position. On the one hand, from both a progressive standpoint and historical experience, as well as in terms of its statehood, legal and cultural heritage, orientation, values, and deep-seated mythology, Georgia is naturally a part of the European, or more broadly, the Western world. It aspires toward the Euro-Atlantic space not only for the sake of ensuring a secure and comfortable geopolitical environment but also to realize the corresponding standards of governance and development.

On the other hand, Georgia still faces existential threats, and while the West may not pose such a threat, it also does not provide guarantees of protection from these dangers (despite the significant hopes placed on such protection). The war in Ukraine has fundamentally changed the global landscape in this regard. Both progressive and reactionary factions of humanity once believed in the existence of certain norms, the violation of which would necessarily provoke a response. This belief has now been undermined for those who relied on it, and the fear has been lifted for those who were

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<sup>8</sup> G. Allison, „Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?“ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2017.



previously restrained by this belief from falling into international banditry and opportunism.

In this context, within Georgia's progressive, pro-Western, and liberal segments, the perception of a threat from Russia has grown, while the reactionary, revisionist, and conservative elements have been emboldened. They are using the existential threat from Russia to weaken the pro-Western orientation, framing it within the narrative that Georgia will not be protected, and therefore, pro-Western alignment is inherently dangerous.

At the same time, this situation provides the government with a clear path for gradually consolidating power through usurpation. Given the aspirations, potential, and methods of regional actors, Georgia faces alternatives that, on the one hand, would place any responsible democratic government in an extremely difficult situation, and on the other hand, would provide additional opportunities for any hybrid regime to deepen the process of power usurpation or delay democratization.

Under the current turbulence and in anticipation of tectonic shifts, Georgia finds itself without real allies - those who have a) formal military commitments to engage in combat if necessary; b) the technical readiness and the political, economic, material-technical, human, and moral resources to back such commitments; and c) the moral willingness to act in solidarity and defend common interests.

In this context, presenting the current situation as somehow justifying the government's shift in both foreign and domestic policy - shifting clearly from pro-Western and liberal to revisionist - appears to validate, at least in the eyes of some segments of the electorate, the government's approach. This is especially true as the narrative grows that confrontation with the West, particularly as a result of internal political decisions, is becoming inevitable.

In reality, even though Russia presents a permanent existential threat to Georgia, at this stage, Georgia is trying to maintain the status quo - that is, to prevent the war from ending. This does not necessarily imply the need for Georgia to open a new front. The so-called "warmongering" or anti-Russian hysteria does not reflect the necessity of defending Georgia against an imminent Russian invasion. First, there is no immediate threat of attack. What does exist is the threat of Georgia being drawn into Russia's orbit. This would require only a shift in the relationship between the two governments, and this alone would be enough.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Georgia has the following alternatives:

1. Closer alignment with Russia, with the risk of sovereignty being compromised and a long-term risk of losing political power for the government.
2. Closer alignment with Turkey, with a lesser risk to sovereignty but a greater likelihood of losing power more quickly.
3. Closer alignment with China, with a subtle erosion of sovereignty but no immediate risk of losing political power.
4. Restoring and deepening relations with the West, with the risk of provoking problems from Russia (but with the prospect of dealing with them) and a high likelihood of political power loss in the short term, almost certainly.

Georgia's current geopolitical situation leaves it facing hard choices, with no clear or easy path forward. Each option carries its risks and trade-offs, with the potential for significant political consequences regardless of the direction taken.

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# The New Military Strategy of the Russian Federation and the Role of Mercenaries in Military Conflicts

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## Abstract

Russia's military intervention into sovereign Ukraine has increased media coverage tendency at any political levels (global, regional and local) and has corroborated a motto on importance correctly delivered truth for the whole stalemate international security community. The newly coined term "Hybrid War" impact on modern world make the international society think and realize new threats that appeared with the significant advances in technology. Russia fully exploits hybrid war strategy in its persuasion to achieve its national interests at any expense.

Certainly, one of the elements of Hybrid war doctrine is engagement of the combat activities of mercenaries whose ethical principles and behavior are very far from elementary norms of humanitarian international laws. Namely factor of Russian mercenary group "Wagner" involvement in Ukraine occupation and military aggression is very high (the Russian mercenaries are being composed of around 40% of the Russian occupational forces intervened into Ukraine since 24 February of 2022). Moreover, together with mercenaries' brutal engagement, Russia's incumbent authority is also articulating, in order to cover their activities, with concrete forms of psychological and informational warfare. Currently information-psychological warfare can be carried out using disinformation, propaganda, cyber-attacks, lobbying, manipulation, deliberate creation of a crisis, and other methods. The use of this methodology is especially important in today's reality, it can be said that these areas are radically demanding. Why Russia is doing so is clear as enrollment of the mercenaries in any combatant sides, vigorously violates international humanitarian law and with elements of psychological war, the Russia's authority desires of manipulating with public society polls and masked their inhumanity acts.

**Keywords:** Mercenary, "Wagner" group, hybrid war, Russian, Military Conflicts, UN General Assembly, Convention, psychological war.

## Introduction

In the military strategic culture of the modern Russian Federation and the strategy of martial arts, the phenomenon of using private military companies is connected with the theory of modern wars, where the theory of hybrid war is considered the most optimal option. Its discussion of a Russian military doctrinal principle is related to the January 2013 report of the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, Army General Valery Gerasimov, where he designed the prospects of conducting such a war together with the students of one of the military academies, and already in 2014, the leadership of the Russian Federation adopted a new military doctrine, which was built based on the principles of hybrid warfare.

Over the centuries, there have been changes in the history of warfare. The changes were related to means, as well as organization, planning, tactics, and strategy. The most important era, which fundamentally changed the nature of war and laid the foundation for modern wars, is the 18th-19th century, which is known as the Napoleonic era. Classical military strategies were formed at this time. The figures of this era created theoretical works where the whole essence of military operations was outlined, thus providing nourishment for future war campaigns. The mercenary occupation was despised and, in contrast to earlier decades, had all but disappeared between 1800 and 1945. However, following World War II and the 1945–1980 Wars of Decolonization, mercenaries made a comeback to the global scene. Portuguese, French, Belgian, and British mercenaries were common during this time. They made a comeback in Africa in the late 1990s, especially in Angola and Sierra Leone, where they were modeled after the traditional soldier of fortune.<sup>1</sup>

## Main Part

The establishment of the term "hybrid war" managed to have a certain influence on the modern world. The phenomenon of hybrid warfare has been debated since it entered into the security and military lexicon.<sup>2</sup> The international community thought about the new threats emerging with the technological development, the correct utilization and implementation of which would bring the greatest victory to the states with less resource costs. Although the term itself is new, some of the methods included in this term were noticed and used many centuries ago, it just combined and merged with modern methods.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Foley, Ch. Kaunert, „Russian Private Military and Ukraine: Hybrid Surrogate Warfare and Russian State Policy by Other Means”, Central European Journal of International and Security Studies, Volume: 16 Issue: 3, 08 September 2022 y. Pp.172-192. <https://cejiss.org/russian-private-military-and-ukraine-hybrid-surrogate-warfare-and-russian-state-policy-by-other-means> (12.10.2024)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

At the modern stage, the trend of the evolution of war has made a rapid transformation in the development phase of the three wars. During each phase, the appearance of specific technological parameters on the political front can be traced, which directly influenced the production of war and its spatial distribution. At the modern stage, there are already talks on a five-dimensional model of warfare, within the framework of which military operations will be conducted at the following spatial modal level:

- *Ground (conventional and non-conventional war);*
- *Sea (oceanic battles and submarine combat operations);*
- *Air (anti-air and anti-missile combat system in A2/AD format and air-to-air war action format);*
- *Space ("Starwars" theory, strategic shield concept, the strategy of "mass avenger", etc.);*
- *Virtual space (cyberwar, cyberterrorism).*

In the conditions of such a transformation of the model of war, it is clear how the approaches and concepts of military art will develop and, in general, how the political and diplomatic approaches to prevent modern wars should be implemented. The point is that within such large-scale parameters, wars are much more difficult to wage and control, and their consequences can be catastrophic for the international community and the planet as a whole. In fact, the norms and principles of international humanitarian law cannot be applied to the three levels of the above-mentioned spatial modalities of war, and the areas of their application are vast. That is why in the 21st century, the issue of realizing the pacifist ideology became acute, and this topic acquired a topical appearance. In general, it can be said that in the format of the analysis of today's military conflicts and their dynamic development and terms of their theoretical platform, three types of war are distinguished:

1. **The model of Irregular Warfare** - In this regard, the theory of "asymmetric conflict" was relevant, which examines how an actor with relatively scarce resources and power, using the right strategy and tactics, may make irrelevant the advantage of a larger power. The term emerged from the challenges posed by nonstate armed groups, which necessarily engage in subversion and guile to outmaneuver militarily stronger states.<sup>3</sup> Historical examples show that even relatively weak actors win and achieve the desired goal, the main question is how they manage to do this. This theory was actively discussed in the context of the Vietnam conflict. Some researchers believe that in the Vietnam conflict, North Vietnam had more to lose than the US, which determined their ability to fight.

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<sup>3</sup> H, D. Ucko, Th. A. Marks, „Redefining Irregular Warfare: Legitimacy, Coercion, and Power”, Modern War Institute, 2022 y. P.1. <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/redefining-irregular-warfare-legitimacy-coercion-and-power/> (16.10.2024)

After the fighting dragged on, US forces were forced to withdraw from Vietnam due to public pressure. The longer the hostilities lasted and the more casualties the US suffered in the form of its soldiers, the more the population pressured the government to end the war, which the leadership of the country eventually followed:

2. **The model of Hybrid Warfare** - Within this model, the theory of "securitization" (Securization theory), the origin of which is connected with the Copenhagen school, which, in turn, played an important role in the formation of the definition of security. According to the "Copenhagen School" theorists, the meaning of security in modern international relations is formed through the words and actions of the main political actors. This school assumes that all people aspire to security, therefore, a political leader who can promise to provide and protect security is considered a desirable and legitimate leader. The mentioned theory brilliantly explains the relationship between such phenomena as conventional, irregular, criminal, and cyber warfare, especially the diverse environment of threats and challenges arising from them. The original perspective on hybrid threats reflected a violent blend of regular capabilities and irregular tactics. This mode of conflict was defined as an adversary that "simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, catastrophic terrorism, and criminal behavior in the battlespace to obtain desired political objectives."<sup>4</sup>
3. **The model of Conventional Warfare** - In this case, the phenomenon of actor-actor (that is, state-state) conflict applies. Conventional warfare is a form of warfare conducted by using conventional weapons and battlefield tactics between two or more states in open confrontation. The forces on each side are well-defined, and fight using weapons that primarily target the opponent's military. It is normally fought using conventional weapons, and not with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> That is why in this case, according to the "grand strategy theory", the goal of the Grand Strategy is to mobilize and coordinate all the resources of the nation to achieve the political goals of the war. The mentioned resources may include economic, military, diplomatic, and cultural resources of the country. John Collins later expanded the concept of Grand Strategy and defined it as "the use of state power to achieve national security goals under all circumstances".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> F. Hoffman, C. M. Neumeyer, B. Jensen, „The Future of Hybrid Warfare”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 8, 2024 y. P.1. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-hybrid-warfare> (17.10.2024)

<sup>5</sup> A. Marshal, „Wath is conventional warfare?”, Boot camp & military fitness institute. 26 May, 2021 y. P.1. <https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/2021/06/14/what-is-conventional-warfare/> (20.10.2024)

<sup>6</sup> L. Milevski, „The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought”, Oxford University Press, May 2016 y. Pp.110-111.

