



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



**SOUTH CAUCASUS AND
BLACK SEA SECURITY:
STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR
NATO AND PARTNERS**

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTION OF
THE PAPERS OF THE SCIENTIFIC-PRACTICAL
CONFERENCE**

GORI, 2025

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THE IMPACT OF THE MILITARY INDUSTRY ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

In the contemporary international system, national security remains a paramount priority. Its enhancement is contingent upon the convergence of political and economic stability alongside military and technological capabilities. In this regard, the military industry serves as a fundamental pillar of a state's sovereignty, strategic independence, and defense sustainability. This paper aims to analyze the role of the military industry in the systemic reinforcement of national security, examining the circumstances under which its influence may emerge as both a stabilizing element and a potential source of risk.

The study is grounded in a comprehensive analysis of both theoretical frameworks and empirical sources, including the security theories articulated by Waltz, Nye, and Buzan, as well as contemporary examples of military-industrial policies practiced by various states. The findings indicate that the military industry exerts a multifaceted impact on national security through enhanced defense capabilities, strategic autonomy, technological advancement, and economic stimulation. Furthermore, the research reveals that excessive politicization or alignment with private interests can precipitate imbalances within the state's system.

In conclusion, the military industry should be regarded not merely as a tool of aggressive policy but as a mechanism for fostering peace, stability, and sovereign development. Its effectiveness is predicated upon political will, economic resources, and technological expertise, which collectively shape the state's position within the global security landscape.

Keywords: national security, military industry, strategic independence, defense capability, military-industrial complex.

Introduction

National security constitutes one of the paramount challenges within the framework of contemporary international relations. Its key determinants encompass both political and economic stability, as well as military and strategic capabilities. In this context, the military industry serves not only as a provider of defense capabilities but also as a crucial factor in establishing a state's sovereignty, technological independence, and its position within the global security architecture. As noted by Waltz (1979), the stability of the security system is directly correlated with the military-political capabilities of states. The military industry is frequently regarded as an integral part of the "Military-Industrial Complex," a term first introduced by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1961 during his farewell address. This concept underscores the notion that military production significantly influences state policy and international relations (Eisenhower, 1961). Beyond its military implications, the military industry plays an essential role in fostering a country's economic and technological advancement. As articulated in Fukuyama's analyses, military innovations often create the basis for civilian progress.¹

The military industry constitutes one of the foundational pillars of a national security framework. A state that possesses the capability to develop its own defense technologies and armaments significantly enhances its prospects for maintaining independence and sovereignty. As Franklin D. Roosevelt aptly stated, "A nation that cannot defend itself is not truly free." Consequently, the military industry not only acts as a safeguard for defense but also serves as a guarantee for freedom.

However, Dwight Eisenhower cautioned against the potential overreach of the military-industrial complex, emphasizing that, when excessive, state security could become vulnerable to private interests. In contemporary circumstances, as noted by Joseph Nye, the concept of security encompasses not merely an arsenal of weapons but also extends to economic, technological, and diplomatic capabilities. Therefore, the enhancement of the military industry should be directed towards fostering stability and peace rather than promoting aggression. Only by maintaining this balance does national security become an expression of responsibility, not power. The primary objective of this paper is to ascertain, through thorough analysis, the contributions of the military industry to national security. A comprehensive examination of this issue remains notably sparse within the existing literature, which predominantly focuses on economic and international political dimensions. The central question of this research seeks to elucidate the significance of the military industry in both the broader context of national security and within the realm of international relations. The topics and conclusions articulated herein reflect general considerations and provide a universal analysis, devoid of alignment with the perspectives of any specific state. The findings derived from the empirical analysis aim to cultivate an understanding of the military industry's importance in the context of national security.²

The military industry constitutes a fundamental component of national security. A robust defense sector enables a state to independently safeguard its sovereignty and prepare for crisis situations. However, there exists a critical perspective regarding the potential for the military industry

1 K.Booth, *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge University Press, (2007).

2 B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, (1991).

to exert excessive influence. Such influence may lead to the transformation of national security into an avenue for economic gain, with defense serving as a mechanism for political manipulation. Therefore, to foster the military industry while mitigating associated risks, it is imperative to establish a balanced approach. This concept posits that sustainable national security is predicated on equilibrium: a strong military industry is essential, but its purpose should be to promote peacekeeping and stable development rather than aggression. The military industry's influence on national security manifests through several primary avenues:³

a) Ensuring defense capability - A well-established military industry enables swift and effective responses to crises, reduces reliance on imports, and bolsters strategic stability. In critical circumstances, this capability may prove essential for preserving national security. The defense capability constitutes a fundamental component of the national security framework. In this regard, the military industry assumes a significant role, as it directly influences the capabilities of the nation's armed forces, the expediency of ammunition supply, and the overall strategic stability.

b) Strategic independence - Dependence on imports represents one of the most significant vulnerabilities within national security. An international embargo or geopolitical tensions can severely undermine a nation's defense capabilities, whereas a robust domestic military industry bolsters strategic sovereignty (Buzan, 1991). Strategic independence constitutes a critical element of national security, as it affects a state's sovereignty, its capacity for autonomous decision-making, and its position within the global security framework. The military industry is integral to this process, as the capability to produce and develop military resources grants the state greater resilience against external pressures.

c) Technological progress and innovation - Numerous scientific advancements have their origins in military applications. Technologies such as GPS, the Internet, and unmanned aerial vehicles exemplify how innovations initially developed for military purposes become integral to civilian life. Consequently, the military sector serves as a significant catalyst in the process of technological modernization. Historically, the military industry has played a vital role in driving scientific and technological progress. The challenges associated with military operations frequently necessitate the development of innovative technologies, which are subsequently adapted for widespread civilian use. Therefore, the enhancement of national security through the military sector is intrinsically linked to the overarching technological advancement of a nation.

d) Economic importance - The military industry plays an important role in the creation of new employment opportunities, the enhancement of the industrial base, and the expansion of export potential. However, there exists a concern that an excessive allocation of resources to the military sector may adversely affect social development (Kennedy, 1987). Furthermore, the military industry not only serves as a crucial component of national defense capability and strategic autonomy but also functions as a significant economic driver. Its influence extends both directly and indirectly to the economic framework of the nation, impacting various sectors, employment rates, and the overall dynamics of economic growth.⁴

³ B. Buzan, L. Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*. Cambridge University Press, (2009).