Therefore, it is interesting to consider how the theory of war developed in the general context and what scales reached the forms and levels of military art and military science.

Using the tools of "hybrid warfare", Russia wants to gain a place on the world stage, regain spheres of influence and become respected by all, however, in the free world today's actions of Russia are compared to the First and Second World Wars, when the use of military force was acceptable between states. Hybrid warfare by Russia is not new. In 2007, it carried out a cyber-attack on Estonia, and in 2008, it directly invaded Georgia. Using energy and economic levers, Putin made Ukraine (during Yanukovich's presidency) refuse the European and Atlantic way of development, and Kyiv agreed to the operation of the Russian military naval base in Sevastopol (Crimea) until 2042. After the escape of the former president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, and especially after the beginning of the "new cold war", in 2014, "little green men" appeared in Crimea<sup>7</sup>. For a long time, Moscow denied that these forces belonged to it. But then the world saw Russian military units in eastern Ukraine in various critical directions. Along the border, intensive exercises were conducted by special forces and intelligence, as well as species and genre units (analogous to the teachings of "Кавказ-2008", which was followed by the intervention in Georgia). It is believed to be part of a well-planned strategy. Sometimes these are obvious steps, and sometimes they are economic wars, cyber-attacks, or a combination of them. Over the years, the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces has studied the capabilities of the North Atlantic Alliance, including the decision-making process, which is based on the consensus of the 31 member states. At the same level, Russia does not shy away from using special forces, economic and energy leverage, cyber attacks, and conventional forces to achieve imperial goals. For such a small state as Georgia, considering the occupied territories, threats come from both the north and the south. In the case of Russia, which occupies 22 percent of the country, the threat of direct and hybrid war remains high. The main force that must confront these threats is the willingness of society to preserve its own state and sovereignty. The goals of Russia are known to the civilized world, the Kremlin is trying to preserve the old Soviet so-called "greatness", and the free world is taking appropriate steps on its behalf. In the case of Georgia, which has not yet become a full member of this free world, the question of how to protect itself and deal with these threats is still relevant."

The composition of the Russian Federation refused the form of a so-called "five-level operational management" (company-battalion-regiment-division-army), which represented the principle of operational-strategic planning, and there was a transition to the so-called

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<sup>7</sup> F.G. Hoffman, „On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats“, War on the rocks, The Texas national security review, July 28, 2014 y. P.1. <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/> (22.10.2024)

"four-level system" (battalion-brigade-operational group-army), which was supposed to be more flexible and adequate to respond to the military threats that were outlined in the new versions of the military doctrine of 2010 and 2015.<sup>8</sup> However, in the conditions of the Syrian military campaign, the hybrid war in Ukraine and the asymmetric war against Georgia, as well as the approach of the "new cold war" at the point of culminating confrontational tension (the second is the confrontational and then direct transition to the "hot phase", at the level of a conventional war), the legitimization obtained under the new conditions (given receiving 77% of the votes by Vladimir Putin and extending his fourth term by 6 years and thus the transition of the authoritarian regime in Russia from "soft" to already "hard" level) led to the change and adjustment of geostrategic ambitions and tasks. President Putin again decided to introduce the striking military doctrinal principles that characterized the military doctrine of the Soviet Union and restored the "five-level system", but with the addition of a more offensive strategic coefficient (meaning the replacement of "regiment" by brigade, i.e. from the operational to the operational-strategic element) and adopted a new Model: battalion-brigade-division-army-army grouping (the latter is strategic or rather gro-strategic and is the most important and most vulnerable for Georgia due to the specifics of geostrategic location).

Now let's start analyzing the operational situation and below we will offer you a higher-level geostrategic analysis based on the views of doctrinal and operational management of Russia. Back in 2016, Russian military media, television, and newspapers announced that in the two operational-strategic commands of Russia, a general army and four motorized rifle divisions were to be created in "West" and a new tank division - in "Central". At the same time, the operational-strategic command "South" another general public army was planned, which the newly created 150th Motorized Rifle Division was to enter. After some time, it became known that the execution of such changes in the Southern Military District was stopped, because financial problems arose and the "Western" strategic direction was considered a priority, which led to the beginning of a serious geostrategic confrontation in the directions of the Baltic Sea and Eastern Europe, considering the deployment of four batteries of "Iskander-M" operational-strategic missile complexes in the units of the Guards Army of the 11th Army in the Kaliningrad District and recruitment and deployment of three divisions of the core of the new general public army in Belarus and

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<sup>8</sup> O. Olikier, „Russia's New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly”, RAND Corporation. Jan 15, 2015 y. P.1. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2015/01/russias-new-military-doctrine-same-as-the-old-doctrine.html> (24.10.2024)



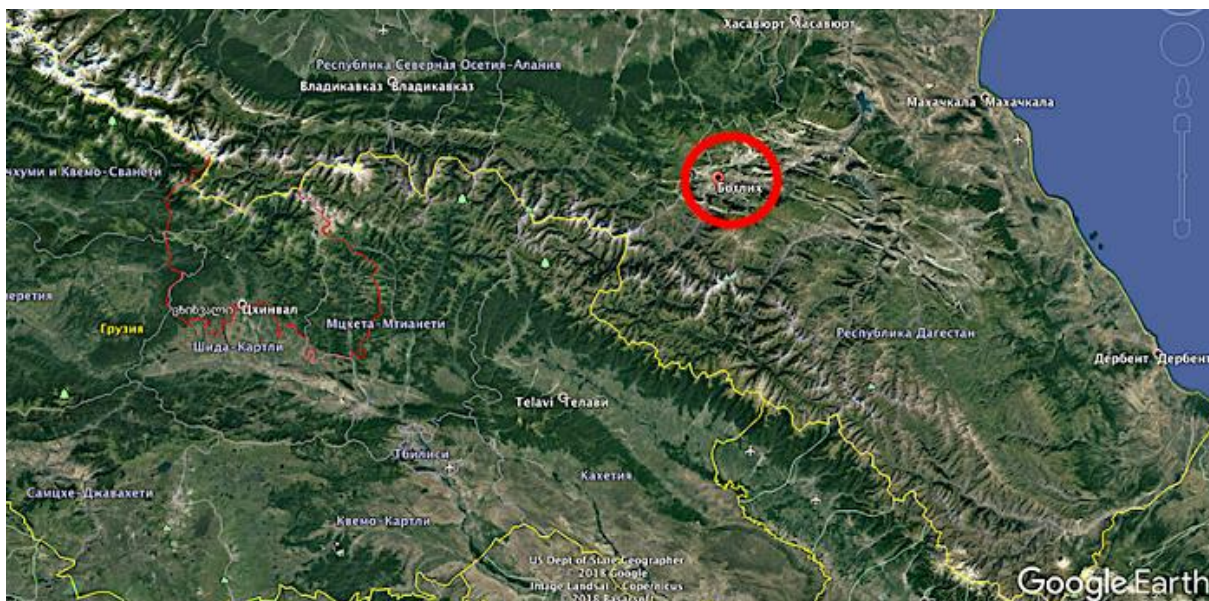
"West" districts<sup>9</sup>. However, on December 3, 2017, the Russian General Staff changed its plans and put forward the idea to create not only one but two divisions in the Southern District (that is, to create two operational-tactical units at the grand strategy level, which can become the basis for creating a new type of operational-strategic unit - joint-military army and then, by uniting several armies, a temporary, strategic unit - an army operational group, which will be able to perform several strategic type of tasks independently at the gro-strategic level and to a certain extent even at the geo-strategic level). Therefore, it became urgent to create two new divisions based on the already stationed two motorized rifle brigades, the 19th and 131st motorized rifle brigades). Assumable, based on the 19th Brigade, the 150th motorized rifle division will be created, which, according to the early plan, will include the abovementioned brigade, as well as three motorized rifle regiments (102nd and two more motorized rifle regiments, 68th tank, self-propelled artillery, 933rd anti-aircraft missile regiment division which has 12 units of Tor-M2 batteries), 5 special purpose battalions (for example, the 174 th deep reconnaissance battalion, etc.). And instead of the 131st, a new division is being created already in the Botlikh district of Dagestan. In fact, the Russian General Staff is trying to create a new gravitational strike center in the direction of Vladikavkaz-Botlich (in the direction of Georgia-Azerbaijan) and based on these two new divisions, to establish a new 8th General Military Army, which is already operational and not staffed. Based on the two armies located within this command - 49th and 58th, and the 8th army, which should be currently already staffed, a new army group can be operationally created, which will also be transferred to the National Defense Center, located in Moscow, and thus the Russian General Staff will create a direct military threat against Georgia from the given center of gravity (such an operational formation will probably be created based on the already existing 58 th Army, which has war experience with Georgia, and the new, already fully formed 8th Army). The probability for this creates the recently announced information that, according to Ramzan Kadyrov, the rehabilitation of the road connecting Chechnya with Georgia in the Arkhot Gorge will begin, and according to the data of the newspaper "Kviris Palitra", two directions have already been added to the crossings on the Caucasus, including the Avar-Kakheti highway, the rehabilitation of which the Kremlin was implemented back in 2014.<sup>10</sup> In fact, from these

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<sup>9</sup> H. Kemp, „Strategic Security in Northern Europe: The Implications of Russian Anti-Access/Ar Anti-Access/Area Denial Str ea Denial Strategies in De ategies in Developing Complex Thr eloping Complex Threat Environments”, Journal of Strategic Security 14, no. 1, 2021 y., : 78-91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.14.1.1871>  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol14/iss1/5> (25.10.2024)

<sup>10</sup> G. Menabde, „Russia Building New Road From Dagestan to Georgia”, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 14 Issue: 100, The Jamestown Foundation, July 27, 2017 y. P.1. <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-building-new-road-from-dagestan-to-georgia/> (27.10.2024)

passages, according to the so-called "funnel principle", if necessary, infiltration and deployment of operational military units in certain directions become possible. That is why we need to strengthen our military-operational means in this direction, and it would be good if such a unit of operational-strategic management as army groups is created, for example, in four directions: South, West, North, and East. It is the northern and eastern groups that will be able to contain the military threat coming from this center of gravity.