⁴ K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, (1979).

Main Part

1.1 How the Defense Industry Contributes to National Security

The development and evolution of the global military arms production and procurement system have emerged as pivotal factors in contemporary international relations. In the context of economic globalization, technological advancements, and the integration of the defense industry, the sector has become an essential element not only for economic growth but also for the maintenance of national security. In the twenty-first century, the significance of the defense industry has escalated, as the security strategies of nations increasingly rely on innovative military technologies, production autonomy, and networks that hinge on global partnerships.⁵

In this context, the role of the defense industry in national security can be articulated through two primary mechanisms. The first mechanism pertains to the facilitation of access to military goods, technologies, and services, which in turn influences the state's defense capabilities and strategic autonomy. The second mechanism involves the enhancement of a nation's international standing and influence, thereby contributing to the reinforcement of national identity, pride, and political cohesion.

This article seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of these two mechanisms, examining both their historical evolution and contemporary dynamics. The study will focus on the transformation of the defense industry's function, evolving from traditional military production into a technological and geopolitical instrument that shapes the state's security

1.2 Access to Military Goods, Technologies, and Services

The Cold War period, along with significant transformations in international relations, led to the development of the military industry and resulted in a substantial increase in arms procurement. Historically, North American and Western European enterprises predominantly led arms production during the Cold War. However, ongoing international and regional developments have given rise to new nations in the field of arms manufacturing and procurement, notably Brazil, India, South Korea, and Turkey. These countries are now recognized as prominent producers within the global arms market. Such shifts have contributed to the diversification of this market. These changes have led to the diversification of the global arms market. According to the new trend, the priority is on the buyer, which has made the global market buyer-oriented.

In recent years, the most significant transformations have been driven by the emergence of new technologies, particularly within the digital domain. This development has facilitated the integration and advancement of new technologies in military production, consequently leading to an increased demand for such innovations. Military analysts have referred to the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) within these technologies as the sixth revolution in military affairs. States are striving to reduce costs and diversify by collaborating with private companies within the military sector; these companies are oriented towards export opportunities while simultaneously witnessing growth in critical sectors of the domestic military industry. Notable trends remain evident within the international arms production and development market. The United States continues to maintain a dominant position in the global arms market. American arms companies enjoy considerable

⁵ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press, (2003).

credibility and prestige in research and sales on the world stage. Any military procurement contract involving the United States is often regarded as a benchmark of success. Concurrently, new digital and high-tech companies have emerged in the global market, entities that previously had no affiliation with the defense industry; however, shifts in the nature of hostilities have prompted them to realign their priorities.⁶

One of the main functions of the military industry is the development, production, and technical support of military goods, technologies, and related services. These processes enable the armed forces and other security agencies to attain the necessary material and technological capabilities. The operations of the military industry encompass both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The qualitative dimension pertains to the technological complexity, innovativeness, and efficiency of the goods and technologies produced, as well as the overall level of professional competence within the industry. High levels of technological expertise are regarded as strategic assets that significantly enhance a state's defense potential and the operational capabilities of its armed forces (defense forces). Conversely, the quantitative aspect reflects the volume and scale of production that the industry can achieve, given its existing resources and infrastructure.

Although the defense sector is characterized by rigorous regulation and often benefits from government subsidies, it remains subject to the principles of market economics and competitive mechanisms. Consequently, conflicts of interest may arise in the production process between economic efficiency and strategic needs, for example, when balancing resource optimization and national security priorities.

The primary factor driving the development of defense industrial production is the level of perceived and actual threats to a state. In a high-threat environment, there is usually an acceleration in military innovation and an increased need to invest in new technologies. Consequently, countries that face greater external threats tend to develop stronger and more innovation-focused defense industries over time.⁷

A prominent example is Israel, which operates in a high-threat environment and has developed a robust domestic defense industry in response. Some of the latest military systems created by Israel include unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), the Iron Dome missile defense system, and advanced reconnaissance satellites. These innovations clearly illustrate how security challenges can serve as a catalyst for technological advancement.

A similar trend has been observed in South Korea and Japan, both of which have significantly enhanced their defense production capabilities in recent decades, driven by escalating geopolitical tensions with China. The expansion of the defense sector in these nations has not only resulted in an augmentation of technological capabilities but has also led to a substantial increase in the economic scale of the industry and the volume of exports.

Furthermore, the strategic competition among leading powers, particularly the United States, China, and Russia, exerts a considerable influence on the dynamics of the global defense industry. This competition is especially prominent in sectors related to emerging technologies, including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and autonomous systems. Consequently,

⁶ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, & J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, (1997).