Picture.1

Currently, the 58<sup>th</sup> Army consists of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Motorized Rifle Division, two motorized rifle brigades (19 and 136), the 4th Army Base stationed in the occupied territory of Tskhinvali, as well as 6 brigades (12<sup>th</sup> Missile, 291<sup>st</sup> Missile, 67<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft -missile, 100<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance, etc.) and also two regiments (31<sup>st</sup> Mine and 40<sup>th</sup> Chemical protection). At the same time, in operational management, the main intelligence unit of the General Staff - the 10<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> special-purpose brigades of the GRU may be transferred to it, as well as the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> mountain assault brigades. In short, this is how we can imagine the concentration and tasks of Russian military forces in our neighboring north, and naturally, no one is saying that hostilities can resume today or tomorrow, which is less likely, but if the Kremlin needed to do it, it would act according to this scheme, as it did during the August 2008 war.<sup>11</sup> That is why we will talk below about how the modernization and transformation of the Russian military system went.

<sup>11</sup> M. Kofman, „The August War, Ten Years On: A Retrospective on the Russo-Georgian War”, War on the rocks, The Texas national security review, August 17, 2018 y. P.1. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/the-august-war-ten-years-on-a-retrospective-on-the-russo-georgian-war/> (29.10.2024)

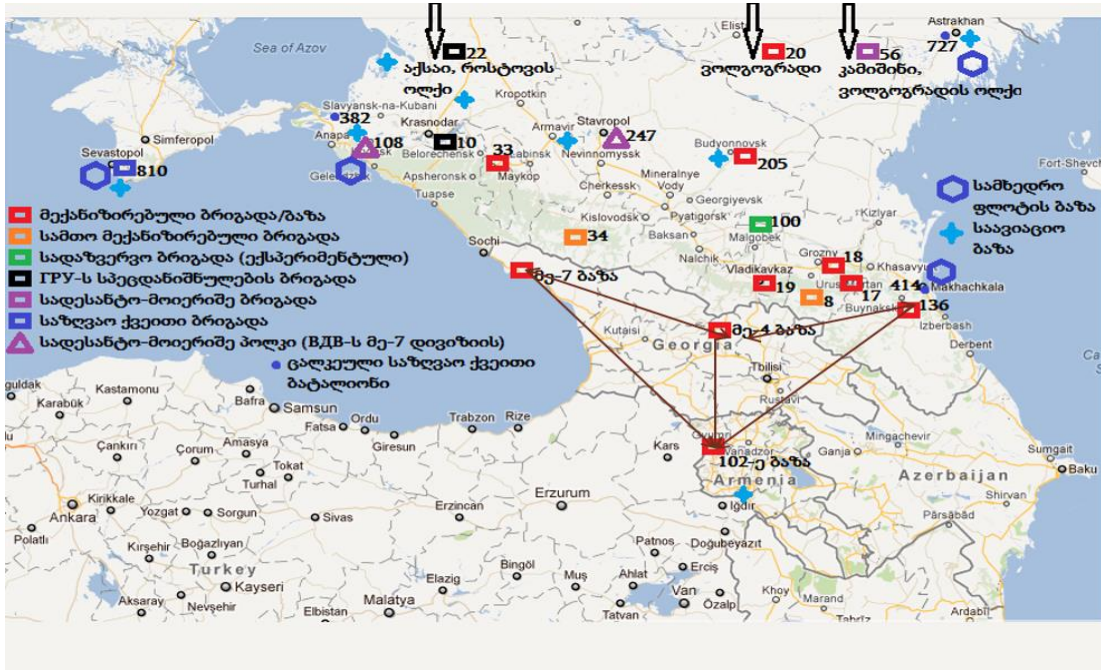
It should also be noted that the essence of the military reforms introduced in the Russian army in 2008 lies in its transformation from the traditional mobilization system to permanent combat readiness forces. The fundamental basis of military reforms is the participation of the "new type" of armed forces of the Russian Federation in limited conflicts, like the 5-day war between Russia and Georgia in 2008.<sup>12</sup> It is to fulfill these goals that the new structure of the Russian army is being organized - the armed forces should be more flexible, mobile, in constant readiness, should be able to react quickly and, first of all, engage in small-scale conflicts both in Russia and in the republics of the former USSR and the adjacent territories. This was the purpose of announcing frequent sudden alarms in the Central and Eastern Military Districts in 2016-2017.

The Southern Military District of the Russian Federation should be specifically mentioned. During the Soviet Union, the Transcaucasian Military District was considered a level of geostrategic balance, and this approach has not changed either now. The Russian Federation has 3 bases in the South Caucasus - the 7<sup>th</sup> base in occupied Abkhazia, the 4<sup>th</sup> base in the occupied Tskhinvali region, and the 102<sup>nd</sup> base in Armenia. In addition to these, the 136<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade/Base is located in Dagestan. Thus, the Russian military strategic-operational "triangular line" is closed in the entire region, which means:

- Localization of a military threat from one direction (that is, the production of one concentrated campaign of military actions in time and space);
- Principle of "concentrated fist" military-strategic distribution;
- Production of a "wedge" penetrating type of military offensive strategy to advance the opponent and the members of its coalition;
- Seizing the strategic initiative and using armed components of all levels (including weapons of mass destruction).

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<sup>12</sup> P. Dickinson, „The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin’s green light”, Atlantic Council, August 7, 2021 y. P.1.  
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/> (30.10.2024)



Picture.2

In the modern military discipline, the term - hybrid war appeared, which means a form of military action in which forces of different composition, means, training level, and character are involved. For this kind of war fast movement, high mobility, local scale, and use of limited forces are essential. According to the view of the military-strategic leadership of the Russian Federation, military conflicts were divided into 3 categories:

- Local - military threat, military conflict;
- Regional - armed conflict, local war;
- Global - regional war, large-scale (coalition) war.

With the special report of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Army General Valery Gerasimov, on the topic: "Means of using the armed forces and the main directions of the forms of development", the ways of combat have completely changed, in particular:

- Initiation of military operations by military groups during peacetime;
- Highly maneuverable non-contact combat operations using various types of military formations;

- Destruction of the military-economic potential of the opposing country, in particular, the destruction of the military and civil infrastructure necessary for the country in the shortest possible time;
- Large-scale use of special military forces and the involvement of military-civilian groups;
- Simultaneous impact on the military units and facilities of the enemy throughout the country;
- Struggle in the information space;
- Use of asymmetric and indirect actions;
- Management of forces and resources in a single information center.

There are also changes in the military doctrine. According to the current doctrine, Russia has the right to use its military forces in the following cases:

- In the event of the start of a large-scale war, both against the Russian Federation and its allied countries;
- In local war and international armed conflicts;
- In internal military conflicts;
- Assistance and peacekeeping operations.

The addition is later if NATO and the USA had not been mentioned before, now they are reported as a potential enemy of the Russian Federation, and in the event of a possible military confrontation, Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons (it is also mentioned concerning the allied countries of the Russian Federation).

Eventually, it is possible to make conclusions

- The current leadership of the Russian Federation prepares the country for the conditions of a state of war and is in constant readiness for a state of war at any time - against a specific opponent (for example, NATO, the USA, the transcendental threat of Islamic jihadism, etc.);
- Transfer of Russian state institutions to the conditions of so-called "permanent state of war" - the creation of the National Defense Center, the establishment of special purpose forces, development of military planning documents during peacetime, etc.;
- The principle of using nuclear weapons in the conduct of conventional war;
- Creation of operational-strategic commands as independent army groups for independent and autonomous operation and development of sufficient "reasonable potential" scheme;

- Delineation of geostrategic areas - in the form of the geostrategic space of the Caucasus (in the form of the North Caucasus Military District and the command of the Russian military group in the South Caucasus, plus the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> bases operating in an autonomous mode), the implementation of the strategic-operational "triangular" line modeling.

"Drawing" of a single communication-defense linear sub-line between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> military bases in the South Caucasus - the creation of an independent army-operational group in "conjunction" with the 102<sup>nd</sup> military base, which will act completely autonomously and independently and using the military potential at their disposal to act against a potential adversary (for example, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Army of Turkey, or the command of Southeast Grouping of NATO, the US European Strategic Command, etc.). "Wagner" groups, which have their training bases and recruitment centers in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (in the vicinity of Ritsi Lake and the former Georgian village of Tamarasheni near Tskhinvali), will be activated here too, and will be used as subdivisions of the "second echelon" intelligence-sabotage groups.

### **Conclusion**

When it comes to current processes of international security intense military capability growth and promotion of new strategic strategies still prevail. Future conflicts are more likely to be violent and will probably have a hybrid nature because major nations prefer to avoid direct combat clashes. The main interests refer to new dimension of military art, named as "hybrid war" doctrine tailored to new and modern realities of the geostrategic environment. The doctrine has been fully exploited by the Russian Federation politico-military leadership since 2015 and even the one has been a stimulus for the further reformation and transformation of the Russian Federation Armed Forces as main aggressive and ruthless military machine.