⁷ D. Eisenhower, *Farewell Address*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1961).

the international security environment itself acts as a catalyst for innovation and a primary driver of military-technological advancement.⁸

The domestic armaments industry in numerous states relies significantly on technology transfer and the importation of components and subsystems. Actually, the acquisition of technology from foreign entities is a principal driver behind the advancement of domestic defense industries. This process enables states to enhance their production technology base and improve the quality of military products. One prevalent mechanism in this interaction is licensed production, which not only facilitates the manufacturing of specific weapon systems but also enables countries to acquire broader technological expertise and manufacturing experience. Furthermore, offset agreements are widely utilized, allowing purchasing nations to obtain technology transfer, access to advanced production techniques, and the development of new industrial capabilities. Consequently, technology transfers and licensed production frequently serve as strategic instruments for importing states aiming to modernize their industries and cultivate niche markets. Over time, this approach has empowered certain countries to establish themselves as reliable suppliers to prominent international arms manufacturers.⁹

Ultimately, domestic defense industries play a critical role in ensuring access to military products, technologies, and services; however, achieving this objective comprehensively remains a formidable challenge. A significant number of states lack the industrial infrastructure and capabilities required to establish and sustain a high-level defense sector. The simultaneous attainment of enhanced production quality, alongside increased technological and structural autonomy, presents particular difficulties.

Realizing these aspirations necessitates substantial financial investments and long-term commitments from domestic stakeholders, predominantly government agencies. Furthermore, in numerous instances, prolonged delays between research and development (R&D) phases and the subsequent commercialization of production may impose additional challenges on industrial advancement.¹⁰

In the context of less industrialized nations, the trade-offs between technological ambitions, production autonomy, and financial implications are especially pressing. Empirical evidence indicates that efforts to establish domestic arms production are successful only when a country's technological objectives are aligned with its economic and industrial capacities. A prevailing disconnect between the needs of the state and the capabilities of local industries can hinder the efficient production and supply of defense products. Consequently, most nations continue to rely heavily on foreign sources for weapons, components, and technological systems. Although domestic defense production can mitigate this reliance to a certain degree, its overall impact tends to be limited. The pursuit of independent industrial development represents a long-term and resource-intensive initiative that necessitates strategic planning, technological collaboration, and ongoing financial investment.

8 M.Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2007).

9 F.Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, (2004)..

10 J. H. Herz, *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*. *World Politics*, 2(2), (1950), 157–180. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009187>

1.3 Enhancing Security Status and National “Pride”

Domestic defense industries play a crucial role not only in enhancing military capabilities but also in bolstering national status and pride. This dimension can be viewed as a significant source of political influence, impacting both international and domestic policy frameworks and, consequently, shaping the entire national security infrastructure.¹¹

Aspirations related to national status frequently serve as a significant motivator of state behavior within the realm of international relations. The endeavors of states to sustain or develop their defense industries often reflect a form of technonationalism, wherein the pursuit of technological advancement and enhanced status may take precedence over economic rationality or military efficacy. Thus, in certain circumstances, arms production fulfills not only defensive requirements but also acts as a manifestation of national prestige and autonomy.¹²

A prominent illustration of this strategy can be observed in the leading Asian nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia. These countries have, in recent decades, initiated extensive programs aimed at developing domestic defense industries and establishing policies to promote their advancement. Their objectives extend beyond mere military self-sufficiency; they also encompass the enhancement of regional power dynamics and the elevation of their international standing. Therefore, the defense industry may be regarded not only as a mechanism for ensuring security but also as a political emblem of national prestige and identity. This enables states to showcase their technological and strategic independence on the global stage.

Domestic defense production functions as a critical mechanism through which states can demonstrate their military-industrial capabilities and technological competence. Even in situations where states are not entirely self-sufficient in defense matters, the existence of domestic defense industries serves as a significant signal to other nations. This signal conveys that the state possesses the institutional and technological resources necessary to ensure national security and sustain military infrastructure. Particularly noteworthy is the variety and technical complexity of the military products produced, which serve as an indicator of the level of military-technological expertise within the state. Consequently, the development of the defense industry can indirectly reflect the operational capabilities and innovative potential of a state’s armed forces.¹³

The quantitative capabilities of the domestic defense industry, encompassing the scale of production and the capacity to mobilize resources, are indicative of a state’s ability to sustain its armed forces during protracted military conflicts. Consequently, the domestic defense sector serves as a crucial measure of a nation’s survivability and military resilience. Moreover, arms exports hold both economic and substantial political significance, functioning as an effective mechanism to advance national security interests. The exportation of defense products often contributes to the enhancement of military capabilities among allied states, thereby supporting them in countering common adversaries or geopolitical rivals.

11 M. C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*. Princeton University Press, (2010).

12 A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1962).

13 P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York: Random House, (1987).

The authorization of arms exports constitutes a significant political statement, reflecting support for the security objectives of another state and thereby establishing a strategic partnership. Such relationships can enhance the exporting country's influence on the international stage, promote defense cooperation, and strengthen diplomatic ties. Consequently, the defense industry and arms exports provide a state with the opportunity to cultivate a reputation as a reliable and influential actor in regional or global security policy. Simultaneously, these exports create a platform for establishing and maintaining political influence with specific partners. However, the process of arms exports is accompanied by considerable political and strategic risks that necessitate careful and deliberate management by the state.

The granting of an export permit may strain relations with rival nations of the importing country, while a denial of such permits may adversely affect diplomatic relations with both existing and prospective partners. Therefore, arms exports should be viewed not merely as economic or industrial transactions but as instruments of strategic balance. The effective management of these exports demands a high level of coordination in foreign and security policy.¹⁴

In conclusion, the domestic defense industry possesses the potential to significantly enhance the international standing of a nation and foster national pride, ultimately contributing to national security. However, accurately assessing the extent to which these nations can achieve such objectives presents considerable challenges. The attainment of international prestige through the defense sector is a protracted, resource-intensive, and costly endeavor that necessitates both technological excellence and substantial production capacity. In this context, the qualitative and quantitative standards of the weapons and military technologies produced by a nation serve as crucial indicators of its perceived strength and credibility. The more innovative and technologically advanced the systems developed, the greater the impact on the nation's status in the global arena.¹⁵

Thus, the defense industry can be seen as a complex system that has military, economic, and symbolic importance. Its success relies not only on industrial and technological abilities but also on how effectively the government converts these resources into strategic advantages that bolster national security and enhance international standing.

Conclusion

The domestic military industry plays a crucial role in enhancing national security by integrating military, political, and economic functions, thereby serving as a strategic asset for the state. From a military perspective, this industry facilitates reliable domestic access to military goods, technologies, and services. Such access enhances the operational readiness of the armed forces (defense forces), fosters technological self-sufficiency, and bolsters the capacity of states to respond to both national and global threats effectively. The capability for high-quality and large-scale production significantly contributes to the efficient mobilization of domestic resources, thereby strengthening the state's resilience in conflict situations.

Second, within the framework of dependency and interdependence, the defense industry establishes a network of political and economic ties among states. It reinforces strategic partner-

14 J. S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, (2004).

15 C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge, (2021).

ships with allies and enhances influence within regional or international security dynamics. Arms production and export reflect a state's willingness to support its partners; strengthen diplomatic positions and contribute to political influence in the long term.

Third, the dimension of status and national pride underscores the symbolic significance of the defense industry. A robust defense sector enables a state to exhibit its technological and strategic autonomy on the international stage, enhance its political and regional influence, and fortify its national identity. This aspect is particularly vital for smaller states striving to elevate their strategic prestige through industrial advancement.

Ultimately, the military industry contributes to national security by reinforcing military capabilities, augmenting the strategic influence of states, facilitating the establishment of international standing, and bolstering the foundation for national pride. However, the efficacy of this contribution is neither automatic nor flawless. It is contingent upon the political context of the state, economic resources, technological capabilities, and prevailing social values. Thus, the military industry functions as a multifaceted strategic instrument that simultaneously encompasses both practical and symbolic dimensions in the establishment of national security.

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CYBERSECURITY CHALLENGES IN AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA

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Abstract

Cybersecurity has emerged as a strategic priority for modern states, particularly in regions marked by geopolitical tension. In the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Armenia face complex cyber challenges shaped by their historical conflict, evolving digital infrastructures, and differing national strategies. This paper explores the strengths and weaknesses of both countries in the cyber domain, analyzing their institutional capacities, financial resources, strategic approaches, and the role of international partnerships. Drawing on recent reports and documented incidents, including the use of Pegasus spyware, the study reveals how cyber tools have become instruments of political influence and intelligence gathering.

The central research question guiding this study is: How do Azerbaijan and Armenia differ in their cybersecurity governance, and what implications do these differences have for regional stability and digital sovereignty? To address this question, the paper employs a qualitative comparative analysis, drawing on policy documents, expert interviews, and incident-based case studies to assess institutional resilience and strategic orientation.

Azerbaijan has made notable progress in developing a centralized cybersecurity framework. Its 2023–2027 national strategy outlines clear priorities for protecting critical infrastructure and enhancing state coordination. The creation of the Special State Service for Communications and Information Security (SSSCIS) reflects a commitment to institutional resilience. In contrast, Armenia's cybersecurity landscape remains fragmented. Despite adopting a digital transformation strategy, the country struggles with underfunding, limited human resources, and weak institutional structures. Armenia relies heavily on international support, including partnerships with major tech companies, to address its vulnerabilities.

Both nations face common threats such as phishing, DDoS attacks, and internal system weaknesses. However, the use of advanced spyware like Pegasus during periods of heightened conflict underscores the politicization of cyberspace. These incidents raise serious concerns about privacy, human rights, and the ethical boundaries of cyber operations.

The paper concludes that while Azerbaijan and Armenia have taken steps toward strengthening their cyber defenses, the region's stability depends on collaborative frameworks, shared standards, and legal safeguards. Cybersecurity in the South Caucasus is no longer a technical issue—it is a matter of national security, diplomacy, and democratic integrity.

Keywords: cybersecurity, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Pegasus spyware, cyber conflict, national strategy, South Caucasus

Introduction

The digital transformation of state institutions and societies has elevated cybersecurity to a core component of national security. In the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Armenia are navigating this transformation amid longstanding geopolitical tensions and intermittent armed conflict. Their respective approaches to cybersecurity reflect broader political, economic, and institutional realities, revealing both progress and persistent vulnerabilities.

Azerbaijan has demonstrated a proactive stance in building its cybersecurity infrastructure. In 2023, the government adopted a comprehensive strategy titled “*Information Security and Cybersecurity Strategy 2023–2027*,” which outlines goals for protecting critical infrastructure, enhancing inter-agency coordination, and aligning with international standards.¹ The establishment of the Special State Service for Communications and Information Security (*SSSCIS*) has centralized oversight and improved response capabilities. Azerbaijan’s cybersecurity governance benefits from strong state support and integration with broader national security objectives.

The country’s efforts have yielded tangible results. For instance, during the 2024 COP29 climate summit hosted in Baku, cybersecurity protocols were successfully implemented to protect digital infrastructure and sensitive communications.² Moreover, Azerbaijan has invested in training programs and public awareness campaigns, although it remains reliant on foreign technologies and expertise for advanced threat detection.

Armenia’s cybersecurity development has followed a different trajectory. While the government adopted a digital transformation strategy in 2021, implementation has been hampered by institutional fragmentation and limited financial resources. According to the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance,³ Armenia ranks 93rd out of 193 countries in global cybersecurity readiness, reflecting systemic weaknesses. The country lacks a centralized cybersecurity authority, and coordination among agencies is inconsistent.