The composition of the Russian Federation refused the form of a so-called "five-level operational management" (company - battalion - regiment - division - army), which represented the principle of operational-strategic planning, and there was a transition to the so-called "four-level system" (battalion-brigade-operational group-army), which was supposed to be more flexible and adequate to respond to the military threats that were outlined in the new versions of the military doctrine of 2010 and 2015. However, in the conditions of the Syrian military campaign, the hybrid war in Ukraine and the asymmetric war against Georgia, as well as the approach of the "new cold war" at the point of culminating confrontational tension (the second is the confrontational and then direct transition to the "hot phase", at the level of a conventional war), the legitimization obtained

under the new conditions led to the change and adjustment of geostrategic ambitions and tasks. President Putin again decided to introduce the striking military doctrinal principles that characterized the military doctrine of the Soviet Union and restored the "five-level system", but with the addition of a more offensive strategic coefficient (meaning the replacement of "regiment" by brigade, i.e. from the operational to the operational-strategic element) and adopted a new Model: battalion-brigade-division-army-army grouping (the latter is strategic or rather gro-strategic and is the most important and most vulnerable for Georgia due to the specifics of geostrategic location).

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# The Role of International Organizations in Security

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## **Abstract:**

This article explores the historical evolution and roles of three major international organizations—the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU)—in the pursuit of global security and cooperation. Established in the aftermath of World War II, these organizations were designed to prevent conflict, foster international cooperation, and promote peace and stability in a rapidly changing world order.

The article examines several key milestones in the evolution of these organizations, highlighting significant peacekeeping missions such as the UN's interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, NATO's operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and the EU's rule-of-law missions in Kosovo and other conflict zones. It also discusses the challenges faced by these organizations, including resource constraints, political interference, and the complexity of local dynamics in post-conflict settings. Despite notable successes in stabilizing conflict regions and rebuilding governance structures, the article underscores the difficulties in achieving long-term peace, as seen in the ethnic fragmentation in Bosnia, political resistance in Kosovo, and persistent instability in Afghanistan.

Through a comparative analysis of the UN, NATO, and EU, the article highlights the evolving roles these organizations play in peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction. It underscores the importance of their capacity to adapt to emerging security threats such as terrorism, cyber warfare, and regional instability. While the challenges remain significant, the article concludes that the continued relevance and effectiveness of these organizations are essential for maintaining global security and fostering international cooperation in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Their future success will depend on their ability to innovate, manage political differences, and address the dynamic nature of contemporary global threats.

**Keywords:** International Organizations, Global Security, EU, NATO, UN, Peacekeeping Mission, International Peace, Stability

**Hypothesis** - "The United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and European Union (EU) have continuously adapted their roles and strategies in response to evolving global security challenges, demonstrating their capacity for flexibility and innovation in maintaining international peace and stability, despite facing significant political, resource, and operational challenges."

**Research Question** - "How have the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and European Union (EU) evolved in their roles and strategies to address global security challenges from the post-World War II era to the present"

**Methodology** - This study will employ a qualitative research design with a focus on historical analysis and comparative case study approaches. By examining key historical milestones, peacekeeping missions, and policy shifts, the research will analyze how each organization has adapted to changing geopolitical dynamics and emerging security threats. A comparative approach will be utilized to explore the distinct roles and strategies of the UN, NATO, and the EU, highlighting both their successes and challenges in different contexts

The data collection will involve secondary sources: Academic books and journal articles, Research papers published by think tanks, universities, and policy institutes focused on international security, peacebuilding, and geopolitical dynamics. News articles and media reports documenting major events, such as NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, the EU's role in Kosovo, or UN peacekeeping operations in the Balkans.

**Analytical Framework** - Neorealism and Institutionalism: These theories will be used to understand how international organizations adapt to the shifting distribution of power and respond to changing security threats in the international system.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Theories: The study will integrate frameworks from peace and conflict studies to assess the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and the broader strategies employed by these organizations.

## **Introduction**

International organizations are indispensable pillars in the architecture of global security. These entities, often created through multilateral treaties and cooperation, embody the collective will of nations to address common threats and promote stability across borders. The evolution of international organizations reflects an ongoing journey to establish mechanisms for conflict prevention, crisis management, and peacebuilding. Their roles vary widely, from diplomatic mediation and imposing sanctions to deploying peacekeeping forces and supporting post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Entities like the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union

(EU) and other regional and international organizations are prime examples of how international collaboration can enhance security. The UN, with its numerous specialized agencies and peacekeeping missions, exemplifies the broad scope of activities these organizations undertake to mitigate conflicts and build lasting peace. NATO, initially formed as a military alliance, has adapted to address contemporary security challenges such as terrorism and cyber threats, demonstrating the dynamic nature of these organizations. Their activities span diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction, reflecting their adaptability and comprehensive approach to security.

The role of international organizations in security extends beyond immediate conflict zones. They are crucial in addressing transnational issues like human trafficking, drug smuggling, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These organizations provide platforms for dialogue, facilitate the implementation of international laws, and ensure compliance through monitoring and verification mechanisms.

This article seeks to unravel the complex and multifaceted contributions of international organizations to global security. By examining their historical evolution, core functions, successes, and challenges, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of their indispensable role in shaping a safer world. Through this lens, we appreciate how international organizations not only respond to crises but also proactively work to create conditions for sustainable peace and security.

One of the fundamental purposes of international organizations is conflict prevention. They work to identify potential flashpoints and engage in preventive diplomacy to avert crises before they escalate. Furthermore, they are involved in crisis management, providing mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution and, when necessary, deploying peacekeeping forces to stabilize volatile regions.

The peacebuilding efforts of these organizations are equally significant. Beyond immediate conflict resolution, they focus on creating conditions for lasting peace by supporting governance reforms, economic development, and reconciliation processes. This multi-faceted approach underscores the crucial role that international organizations play in ensuring global security.

## **Main Part**

### **Historical Evolution of the Three Major International Organizations**

The origins and development of major international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU) represent significant milestones in the pursuit of global security and cooperation.

These entities have evolved in response to the shifting geopolitical landscape, adapting their roles and strategies to address emerging challenges.

The United Nations, established in 1945 after World War II, aimed to prevent future conflicts and promote international cooperation. The Charter of the United Nations, signed on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco, laid the foundation for this global organization. The UN's primary objectives include maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, and fostering social and economic development. Significant milestones in the UN's evolution include the establishment of peacekeeping operations in 1948 with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East. Over the decades, the UN has conducted numerous peacekeeping missions worldwide, adapting its strategies to address complex conflicts. The creation of specialized agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), further expanded the UN's role in global security and development.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded on April 4, 1949, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (also known as the Washington Treaty). Its primary purpose was to provide collective defense against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The alliance originally consisted of twelve member countries but has since expanded to include 32 members, reflecting the evolving security needs of the Euro-Atlantic region. Key milestones in NATO's history include the adoption of its first Strategic Concept in 1949, which outlined the alliance's defense strategy. The end of the Cold War marked a significant turning point, leading to NATO's enlargement and the inclusion of former Eastern Bloc countries. In the post-9/11 era, NATO has adapted to address new security challenges, such as terrorism and cyber threats, as evidenced by its involvement in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

The European Union's origins can be traced back to the aftermath of World War II, with the aim of fostering economic cooperation and preventing future conflicts in Europe. The signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 established the European Economic Community (EEC), which laid the groundwork for the EU. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, formally established the EU, expanding its scope to include political, social, and security cooperation. Significant milestones in the EU's evolution include the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), later renamed the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). These initiatives have enabled the EU to take on a more active role in conflict prevention, crisis management, and peacekeeping. The EU's enlargement, incorporating countries from Eastern Europe, has further strengthened its capacity to promote regional stability. These international organizations have continuously adapted their roles and

strategies to address the changing security landscape. Their ability to evolve and respond to new challenges underscores their importance in maintaining global security and fostering international cooperation.

### **Peacekeeping Missions**

The United Nations (UN) has been involved in several peacekeeping operations in conflict zones, including Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. These missions were designed to help stabilize the region, assist with post-conflict rebuilding, and protect human rights.

The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was established in 1992 in response to the Bosnian War (1992-1995). It was the first large-scale peacekeeping mission in Europe after the end of the Cold War. The mission's primary objectives were to provide humanitarian aid, protect civilian populations, and monitor the ceasefires between the warring factions. UNPROFOR was tasked with enforcing "safe areas" designated by the UN, such as Srebrenica and Sarajevo. The mission faced significant challenges, including limited mandate and insufficient resources, which were especially evident during the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, where more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb forces.

Following the signing of the Dayton Agreement in December 1995, which ended the Bosnian War, UNPROFOR was replaced by the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) for peace enforcement, followed by the Stabilization Force (SFOR).<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established in 1999 after the Kosovo War, which saw conflict between ethnic Albanians and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia). The mission was mandated by the UN Security Council resolution 1244 to oversee the administration of Kosovo, which was placed under UN interim administration. UNMIK was tasked with maintaining law and order, providing humanitarian assistance, supporting the development of local governance institutions, and ensuring the return of refugees. Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority sought independence from Serbia, which was achieved in 2008 when Kosovo declared independence, although Serbia and some other countries have not recognized it.

The peacekeeping force in Kosovo, known as KFOR (Kosovo Force), was led by NATO and played a crucial role in maintaining security during the transition period. UNMIK's role evolved as Kosovo moved toward self-governance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peacekeeping*. New York: United Nations, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>International Court of Justice. "Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Kosovo." *ICJ Reports* 2010.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established in 2002 in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban regime. UNAMA's mandate was to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, promote human rights, coordinate humanitarian aid, and facilitate the establishment of a stable government. Initially, UNAMA worked to support the Afghan government and provide a framework for elections. The UN also assisted in the creation of the Afghan constitution and supported the development of the Afghan National Police and Army.

NATO's engagement in Afghanistan began in 2001 in response to the 9/11 attacks and the Taliban regime's sheltering of al-Qaeda. NATO's mission evolved from a counterterrorism operation under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to a comprehensive mission aimed at stabilizing the country. ISAF,<sup>3</sup> which operated from 2003 to 2014, included over 50 countries and had a mandate to provide security and support the Afghan government in maintaining peace and security across the country.

ISAF's mission was gradually expanded to include training and mentoring the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to eventually take over security responsibilities. After ISAF's withdrawal in 2014, NATO shifted its mission to Resolute Support (RSM), a non-combat mission focused on advising and assisting the Afghan government and security forces. The Doha Agreement, formally known as the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, was signed on February 29, 2020, between the United States and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. The agreement marked a significant step in the peace process for Afghanistan, aiming to end the United States' longest-running war and bring stability to Afghanistan. The U.S. committed to reducing its troop presence to 8,600 within 135 days of the agreement's signing and to a complete withdrawal of all U.S. forces and coalition troops within about 14 months.