Armenia has sought to compensate for these gaps through international partnerships. Collaborations with Google, Microsoft, Meta, and Apple have provided technical assistance and threat intelligence, particularly in response to targeted attacks on civil society and government institutions.⁴ Civil society organizations such as CyberHUB-AM have also played a vital role in raising awareness and supporting vulnerable groups, including journalists and human rights defenders.⁵

Despite differing capacities, both countries face similar threats. Phishing campaigns, distributed denial-of-service (*DDoS*) attacks, and remote access trojans (*RATs*) are common across the region. These threats are exacerbated by low public awareness and insufficient cybersecurity education. In Azerbaijan, media outlets and opposition figures have reported increased targeting by malicious actors, while in Armenia, government websites have experienced repeated disruptions.

1 DCAF, „*Cybersecurity Governance Assessment: Armenia*. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance“, 2023, <https://surl.li/gmvptj>

2 Caliber.az, „*Cybersecurity in Azerbaijan: Threats, Challenges, Solutions*“. Caliber News, 2024, <https://surl.lt/unsyaj>

3 DCAF, „*Cybersecurity Governance Assessment: Armenia*. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance“, 2023, <https://surl.lu/zjkcuY>

4 *The Armenian Report*, „Armenia’s Cybersecurity Under Threat, Warns Top Official. *The Armenian Report*“, 2024, <https://surl.i.cc/eizwmk>

5 *CyberHUB-AM Team*, „Armenia Country Threat Landscape Report“, 2023, <https://surl.lu/ykvtfl>

Main Part

The politicization of cyberspace is most evident in the use of spyware during periods of heightened conflict. Between 2020 and 2021, Pegasus spyware—developed by the Israeli firm NSO Group—was reportedly deployed against officials, journalists, and civil society actors in both countries. Politico (2023) documented infections on devices belonging to Armenia’s ombudsman and foreign ministry staff, suggesting a coordinated surveillance campaign. Similar allegations have emerged in Azerbaijan, although official confirmation remains elusive.

These incidents highlight the blurred lines between cybersecurity and intelligence operations. The deployment of spyware raises ethical and legal questions about privacy, sovereignty, and the weaponization of digital tools. In fragile democracies, such practices can undermine public trust and erode institutional legitimacy.

Financial resources further differentiate the two countries. Azerbaijan’s cybersecurity initiatives are funded through the state budget, with allocations directed toward infrastructure protection and strategic planning. While exact figures are not publicly disclosed, the scale of investment suggests a prioritization of cybersecurity within national development agendas.⁶ Armenia, by contrast, faces budgetary constraints. The Audit Chamber’s 2023 report indicates that cybersecurity funding is insufficient to meet strategic goals, leaving critical systems exposed.⁷

International engagement remains a cornerstone of Armenia’s cybersecurity policy. The country has benefited from EU and NATO support, as well as bilateral cooperation with tech companies. However, reliance on external actors can limit strategic autonomy and complicate policy implementation. Azerbaijan, while also engaging internationally, has emphasized domestic capacity-building and regional leadership.

This regional cybersecurity landscape cannot be divorced from broader geopolitical dynamics. In recent statements, President Donald Trump emphasized that Europe must “*stop purchasing Russian oil that is funding the war,*” urging EU leaders to apply economic pressure on both Russia and China for their roles in sustaining conflict.⁸ Trump’s remarks reflect growing frustration with European inaction and highlight the interconnectedness of energy, security, and cyber policy.

European leaders, meanwhile, have called on Trump to defend their security interests in upcoming negotiations with President Vladimir Putin. In a joint statement, EU officials stressed that “*a just and lasting peace must respect international law, including the principles of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity*”.⁹ Their concern is that any peace deal struck without Ukraine’s full participation could embolden Russia and destabilize the region further.

Putin, for his part, has continued to leverage cyber capabilities as part of Russia’s broader strategic posture. European intelligence agencies have warned that Russian cyber operations are increasingly targeting critical infrastructure across Eastern Europe, including energy grids and communication networks. These developments have direct implications for the South Caucasus, where Russian influence remains strong and cyber vulnerabilities are acute.

6 Azernews.az, „Azerbaijan Strengthens Cybersecurity Ahead of COP29“. 2024, <https://surl.li/oejsjo>

7 CyberHUB-AM Team, „Armenia Country Threat Landscape Report“, 2023, <https://surl.li/wsfboa>

8 CNN, “Trump pushes Europe to stop buying Russian oil and up pressure on China in effort to end Ukraine war”, p. 1, 2025. <https://surl.li/ekhkey>

9 Aldjazeera, “Europe promises to ‘stand firmly’ with Ukraine as Trump, Putin plan summit”, p. 1, 2025. <https://surl.li/ofbcrb>

In this environment, the development of robust legal frameworks and ethical standards is essential. Cybersecurity must be grounded in democratic principles, including transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. Without these safeguards, technological advancement risks becoming a tool of repression rather than protection.

Conclusion

The cybersecurity landscape in the South Caucasus, particularly in Azerbaijan and Armenia, reflects a complex interplay of technological development, political ambition, institutional capacity, and geopolitical pressure. As both countries navigate the digital age, their efforts to secure cyberspace are shaped not only by internal priorities but also by external influences and regional tensions. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings of the analysis and expands on the broader implications for national security, democratic governance, and international cooperation.

Azerbaijan has emerged as a regional frontrunner in cybersecurity strategy. Its centralized governance model, embodied by the Special State Service for Communications and Information Security (SSSCIS), allows for coordinated policy implementation and rapid response to emerging threats. The 2023–2027 national strategy demonstrates a clear vision for infrastructure protection, legal reform, and international alignment. Azerbaijan’s ability to secure major events such as COP29 illustrates the operational maturity of its cybersecurity apparatus. However, challenges remain, including dependence on foreign technologies, limited transparency in budget allocations, and the need for greater public engagement in digital literacy.

Armenia, by contrast, faces significant structural and financial constraints. Despite adopting a digital transformation strategy, the country struggles with fragmented institutional frameworks, underfunded programs, and a shortage of trained professionals. Armenia’s reliance on international partnerships—while beneficial in the short term—raises concerns about strategic autonomy and long-term sustainability. Civil society organizations like CyberHUB-AM play a vital role in bridging gaps, but without robust state support, their impact is limited. The country’s vulnerability to cyberattacks, including those targeting government websites and civil society actors, underscores the urgency of comprehensive reform.

Both nations have experienced the weaponization of cyberspace, most notably through the deployment of Pegasus spyware. These incidents reveal how digital tools are increasingly used for surveillance, political control, and strategic advantage. The blurred boundaries between cybersecurity and intelligence operations pose ethical dilemmas and threaten democratic norms. In fragile political environments, unchecked cyber capabilities can erode public trust, suppress dissent, and destabilize institutions.

The broader geopolitical context amplifies these risks. Russia’s cyber influence in the region, Iran’s growing digital footprint, and Turkey’s strategic interests all contribute to a volatile cyber environment. European leaders have expressed concern over the erosion of democratic safeguards and the potential for cyber conflict to spill across borders. President Donald Trump’s recent remarks urging Europe to “stop funding adversaries through energy dependence” and to “take cybersecurity seriously as a matter of sovereignty” reflect a growing recognition that digital security is

inseparable from economic and political stability. Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin continues to position Russia as a cyber power, leveraging digital tools to project influence and challenge Western norms.

In this environment, cybersecurity must be reframed not merely as a technical challenge but as a multidimensional policy domain. It intersects with human rights, economic development, national defense, and international law. For Azerbaijan and Armenia, this means moving beyond reactive measures and investing in long-term resilience. Legal frameworks must be updated to reflect contemporary threats, institutional capacity must be strengthened, and public awareness must be cultivated. Moreover, ethical standards must guide cyber operations to prevent abuses and ensure accountability.

Regional cooperation, though currently limited, offers a path forward. Shared threat intelligence, joint training programs, and harmonized legal standards could help mitigate risks and build trust. International organizations such as NATO, the EU, and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) can facilitate dialogue and provide technical assistance. However, political will is essential. Without a commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and democratic values, cybersecurity efforts risk becoming tools of control rather than instruments of protection.

Ultimately, the future of cybersecurity in the South Caucasus depends on the choices made today. Azerbaijan and Armenia must decide whether to pursue isolated, competitive strategies or to embrace collaborative, principled approaches. The stakes are high: in an era where information is power, the integrity of cyberspace is fundamental to sovereignty, security, and human dignity. By investing in ethical governance, regional solidarity, and global engagement, both countries can transform cybersecurity from a source of vulnerability into a pillar of national strength.

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A NEW CHALLENGE FOR GEORGIA'S TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION SECURITY

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Abstract

The main supporters of the President D. Trump's initiated Zangezur Corridor (TRIPP) discussed in the article are the US, Armenian, Azerbaijani administrations and the Pan-Turkic forces of Turkey, which are trying to expand their influence in the Caspian Sea region, Central Asia and even on the projects of China's "Belt and Road Initiative". They rely on the points of the agreement that provide for: 1) unblocking economic and transport links in the region; 2) ensuring transport links between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan by Armenia along the banks of the Araks River; 3) construction of new transport links between Nakhchivan and other regions of Azerbaijan. Therefore, their statements about TRIPP as an alternative to the Georgia-EU Caspian hydrocarbons western "corridor" are unclear.

For example, in the Forbes, July 18, 2025, in an article titled "America's Growing Influence on the Zangezur: How a US-led Corridor Could Cut European Energy Prices and Counter Russia," Guney Yildiz writes: "This has serious implications for Europe's energy security. According to the IEA's 2025 World Energy Outlook, Europe will need 20 billion cubic meters more non-Russian gas by 2030. Normalized Armenian-Turkish borders could improve access to Caspian Sea reserves, potentially reducing import costs by 10-15 percent for companies like BP (Forbes, G. Yildiz, 2025).

This idea conflicts with the EU's BTC oil pipeline and the "Southern Gas Corridor" projects, which are supported by the European Union, as well as Georgia and Azerbaijan. This situation indicates the complex geopolitical dynamics in the region and the different interests of different parties regarding the development of energy routes.

We support that part of the experts who rightly disagree with this interpretation and present 4 arguments: a) the TRIPP agreement concerns only the movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo, and not the construction of a railway or the transportation of oil and gas; b) the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" (TRIPP) will pass through the territory of Armenia and will be controlled by the US military, i.e. on the 43 km bank of the Araks River, within the framework of one country, the US military will be located near the Russian Gyumri military base and the regional RF border guards, - one of the 4 detachments (Погранотряд) of Russian border guards deployed in Armenia. This one is directly deployed in Zangezur, in the city of Meghri (TASS, 2024); c) Deployment in the "Zangezur Corridor" the Russian border guards and the Gyumri base poses a risk to both the pipelines of European energy companies and the entire transport infrastructure; d) The starting/ending points of the "Zangezur Corridor" are Azerbaijan and NATO member Turkey, and not the Syunik region of Armenia (Zangezur), i.e. the starting/ending points of the cargo will be in Turkey and Azerbaijan and the RF border guard nothing to do there.