The European Union (EU) has also played a significant role in promoting regional stability and security through various initiatives and missions. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) includes civilian and military operations aimed at conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and strengthening international security. One example is the EU's involvement in the Balkans, particularly the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), launched in 2008 to assist local institutions in establishing sustainable and accountable rule of law standards.

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<sup>3</sup> "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)," NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_69366.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm)

## Successes and Challenges

The UN was involved in the post-war peacebuilding process, but its success was often limited by political fragmentation and the complexity of the Dayton Agreement. NATO's peacekeeping mission, known as the Implementation Force (IFOR), and later the Stabilization Force (SFOR), helped maintain peace and security but faced difficulties in promoting long-term stability and political cohesion due to the fragile nature of the agreement. The European Union's engagement was marked by its efforts to rebuild the country's economy and institutions, with a focus on promoting democratic reforms, human rights, and integration into European structures. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of political fragmentation along ethnic lines and the slow pace of EU integration. The international community was successful in stopping the violence and preventing the return of widespread conflict. However, Bosnia's political instability, with its complex power-sharing arrangements between the country's three main ethnic groups, has hindered the development of a fully functional state.

NATO's air campaign in Kosovo in 1999 led to the withdrawal of Serbian forces, and UNMIK was tasked with providing civilian administration and maintaining peace and order. UNMIK's mandate was complicated by political tensions, the rise of ethnic nationalism, and the complex status of Kosovo. The EU took a more active role in Kosovo after its declaration of independence, particularly in terms of promoting legal reforms and governance through the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). While EULEX had some success in supporting the judicial system, its impact was often limited by political resistance and local corruption. The intervention led to a decrease in ethnic violence, and Kosovo's independence has been recognized by many countries, though Serbia and its allies continue to oppose it. However, political instability, corruption, and the lack of a fully functional state structure have impeded Kosovo's long-term development. EU integration remains a key goal, but progress has been slow.

The situation in Afghanistan has been marked by the intervention of a range of international organizations, notably the United Nations, NATO, and the U.S.-led coalition forces. The international community's involvement began in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the U.S. and NATO forces ousted the Taliban regime. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by NATO, was tasked with stabilizing Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. Its mission was to provide security and assist with reconstruction. However, NATO faced significant challenges in terms of security, corruption, and the resilience of the Taliban insurgency. The UN played a key role in humanitarian assistance, development, and governance, primarily through the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The UN also facilitated elections and



supported human rights initiatives. Despite these efforts, Afghanistan continued to face ongoing political and security challenges, with widespread corruption undermining international assistance. Initially, international organizations were successful in providing humanitarian aid, rebuilding infrastructure, and supporting education and health services.

Despite their successes, international organizations face several significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness and ability to achieve their objectives fully. **Resource Constraints:** One of the primary challenges is the limitation of resources. Peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid operations often suffer from inadequate funding and insufficient personnel.

Political dynamics among member states can also pose significant challenges. Decisions within organizations like the United Nations Security Council can be influenced by the political interests of powerful member states, leading to deadlock or biased outcomes. For example, the use of veto power by permanent members of the Security Council has often stalled crucial resolutions, hindering effective international action. Implementing sanctions and enforcement mechanisms can also be problematic.

These successes and challenges highlight the complex landscape in which international organizations operate. Their ability to navigate these difficulties while continuing to promote global peace and security underscores their indispensable role in the international community.

### **Conclusion**

International organizations have undeniably carved out an essential role in shaping global security. Their multifaceted contributions encompass diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping, sanctions enforcement, and the holistic peacebuilding needed to create lasting stability. From the early days of the United Nations (UN) to the evolving mandates of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), these entities have continually adapted to meet the changing demands of international security. Through historical evolution, the UN has demonstrated its capacity for comprehensive peacekeeping and conflict resolution, reflecting a commitment to global cooperation established in its Charter. NATO, originating as a defensive alliance, has evolved to address contemporary challenges like terrorism and cyber threats. The EU has grown from an economic community into a political and security actor, reinforcing regional stability through initiatives like the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Their core functions—diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping missions, and sanctions enforcement—underline their capacity to not only respond to immediate crises but also to build frameworks for enduring peace. Case studies of UN missions in Balkans, NATO's

involvement in Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, and the EU's operations in Kosovo and the Mediterranean illustrate the practical impact of their work.

Despite notable successes, international organizations face challenges such as resource constraints, political interference, operational difficulties, and evolving threats. These obstacles highlight the complexity of their work and the continuous need for adaptation and innovation. Nevertheless, their achievements in conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, and comprehensive peacebuilding underscore their indispensable role.

In summary, the influence of international organizations in maintaining global security cannot be overstated. They are instrumental in fostering cooperation, mitigating conflicts, and promoting peace and stability worldwide. As the global landscape continues to evolve, the capacity of these organizations to adapt and respond will remain critical in shaping a safer, more secure world. Their role is not only essential but foundational to the pursuit of international peace and stability.

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# **NATO Cyber Security Policy in the Black Sea Region**

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## **Abstract**

Cyber security has become critical in NATO's strategic framework, especially in a geopolitically sensitive region like the Black Sea. NATO's interest in cyber security in the Black Sea region stems from its strategic importance as a crossroads between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, compounded by historical tensions and contemporary geopolitical dynamics.

NATO's approach to cyber security in the Black Sea region involves increasing resilience against cyber-attacks through cooperative defense mechanisms and strengthening the cyber capabilities of member and partner countries. The NATO Cyber Defense Pledge underscores the Alliance's commitment to collective cyber defense, encouraging member states to improve their cyber defenses and enhance information sharing.

NATO participates in developing cyber defense capabilities with the Black Sea countries through various initiatives, including the NATO-Georgia Essential Package and the NATO-Ukraine Annual National Programs. These efforts aim to build local cyber defense capabilities, improve incident response mechanisms, and increase resilience against cyber threats emerging within and outside the region.

NATO's cyber security efforts in the Black Sea region face significant challenges. The hybrid nature of modern conflicts, where cyber operations are intertwined with conventional military tactics and political maneuvers, complicates the security landscape. Moreover, the involvement of state and non-state actors with different agendas further exacerbates these challenges.

Looking to the future, NATO's cyber security strategy in the Black Sea region should continue to evolve. This evolution should include greater integration of cyber defense into collective defense planning, enhanced cooperation with partner states and organizations, and adaptation to evolving technologies and threat vectors. Moreover, fostering a culture of cyber resilience among civilians and critical infrastructure operators is critical to mitigating cyber-attacks' impact.

In conclusion, NATO's cyber security policy in the Black Sea region is crucial to the Alliance's broader strategic objectives. By addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by cyber threats, NATO aims to enhance regional stability, enhance joint security measures, and protect the integrity of member and partner states' cyberinfrastructure in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics.

**Keywords:** NATO, cyber security, Black Sea region, geopolitical dynamics, resilience, collective defense

### **Introduction**

In recent years, cyber security has become a critical area in international relations, especially in regions of strategic importance such as the Black Sea. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has been at the forefront of developing policies and strategies to address cyber security challenges in the region. This paper examines NATO's approach to cyber security in the Black Sea region, reviewing threats, responses and implications for regional security.

NATO's involvement in cyber security stems from its mission to ensure the safety and security of its member states. Originally formed as a collective defense alliance during the Cold War, NATO has adapted to new security threats in the digital age. Cyber threats, including hacking, data breaches and cyber espionage, are becoming increasingly sophisticated and pervasive. The Black Sea region, with its geopolitical importance and diverse range of actors, presents unique challenges and opportunities for NATO's cyber security efforts.

### **Main Part**

The Black Sea region is a complex geopolitical landscape that includes countries with diverse political systems, economic interests, and historical backgrounds. NATO's involvement in the region is driven by both the security concerns of its member states and the dynamics of cooperation and competition with other regional powers, especially Russia. The Black Sea's strategic importance lies in its role as a transit route for energy resources, its proximity to conflict zones such as Ukraine, and its potential as a gateway to the Middle East and Central Asia.

Broadly speaking, the Black Sea region is a strategically important area located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, with diverse geopolitical, economic and cultural characteristics.

The Black Sea is bordered by six countries: Ukraine to the north and northeast, Russia to the northeast, Georgia to the east, Turkey to the south, Bulgaria to the west, and Romania to the northwest. It joins the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus Strait and the Sea of Marmara, which are controlled by Turkey. The region also includes the Sea of Azov, which is connected to the Black Sea through the Kerch Strait.<sup>1</sup>

The region features diverse landscapes, ranging from coastal plains to mountainous areas, with the Caucasus Mountains in the southeast and the Carpathian Mountains in the northwest.

Historically, the Black Sea region has been at the crossroads of civilizations, with the influence of the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Russian empires shaping its cultural and political landscape.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova gained independence, while Russia retained influence over parts of the region, notably Crimea and the separatist regions of Abkhazia. South Ossetia.

The Black Sea region is crucial for trade and transport and serves as a connecting link between Europe and Asia. The main ports are Odessa (Ukraine), Constanta (Romania), Varna (Bulgaria) and Novorossiysk (Russia).

The region is rich in energy resources, including offshore oil and natural gas reserves. Countries such as Russia and Ukraine are important players in the European energy market, and pipelines such as Nord Stream and South Stream affect regional geopolitics.

The Black Sea hosts several military installations, including Russian naval bases in Crimea and the presence of NATO allies in Romania and Bulgaria. These installations contribute to regional security dynamics and are a focus of geopolitical tensions.

The region has seen conflicts, such as the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, further complicating geopolitical relations.

The Black Sea faces environmental challenges, including pollution from industrial activities, agricultural runoff and overfishing. Efforts are underway to resolve these issues through regional cooperation and environmental agreements.

The region is ethnically diverse, with a mixture of Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Georgian and other ethnic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> გვენეტაძე, „შავი ზღვის რეგიონის უსაფრთხოება და ნატო“, საინფორმაციო ცენტრი ნატოსა და ევროკავშირის შესახებ, 1.03.2024 P.1 <https://infocenter.gov.ge/blog/shavi-zghvis-regionis-usaftrkhoeba-da-nato/>

The rich cultural heritage sites include ancient Greek colonies, Byzantine churches, Ottoman architecture and Soviet-era monuments, reflecting the diverse historical influences of the region.

The countries of the Black Sea region have different relations with international organizations such as the European Union (EU) and NATO. Some, such as Romania and Bulgaria, are NATO members, while others maintain partnerships or aspire to EU integration.<sup>2</sup>

Russia plays an important role in the region's geopolitics, often asserting its influence through economic ties, military presence, and cultural diplomacy.

Projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and EU-funded infrastructure improvements aim to boost connectivity and economic development in the region.

Ongoing conflicts and geopolitical tensions pose challenges to stability and regional cooperation, requiring diplomatic efforts and international mediation.

In conclusion, the Black Sea region is a complex geopolitical area with strategic importance due to its geographical location, economic resources and historical importance. To understand its dynamics, it is necessary to take into account the historical legacy, current conflicts, economic interests and environmental challenges that shape its current and future trajectory.

### **Cyber threats in the Black Sea region**

Cyber threats in the Black Sea region are multifaceted and include state-sponsored cyber-attacks, cybercrime and hybrid warfare tactics. Russia, in particular, has been involved in various cyber incidents targeting NATO member states and partner countries in the region. These threats threaten critical infrastructure, military capabilities and political stability, making cyber security a top priority in NATO's defense strategy<sup>3</sup>.

Cyber threats in the Black Sea region are increasingly becoming a concern due to geopolitical tensions and the strategic importance of the area. There are several key aspects to consider. These are:

- **Geopolitical tensions:** The Black Sea region is characterized by complex geopolitical dynamics involving Russia, NATO countries (such as Turkey and Romania) and other

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<sup>2</sup> ყიფიანი, „შავი ზღვის დიდი რეგიონი თანამედროვე კონტექსტში: გულახდილი საუბარი“, *ინტერპრესნიუსი*, 22.07.2023. P.1 <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/764666-shavi-zgvis-didi-regioni-tanamedrove-kontekstshi-gulaxdili-saubari/>

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, „A security strategy for the Black Sea“, *Atlantic Council*, 15.12.2023 P.1 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/a-security-strategy-for-the-black-sea/>

neighboring states (Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria). These tensions create fertile ground for cyber operations aimed at espionage, disruption or influencing operations.

- **State-sponsored activities:** State-sponsored cyber operations are a significant threat in the region. In particular, Russia is accused of cyber-attacks on neighboring countries and NATO members. These attacks can range from intelligence gathering to critical infrastructure cyber-attack operations.
- **Vulnerability of critical infrastructure:** The Black Sea region hosts critical infrastructure such as energy pipelines, ports and military installations. These are attractive targets for cyberattacks aimed at disrupting operations or gathering intelligence.
- **Espionage and influence operations:** Cyber espionage is a common tactic used to gather sensitive political, military, or economic information. Influence operations, including disinformation campaigns, are also common in the region, using social media and other online platforms to shape public opinion or destabilize governments.
- **Cyber Defense and Resilience:** Countries in the Black Sea region differ in their cyber security capabilities. NATO allies are strengthening cyber defenses and conducting joint exercises to improve resilience against cyber threats. However, smaller states may be more vulnerable and less equipped to defend against sophisticated cyber-attacks.
- **International response and cooperation:** Efforts to address cyber threats in the Black Sea region include international cooperation through organizations such as NATO, which provides assistance in cyber security and promotes information sharing among member states.

Understanding and mitigating cyber threats in the Black Sea region requires a multifaceted approach that includes cybersecurity measures, international cooperation, and diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions and promote stability.

### **NATO's cyber defense capabilities**

NATO's approach to cyber security in the Black Sea region is characterized by a combination of deterrence, defense and resilience measures. The Alliance has established a Cyber Defense Policy and a Cyber Defense Condition that emphasize the importance of collective defense and cooperation among member states. The NATO Cyber Defense Center, located in Tallinn, Estonia, plays a critical role in developing cyber defense capabilities and facilitating information sharing among member states<sup>4</sup>.

NATO's cyber defense capabilities are a critical component of its overall security strategy, which aims to protect member states from cyber threats that could compromise

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<sup>4</sup> Healey, Jordan, „NATO's Cyber Capabilities: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow”, *Atlantic Council*, 09.2014 P.1-9 [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NATOs\\_Cyber\\_Capabilities.pdf](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NATOs_Cyber_Capabilities.pdf)



military readiness, national infrastructure and societal stability. NATO's cyber defense capabilities have key aspects:

- **Cyber Defense Policy and Framework:** NATO's approach to cyber defense is guided by its Cyber Defense Policy, which emphasizes the importance of collective defense, resilience and deterrence in the cyber domain. The policy underscores NATO's commitment to protecting its networks and critical infrastructure from cyber attacks. NATO also conducts cyber operations to protect its networks, systems and missions from cyber threats. These operations may include defensive measures, incident response and cooperation with Member States and partners to mitigate cyber incidents.
- **Cyber Incident Response and Coordination:** NATO has Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRTs), which are specialized teams that can quickly deploy to member states in the event of major cyber incidents. These teams provide technical expertise and support to mitigate the impact of cyber-attacks. NATO also facilitates information sharing and coordination among member nations through the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA) and the NATO Cyber Incident Response Capability (NCIRC). This enables the timely exchange of threat intelligence and best practices to strengthen collective defense.<sup>5</sup>
- **Cyber exercises and training:** NATO conducts regular cyber exercises, such as Cyber Coalition and Locked Shields, to test and improve the readiness and resilience of its cyber defenses. These exercises simulate realistic cyber-attack scenarios to assess response capabilities and identify areas for improvement. NATO provides training programs and capacity building initiatives to improve cyber defense skills among member nations and partners. This includes training in cyber threat analysis, incident response and the use of advanced cyber defense technologies.
- **Partnerships and cooperation:** NATO collaborates with the private sector and academia to leverage technological expertise and innovative solutions in cyber defense. This partnership strengthens NATO's ability to address cyber threats and vulnerabilities. NATO pursues international cooperation in cyber defense in partnership with other international organizations such as the European Union, the OSCE and the United Nations.
- **Emerging technologies and future challenges:** NATO monitors and adapts to the development of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum

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<sup>5</sup> Anastasov,, "The Black Sea region: a critical intersection", *NATO REVIEW*, 25.05.2018 P.1  
<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/05/25/the-black-sea-region-a-critical-intersection/index.html>

computing and the Internet of Things (IoT), which present both opportunities and challenges for cyber defence. NATO continues to strengthen cyber resilience and adaptability in response to evolving cyber threats, including state-sponsored cyber attacks, ransomware and hybrid warfare tactics that may include cyber elements<sup>6</sup>.

Ultimately, it can be said that NATO's cyber defense capabilities are integral to its mission of ensuring the security and defense of its member states. Through policy frameworks, incident response mechanisms, cyber exercises and international partnerships, NATO is strengthening its collective defense posture in the face of increasingly sophisticated cyber threats.

In addition to domestic efforts, NATO engages in cooperative security initiatives with partner countries in the Black Sea region. These initiatives aim to strengthen cyber security capabilities, increase situational awareness and build trust between participating states. Partnership programs such as the NATO-Ukraine Joint Task Force on Cyber Defense and the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Assessment Center contribute to the region's stability and resilience against cyber threats.

NATO's Cooperative Security Initiatives play a critical role in fostering partnerships, enhancing stability, and promoting collective defense among member states and partner nations. These initiatives aim to strengthen NATO's capabilities to address various security challenges, including terrorism, cyber threats and regional instability. Among the main aspects of NATO's cooperative security initiatives, it should be noted:

- **Partnership for Peace (PfP):** Established in 1994, PfP aims to build trust and cooperation between NATO and non-member countries of Europe and the former Soviet Union. PfP partners engage in political dialogue, military cooperation and joint exercises with NATO member states. Includes countries such as Sweden, Finland, Ukraine, Georgia and others that contribute to NATO-led operations and participate in interoperability programs<sup>7</sup>.
- **Mediterranean Dialogue (MD):** Established in 1994, the MD promotes dialogue and cooperation between NATO and the countries of the Mediterranean region. Focuses on political consultation, military-to-military cooperation and capacity building initiatives. It includes countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, enhancing regional security and stability.
- **The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI):** which was established in 2004 and aims to strengthen security cooperation between NATO and the GCC countries in the wider

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<sup>6</sup> Healey, Jordan,, NATO's Cyber Capabilities: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow", *Atlantic Council*, 09.2014 P.1-9  
[https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NATOs\\_Cyber\\_Capabilities.pdf](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NATOs_Cyber_Capabilities.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> NATO, "Partnership for Peace programme", *NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION*. 28.06.2024. P.1  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50349.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm)

Middle East region. It focuses on political dialogue, military interoperability, defense reform and joint exercises. It includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, enhancing mutual understanding and regional security cooperation<sup>8</sup>.

- **Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE):** Established in 2008 in Tallinn, Estonia, CCDCOE serves as a center of expertise and cooperation among NATO member and partner nations in cyber defense. Conducts research, exercises, and training on cyber defense, promotes information sharing, and develops cyber defense capabilities. It includes NATO member states and partner countries, promoting joint efforts against cyber threats and increasing resilience.
- **Benefits and Objectives:** Through these initiatives with partner nations, NATO strengthens regional and global security by promoting stability, cooperation and collective defense capabilities. These initiatives promote political dialogue and understanding between NATO and partner countries, contributing to conflict prevention and crisis management. Through joint exercises, training programs and defense cooperation activities, NATO enhances interoperability with partner nations, enabling effective joint operations and crisis response.

NATO's cooperative security initiatives are integral to its strategy of building partnerships, strengthening security and promoting stability beyond the borders of its member states. These initiatives promote dialogue, cooperation and capacity-building efforts to address various security challenges and strengthen collective defense in a complex and interconnected global security environment.

Despite NATO's efforts, cyber security in the Black Sea region faces many challenges, including legal and regulatory differences between member states, resource constraints, and the rapid evolution of cyber threats. In addition, geopolitical tensions and competing interests among regional actors complicate efforts to achieve a unified approach to cybersecurity.

Looking ahead, NATO will likely continue to adapt its cyber security policies and capabilities to address emerging threats and protect the security of member states and partners in the Black Sea region. Enhancing cooperation with non-NATO countries, increasing investment in cyber defense technologies, and a greater emphasis on resilience and deterrence are expected to be high on NATO's cyber security agenda in the coming years.