Azerbaijan and Turkey have already agreed on the Baku-Erzurum-Nakhchivan gas pipeline project in February 2020. In the memorandum, Ilham Aliyev and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed their mutual interest in building a gas pipeline from Erzurum and Iğdir to Nakhchivan, an autonomous region separated from the rest of Azerbaijan, via Georgia. The main topic of discussion during the talks was whether Turkey could help improve the energy security of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan autonomous region, which is threatened by the Syunik (Zangezur) corridor in Armenia.

Keywords: Zangezur Corridor, Caspian Sea, Central Asia, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, NATO, gas pipeline.

Introduction

In 2020-2024 the importance of transport and communication projects in strengthening Georgia's transit function was clearly highlighted. The value and place of this direction in Georgia's economic security policy are even better seen when we consider it on a regional scale. A trilateral regional agreement of this rank was signed between the USA, Azerbaijan and Armenia on August 8, 2025 and it was called the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" - TRIPP agreement.

In order to protect itself from the threats emanating from its northern neighbor, Georgia is trying to deepen relations with neighboring countries and make the South Caucasus an economically stable, peaceful and desirable region. Currently, with the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the process of being resolved, Georgia has traditionally maintained a peaceful relationship with these two countries, as only good-neighborly relations can further develop the South Caucasus in the interests of common economic interests.

This is all the more significant when, in the wake of the 2008-09 global financial crisis, the rise of middle-income and emerging economies further reshaped the global economic order, reflecting their growing influence in promoting economic growth and integration.¹ However, while globalization and technological progress have brought significant benefits, they have also brought significant costs, including rising inequality and climate change. First, with the progress of global integration, factors of production are increasingly moving freely across sectors and borders. The result is growing inequality. This trend, particularly noticeable in developed economies since the 1980s² and in developing countries since the late 1990s³, has led to a significant increase in income and wealth inequality. By 2020, more than 75% of the world's population lived in countries where income inequality had worsened since the 1990s.⁴

Given this context, Georgia is keen to continue to maintain close economic relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia. The implementation of large-scale projects in the South Caucasus region is not only of economic importance. In addition to such a burden, such projects are directly related to strengthening security. Over the years, the economic relationship between Georgia and Azerbaijan has established these two states as strategic partners. The "National Security Concept of Georgia" states that: "Projects for the creation of a unified energy, transport and communications network significantly contribute to the sustainability and development of both countries".⁵

Georgian Railway

It is true that the trilateral agreement of August 8, 2025 on the "Zangezur Corridor" refers to the Baku-Nakhchivan highway as the corridor route. In the event of the future operation of this corridor, it is likely that the completion of the "Iron Silk Way" project connecting Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) passing through Georgia will be postponed. The full opening of the BTK railway was planned back in 2017 - but its cargo turnover is already decreasing. With this communication,

1 The World Bank annual report 2007 (English), <https://surli.cc/briijy>

2 D. Rodrik. The New Global Economic Order. 2025, <https://surli.li/owgwxw>

3 Trade and Inequality in Developing Countries. 2005, <https://surli.li/anpuwo;>

4 GlobalAValuechains... <https://surli.li/bmlprv>

5 National Security Concept of Georgia. 2011, <https://mfa.gov.ge/national-security-concept;>

Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia would strengthen their transit function and, at the same time, fully and effectively engage in international rail transportation. This railway should contribute to the expansion of economic and political ties between the East and the West and bring Georgia even closer to the Single European Economic Area. The “National Security Concept of Georgia” emphasizes that it is very important to support the competitiveness of this transport corridor through cooperation with Azerbaijan.⁶

In addition, events in 2020-24 have developed so dynamically that it is necessary to reflect new political realities in EU projects. The so-called 44-day war in Karabakh, as well as the war in Ukraine, elections in Armenia and Iran, the Israeli-Hamas confrontation and the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in September 2021 - these new realities are bringing major changes to the region. The fact is that the current governments of Armenia and the Russian Federation did not immediately hide that they would try to open transport links with Azerbaijan and Turkey via Armenia. Armenia plans to build a new railway corridor from Meghri to Tabriz to Iran, parallel to the existing Derbent-Baku-Astara road in Azerbaijan. Therefore, Tehran is a competitor to the Baku-Meghri (Syunik region of Armenia, former Zangezur region)-Nakhchivan, or “Gateway to Turan”, initiative, which coincides with the US-initiated TRIPP. Iran has stated that it will not allow Baku to have transit hegemony along this new route along with the already existing Derbent-Baku-Astara, or “North-South” transport corridor.

Yerevan and Tehran want to balance the “North-South” Azerbaijani route with the Tabriz-Meghri railway. Significant changes are also observed in the EU TRACECA program. One of the goals of the trilateral ceasefire agreement brokered by the Russian Federation on November 9, 2020, was to establish communications through Armenia to the Caspian Sea coast.

We believe that it is more justified to build the Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan railway line, that is, to continue the Georgia-Turkey route (BTK), on which the Turkey-Azerbaijan memorandum was signed in the spring of 2020 before the 44-day Karabakh war. This railway would be much safer than the reconstruction of the old Soviet railway Nakhchivan-Baku. Despite the fact that the Baku-Nakhchivan railway is the closest route connecting Azerbaijan with Turkey, its construction needs to be started from scratch - according to a study conducted by the international organization IA in 2015, 104 km of railway from the Azerbaijani city of Horadiz to the Nakhchivan city of Ordubad have been demolished, 12 stations and 3 tunnels have been completely destroyed.⁷ According to an approximate cost estimate, the construction of a 400 km modern “Ankara-Sivas” railway in Turkey in 2020 cost 1.5 billion euros.⁸ If we take into account that the Horadiz-Ordubad section is 4 times shorter, then the construction of the railway in Zangezur alone, without the cost of stations and tunnels, will cost 375 million euros.