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<sup>8</sup> Yenigün, Cüneyt. *Gulf Security, NATO and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*, Istanbul, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, 09.2015. P.33-48  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313846140\\_Gulf\\_Security\\_NATO\\_and\\_the\\_Istanbul\\_Cooperation\\_Initiative](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313846140_Gulf_Security_NATO_and_the_Istanbul_Cooperation_Initiative)

### Conclusion:

NATO's cyber security policy in the Black Sea region reflects its commitment to collective defense, cooperation and resilience in the face of growing cyber threats. By leveraging its expertise, partnerships and technological capabilities, NATO aims to strengthen security and stability in one of the world's most strategically important regions. As cyber security continues to evolve as a critical area of international security, NATO's role in the Black Sea region will remain critical in shaping the future of cyber security policy and practice.

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# NATO enlargement policy and the security of the Black Sea region

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## **Abstract**

In the modern world, the security of the Black Sea region is a sphere of interest for NATO, which is confirmed by the statements of the North Atlantic Alliance and several effective steps it has taken. NATO's interests are evidenced by the attention shown at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, and the Bucharest Parliamentary Assembly in 2017, as well as several exercises conducted by NATO in the Black Sea basin, which contribute to the security of the region. , and the Alliance continues to implement many projects in this direction. Also important are the effective steps taken by the United States of America, the most powerful NATO country, to support Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the invasion of Georgia in 2008, and the military invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, it can be said that the Black Sea region is in the sphere of interest of global actors whose views diverge sharply, from each other. Russia opposes the policy of NATO expansion in the Black Sea region and perceives this fact as a national threat. It is also important that one of the strong NATO member states, Turkey, partially cooperates with Russia, which creates certain problems for NATO interests in the said region, these interests are: ensuring security, stability, and others.

**Keywords:** NATO, Black Sea Security, geopolitics, Programs, Strategy

## **Introduction**

In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union and new geopolitics presented the world with new challenges. This fact further increased interest in the Black Sea region. The warming of relations between the opposing sides led to a change in political and economic factors in the area, an example of which is the establishment of economic cooperation in the Black Sea.

The Black Sea region is an object of interest for NATO due to its unique location, and this is not surprising, because the Black Sea region is a corridor connecting two worlds and can play an important role in the fight against terrorism. The conflict between the actors within the area and their interests is also important and noteworthy, in this regard the Russian Federation stands out, which wants to pursue its interests in the region, contrary to the interests of NATO. Speaking about the strong states of the area, it is necessary to mention Turkey, so it is not surprising that Russian-Turkish relations, even though Turkey is a NATO member state, relations between these two countries in the context of regional security are exciting.

The transport function of the Black Sea region is essential in the context of modern globalization. It was already noted, that the region has a special geopolitical position; therefore, it has been, is, and will be an important subject of conflicts between players in the international arena.

### **Historical aspects of security in the Black Sea region**

The analysis of the role of security in the Black Sea region in NATO and the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole has been carried out for a long time, therefore, to achieve the set goals, several measures are taken that are aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the Black Sea region. The interests of Russia, one of the powerful states of the Black Sea region, do not coincide and are opposite to the interests of the Alliance in the said region. NATO faces the greatest resistance in the person of the Russian Federation, which seeks to strengthen peace and security in the region. In general, Russia's policy, based on its interests, is an aggressive policy towards the states of the Black Sea region, a striking example of which is the events that took place in Ukraine in February 2022, the illegal invasion of the military forces of the Russian Federation into the territory of Ukraine.

The main interest of the Alliance in the Black Sea region is the corridor between the East and the West, which is connected in many aspects, more precisely, the Black Sea region is a link between the Caspian, Aegean, and Mediterranean basins, therefore it is the most important corridor for access to the Middle East.

Due to its geopolitical position and the above factors, the Black Sea region has always been, is, and will be a region of great interest, therefore NATO is implementing many projects and activities to address the security issue in the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea region is a bridge connecting two worlds, it creates a favorable environment for access to the East, so it is not surprising that there is such a high interest in this region and a constant struggle for dominance between states.

### **NATO is one of the main guarantors of regional security**

NATO's attention to the Black Sea region has clearly shown that this region is considered part of the Euro-Atlantic security space.

In 2004, when Bulgaria and Romania became NATO members, the security of the Black Sea region became a priority on NATO's agenda. It should be noted that 3 of the 6 Black Sea coastal countries are NATO members, these are three states:

- Bulgaria
- Romania
- Turkey

However, it should be noted that only 10 years after Bulgaria and Romania joined the alliance, NATO was able to develop a regional security policy for the Black Sea (NATO Handbook, 2006. Fundamental Security Tasks. NATO Public Diplomacy Division. P. 22).

On the other hand, the Black Sea is of strategic importance for NATO as well, since it is the main front in the fight against Russia, the threat of terrorism and the situation in the Middle East (Syria) have added even more strategic pressure. To the Black Sea region, especially to those countries that have direct access to the Black Sea.

After the annexation of Crimea (the territory of Ukraine Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014. The annexation was preceded by the intervention of the Russian armed forces on the Crimean peninsula, the annexation of Crimea continues to this day), NATO policy has encountered problems in the Black Sea region and the security of this region has become a priority. This is evidenced by the discussions on the mentioned issues in the North Atlantic Council and the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as the effective steps taken by the Alliance in terms of the security of the mentioned region, even though there are many interfering factors. The most noticeable of which is the Russian player, Russia is categorically against the presence of NATO military forces in the Black Sea. In the basin, this directly contradicts the national interests of Russia. In 2021, NATO has already openly declared its readiness for Ukraine's accession, but this was followed by the invasion of Russian troops into Ukrainian territory in February 2022. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the North Atlantic Alliance has put forward several military initiatives to strengthen security in the Black Sea region. NATO had a strong desire to operate in the Black Sea basin within the framework of Operation Active Endeavour (OAE) (Sanders, D.

2009. Maritime security in the Black Sea: can regional solutions work? European Security), but due to opposition from Turkey and Russia, it was unable to implement this initiative.

Since 2001, within the framework of the Active Endeavour, NATO naval forces have been patrolling the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, including warships, submarines, and aircraft. The purpose of this operation is to detect and prevent terrorist activities in the waters of the inland sea. Considering the fact that 65% of oil and natural gas are transported through the Mediterranean Sea to Western Europe (Shaishmelashvili, G. 2021. Russia's Permanent War against Georgia. Analysis, Black Sea Strategy Papers).

As a result of Russian aggression, after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, NATO's military presence in the Black Sea basin has increased significantly. After this terrible event, the alliance conducted many more military exercises than planned and also increased the visit of US ships to the region, which continues to this day. NATO's interests could not be hampered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The United States supports Ukraine and assists Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

### **NATO Strategy for Black Sea Security**

The work repeatedly mentions that the Black Sea region is of great importance in the international arena, since due to its location it is a bridge between the West and the East. Domination in the Black Sea region will significantly increase the possibilities of fighting terrorism.

In the context of the security of the Black Sea region, speaking about NATO strategy, it is necessary to mention the restraining factors. The main intervening player is the Russian Federation. Russia will not allow cooperation between the countries of the region and NATO member countries and will in every possible way hinder the integration of the countries of the region into NATO, an example of which is the recent events in Ukraine. It also opposes the development of alternative oil and gas projects in the mentioned region. The main goal of Russia's foreign policy is to become an important power in the world, and the Black Sea region is in the sphere of strategic interests of Russia, its main task is to stop the policy of NATO expansion and dominate the Black Sea (Chitadze, N. 2011. Geopolitics. Universali. P. 137).

The 3 Black Sea states: Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey are NATO member states, therefore, based on the alliance's policy, NATO considers Russia's aggressive policy as a regional threat, as well as a threat to the Euro-Atlantic space and peace.

One of the main reasons why NATO is not properly represented in the Black Sea region together with the Russian actors is the policy pursued by Turkey, the aim of which is to reduce NATO's role in the Black Sea region, despite the fact that Turkey is a NATO member state. It is also significant that the states of the Black Sea region often have different views on solving existing problems and challenges, despite the coincidence of interests.



At the initiative of Turkey, a naval task force, the "Black Four", was created in 2001, which was later strengthened by the maritime surveillance operation, "Black Sea Harmony". The formation of this group led to the insecurity of the Black Sea, which today is the most vulnerable and least protected segment of NATO's eastern flank (Chitadze, N. 2008. Geopolitics. Universali. P. 108).

From this, it is clear that a large NATO presence in the Black Sea region is not in Turkey's interests, although Turkey is forced to cooperate with NATO due to the situation on the Syrian border since its security largely depends on the "Patriots". "Air defense systems deployed by the alliance. Accordingly, Turkey has to cooperate with NATO in connection with the security issue in the Black Sea, as well as maintain a balance in relations with Russia and NATO.

Russian-Turkish relations are important when Russia is an important adversary of NATO, and Turkey is a NATO member state, so the next chapter of the work is entirely devoted to Turkish-Russian relations, which, in my opinion, is very interesting.

Speaking about NATO's strategy, it is definitely worth mentioning the declaration of the NATO Warsaw Summit, the purpose of which is to inform the public about the decisions taken at the Warsaw Summit, and specifically about what strategy NATO has developed on the security issue of the Black Sea region.

At the Warsaw Summit, threats emanating from the east were named as the main challenge facing NATO, with particular attention being paid to Russia's aggressive policies and actions (NATO, 2016. Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Public Diplomacy Division).

At the Warsaw Summit, military, terrorist, and cyber threats from the east and south of the alliance, emanating from both state and non-state actors, were identified as the main challenges facing NATO. In this regard, special attention was paid to the aggression carried out by Russia and its policy in the Black Sea region.

The summit declaration confirmed that NATO has taken very important steps to strengthen its defense mechanisms.

Since the beginning of 2017, NATO has deployed 4 military units in the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), which operate in coordination with local military units, but at this stage, it is impossible to carry out the same measures in the Black Sea basin. This is due to the Russian and Turkish factors (Chitadze, N. 2022. World Politics and Challenges for International Security. IGI Global. P.102).

This decision was preceded by the approval of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) of the Alliance at the Wales Summit in 2014, which was adopted mainly in response to the threats from Russia and its strategic influence. The RAP includes consistent and comprehensive measures aimed at adapting security to the new reality.

As part of the RAP, NATO has taken a number of effective steps, of which it is worth noting:

- Increasing the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and simultaneously strengthening its capabilities.

- Formation of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which can move in the near future, depending on the need (2-3 days), including in the border regions of the Alliance.

- Creation of eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUS) in the eastern part of NATO, the purpose of which is to coordinate the process of training, preparation, and, if necessary, the reception of additional forces in the specified region.

- Intensification of NATO exercises.

- Development of a strategy for neutralizing hybrid threats, which is being implemented jointly with the European Union (Chitadze, N. 2022. *World Politics and Challenges for International Security*. IGI Global. Pp. 111-112).

The decisions taken at the Wales Summit in 2014, mentioned above, contained political messages about NATO's unwavering position regarding the Russian Federation regarding the principles of the alliance's collective defense. Thanks to these decisions, additional elements of the alliance appeared to the east of NATO, although their main part was the coordination train. The presence of military units was carried out on a rotational basis and did not provide for their permanent deployment in the relevant region to protect the relevant territories.

The Warsaw Summit Declaration emphasizes that in light of the developments in the Black Sea region, including the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggressive policies, the Alliance will significantly strengthen cooperation and dialogue with Georgia and Ukraine on the current situation, threats, and strengthening and maintaining security in the region (NATO, 2016. *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*. Public Diplomacy Division).

In connection with the processes developing in the Black Sea region, namely the annexation of Crimea and the mobilization of excess military infrastructure by the Russian Federation in the said territory, the security of the Black Sea has become an area of special attention for NATO. In this regard, the Warsaw Summit Declaration emphasized and drew attention to the creation of a multinational brigade initiated by Romania. This brigade provides comprehensive training for allied units, the purpose of which is to strengthen the defensive mechanisms in the Black Sea region. The summit also noted the need to discuss various options for strengthening NATO's presence in the Black Sea region.

The Warsaw Summit Declaration noted that for the first time since 2009, financial expenditure on defense increased significantly in 2016. 5 member states of the alliance already fulfill the requirement of the NATO directive (management) to use at least 2 percent

of the country's gross domestic product for defense. The North Atlantic Alliance appreciates the efforts of its allies in terms of participation and engagement in NATO's international operations, missions, and various activities. The work repeatedly mentions that the Black Sea is a military-economic zone of international importance, which has become a subject of confrontation between Russia and the West in recent years. This issue appeared on NATO's agenda after the annexation of Crimea, although Russia's goals in the Black Sea region were clear back then when it occupied Abkhazia and effectively seized a 200-kilometer stretch of Georgia's Black Sea coast. The occupied territory soon turned into a powerful Russian military base, which was directed not only against Georgia but also against NATO. The annexation of Crimea, its subsequent militarization, which manifested itself in the further strengthening of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (the said process continues today), in the creation of a qualitatively new group of aerospace and ground forces on the peninsula, prompted NATO to take retaliatory measures. Against the backdrop of Russia's obvious superiority, we continue to see frequent visits by American warships to Black Sea ports and frequent exercises conducted by NATO. All interested parties, including Russia, were waiting for the decision of the NATO Warsaw Summit on security in the Black Sea. Expectations were partially justified, paragraph 10 of the decision adopted at the summit notes that Russia is carrying out provocative actions in the Black Sea basin, using the military potential located there to demonstrate its power in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is a challenge for NATO. Paragraph 23 of the same statement emphasizes that the security situation in the Black Sea has significantly worsened in recent years. NATO supports the efforts of the Black Sea basin states to establish security and stability in the region (Chitadze, N. World Politics. International Black Sea University. Pp. 23-24).

As we can see, the documents of the NATO Warsaw Summit do not mention specific steps, but they contain clear signals to the Kremlin that Russia will not have a strategic advantage in the Black Sea.

NATO will become more active in ensuring security in the Black Sea basin, and non-member states of the alliance - Georgia and Ukraine - will find their place in this process.

As for the presence of NATO warships in the Black Sea, it is worth mentioning the Montreux Convention, signed in July 1936 in Switzerland (Shaishmelashvili, G. 2021. Russia's Permanent War against Georgia. Analysis, Black Sea Strategy Papers. Pp. 32-34), which regulates the use of the Black Sea straits of the Union, Turkey, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Australia, Japan, and Greece. According to the convention, merchant ships of any state (except states at war with Turkey) have the right to freely use the Black Sea straits in any situation (war or peace).

Certain restrictions apply to warships, mainly for non-Black Sea states. In peacetime, they can bring watercraft with a displacement of no more than 45,000 tons into the Black

Sea and stay for a maximum of 21 days (Article 18); this restriction does not apply to Black Sea countries.

At this stage, it is unknown how to resolve such an obstacle to increasing NATO's presence in the Black Sea as the Montreux Convention of 1936. (Montreux Convention) (Chitadze, N. 2011. Geopolitics. Universali. p. 269).

The said requirement of the convention obliges ships of the corresponding class of the Sixth Operational Fleet of the US Navy in the Mediterranean to enter the Black Sea only on a rotational basis. In this regard, the issue of lifting the existing restrictions by amending the Montreux Convention was raised; this is procedurally possible. As is known, the term of the conference is extended every 20 years.

Since any change in the Montreux document directly or indirectly concerns the security of Georgia, concerns occupied Abkhazia and the Russian military bases located there, the Georgian side should seriously consider this issue. First of all, there should be an agreement on the need to amend the Montreux Convention.

Reducing the level of militarization of the Black Sea is very useful for the security of the region. Possible changes to the Montreux Convention should also serve the interests of preventing conflict in the Black Sea. It is important and necessary that any Black Sea state that carries out armed aggression against another Black Sea state, occupying and annexing its territory, be deprived of the right of free passage of both military and merchant ships in the Black Sea straits. Of course, the same rule should be established for non-Black Sea states that are at war with one or another Black Sea state. Once the above idea is properly finalized, the adoption of the proposal made to the Black Sea countries will certainly contribute to the removal of tensions created in the Black Sea region and the establishment of a lasting and fair peace in the region.

It should be noted that the current version of the Montreux Convention also contains certain restrictions on the use of the Black Sea straits in wartime (Articles 19, 20). They reliably protect the interests of Turkey. This shortcoming of the convention must be corrected. Based on this factor, Turkey is strongly against the revision of the Montreux Convention, so today the revision of the Convention is not on the agenda (Chitadze, N. 2011. Geopolitics. Universali. p. 270).

In recent years, many NATO warships have entered the Black Sea. In 2019, the port of Poti was visited by four ships of the Second Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG2), the ships were received by the Coast Guard of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and it is good that joint exercises with NATO ships took place.

According to information confirmed in the media, two NATO warships entered the Black Sea in 2019. According to the "Bosphorus Observer", the British ("HMS Duncan") and Canadian (HMS Toronto) warships passed through the Dardanelles Strait and entered the Black Sea waters. The said ships went to Ukraine to participate in military exercises ("Sea

Breeze 2019" - "Sea Breeze 2019") (Middle East Institute. 2021. America`s Black Sea Strategy in 2021 and Beyond. Case of Ukraine).

Several projects and plans developed by NATO play an important role in the security of the Black Sea region, such as:

Operation Active Endeavor

Partnership Action Plan (PAP)

Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)

Which, of course, will be discussed in detail in the article separately when it comes to the projects implemented by NATO, (2.3) Each of them played a special role in the security of the region, and this is still the case.

NATO continues to implement various projects in the Black Sea region to protect the rights of democratic states in the region and to contribute to strengthening security in the region because it can be said that today there are 5 conflicts in the Black Sea region. Sea, some of them are active and some are frozen, namely: the conflict in Transnistria (Moldova), Crimea and Donbas (Ukraine), and Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), where Russia is actively violating borders.

The conflicts in the region pose the greatest challenge to the security of the Black Sea since effective transatlantic cooperation is impossible without eliminating the aggression shown by Russia.

NATO's Black Sea Strategy until 2021 is aimed at ending the conflicts in the region. Along with this, it should be noted that in April 2021, the US National Intelligence Service published an annual threat assessment report (Intelligence Community), which clearly stated that Russia is using the territories of the former Soviet Union to strengthen its position. In the current realities, it is clear that the Black Sea occupies an advantageous position in the maritime region. Also in the spring of 2021, the President of the United States of America Joe Biden said that the Russian President will soon pay for interfering in the 2020 presidential elections of the United States of America, which he considers the largest—effective and promising military alliance. After the invasion of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine in February 2022, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, and Slovakia have activated security concerns provided for in Article IV. According to Kaja Kalasmi (Prime Minister of Estonia), Russia's aggression is the greatest threat to the entire world, so NATO must begin active consultations to protect its allies. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO announced an increase in its military presence in Poland, the Baltic Sea, and Romania (Chitadze, N. 2024. World Politics. IBSU. Pp. 78-79).

For the first time in history, NATO response forces were sent to the eastern border, these forces include the Higher Joint Task Force (VJTF), which is currently commanded by

France, and the actions of NATO member states are also important. , they sent weapons to Ukraine, including air defense systems.

By the decision of the United States of America, another 7 thousand soldiers joined the 5 thousand American troops stationed in Europe.

It is worth noting that the Joe Biden administration is well aware of modern threats, and the United States will become much more active in the international arena, including in the Black Sea region (Chitadze, N. 2024. World Politics. IBSU. Pp. 80-81). Biden accused former US President Donald Trump of undermining NATO and emphasized the desire to have warm relations with the Russian president, which Biden radically disagrees with. The new strategy of the United States of America and its attitude towards Russia directly affect the Black Sea region and NATO's strategy in terms of ensuring security in the region.

### **Conclusion**

The paper emphasizes the fact that for the regional actors of the Black Sea, issues related to the security of the region are important for each of them. Along with this, the security of the Black Sea occupies an important place in the political agenda of international actors, since the events in this region affect the whole world. The main goal of NATO is to "contain" Russia and ensure stability and peace in the Euro-Atlantic area, this is the goal of important projects that the alliance is implementing in the region. The way to avoid the threat emanating from the East lies through the Caucasus region, the stability of which is in NATO's field of interest.

For Georgia and Ukraine, the challenges in the Black Sea region represent a threat to national security and, at the same time, an opportunity to deepen cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic area.

For Russia and Turkey, the issue of regional security of the Black Sea is determined by their identity and regional interests, they do not advocate actualizing the issue of security of the Black Sea region in the international arena, for both of them this region is vitally important, they have a desire and aspiration for dominant positions in the region. The study found that the security of the Black Sea region for Russia and Turkey requires the closure of the region, and NATO prefers collective defense approaches in this regard. NATO's strategy, which includes support for the Black Sea countries and the deployment of warships in the Black Sea on a rotational basis, creates small zones around the Russian Federation, as a result of which the Russian fleet is significantly limited.

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