The interests of Russia and Iran include not Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, but the exploitation of Adler-Tbilisi-Gyumri-Kars and the connection of Gyumri not only with Turkey, but also with Russia and Iran, especially since this railway is still in excellent condition. For this reason, the US-initiated “Zangezur Corridor” (TRIPP) was immediately opposed by Iran. The same can be said about Turkey’s expressed desire to join the projects of the Chinese-initiated “Belt and Road Initia-

6 Ibid.

7 Envisioning peace: An analysis of grassroots views on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, <https://surl.li/imjdrq>

8 А. Суков. Золотые рельсы. Сколько денег закопают в проект «высокоскоростной железной дороги» <https://surl.li/syqqgg>

tive” (BRI). Ankara has conflicts in its neighborhood and in the Mediterranean region. Amid the conflicts in Central Asia, Ankara may find its already tense relations with Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing even worse mainly due to the “Greater Turan” pan-Islamic project, which is on the same TRIPP route.⁹

The geopolitical reality in Central Asia has already changed. Turkey is no longer the leading economic player in the region, as it was in the 1990s. Currently, China and Russia dominate as investors and trading partners. Therefore, Turkey supports TRIPP, which will help it implement the trans-Caspian projects of the old pan-Turkic “Gate of Turan” (Turkey-Central Asia), so that Central Asian resources and cargo are more oriented not towards China and Russia, but - again - towards Turkey. The fact is that Chinese and Russian companies have leading positions in the region’s transport and energy sectors. China and Russia are also trying to limit pan-Turkic influence in Central Asia.

Turkey and Azerbaijan have always continued to cooperate despite these challenges. On February 25, 2020, a few months before the Second Karabakh War, the leaders of the two countries signed a memorandum on the Kars-Igdir-Aralık-Diluchu-Sadarak-Nakhchivan-Julfa railway project. This agreement indicates that despite the existing challenges, Turkey and Azerbaijan were still trying to develop regional transport infrastructure. However, the successful implementation of the project depended not only on bilateral cooperation, but also on regional geopolitical dynamics and international economic factors.

The Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan railway line, as a continuation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, was then considered more effective than the restoration-reconstruction of the Kars-Gyumri-Nakhchivan-Meghari-Baku Soviet railway. This is an important conclusion from the point of view of the development of regional transport infrastructure. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the interests of Russia and Iran are not the completion of Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars (BTK), - they want to restore the Adler-Tbilisi-Gyumri-Kars route. In addition, they are interested in establishing a connection from Gyumri not only with Turkey, but also with Iran. This indicates the different geopolitical interests in the region and the strategic importance of transport routes.

As noted above, in February 2020, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Turkey signed a memorandum on the construction of a railway line between Nakhchivan and the Turkish city of Kars. This project is an extension of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which will need to be reactivated, since the trilateral agreement on the “Zangezur Corridor” of August 8, 2025 does not mention the railway and only indicates a highway. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev noted the importance of the Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan project in overcoming Nakhchivan’s economic isolation caused by the conflict with Armenia. According to him, this railway would improve the export of Nakhchivan’s products and contribute to the economic development of the region.

Although various agreements mention the possibility of laying communications through the Syunik (Zangezur) region of Armenia, this idea looks more like a fantasy than a real plan. The Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway is still sufficient for Turkish-Azerbaijani economic cooperation.

Historically, the restoration of the Kars-Gyumri-Nakhchivan-Meghari-Baku railway was dis-

⁹ Green, Anna. How the War in Ukraine Intersects With the South Caucasus, Part II (амер. англ.). EVN Report (9 января 2023). <https://surl.li/nszunq>

cussed as early as 2009 during the negotiations within the framework of the so-called Turkish-Armenian “football diplomacy”, but this idea did not develop. From a practical point of view, unlike the highway, as already mentioned, the continuation of the railway through Armenia is unlikely in the near future. All this indicates that the restoration of transport links in the region is a complex and long-term process, associated with many political and economic challenges (see Figure 1). Financing is the main challenge for the implementation of the land “Turanian Gateway” project. The highway along the Araks River is operational, but the restoration of the railway requires significant financial resources. Figure 1 shows the inactive railway as a dotted line.

At the same time, Turkey’s participation in the global projects of the “Belt and Road Initiative” has already been decided, despite Ankara’s confrontation with both its immediate neighbors and other Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, Turkey’s desire to get involved in the Chinese “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) and, especially, the US-initiated TRIPP projects in Central Asia is likely to complicate its already tense relations with Moscow, Tehran, and Beijing. This indicates the complex diplomatic and economic relations in our region, and their further strain.

Regarding the US-initiated TRIPP and the maritime dimension of the Turkish “Turanian Gateway”, it is worth noting that cargo traffic in the Mediterranean-Black Sea basin and towards the world oceans is steadily increasing. Experts advise Georgian ports to make every effort to capture Central Asian cargo, although competition in maritime cargo transportation is constantly growing. Also interesting are the active steps of the Turkish government to turn the country into a transport “hub”. Namely: 1) In the 90s, the reconstruction of all five Turkish ports on the Black Sea was completed; 2) A large railway junction was created in Ankara and a new airport was built in Istanbul; 3) In 2013, a road tunnel was laid under the Bosphorus Strait, and in 2018, the “Marmaray” railway tunnel; 4) On June 26, 2021, the construction of the “Istanbul Canal” began, which will be completed in 2027. The “Istanbul Canal” project is especially interesting for Georgian ports.

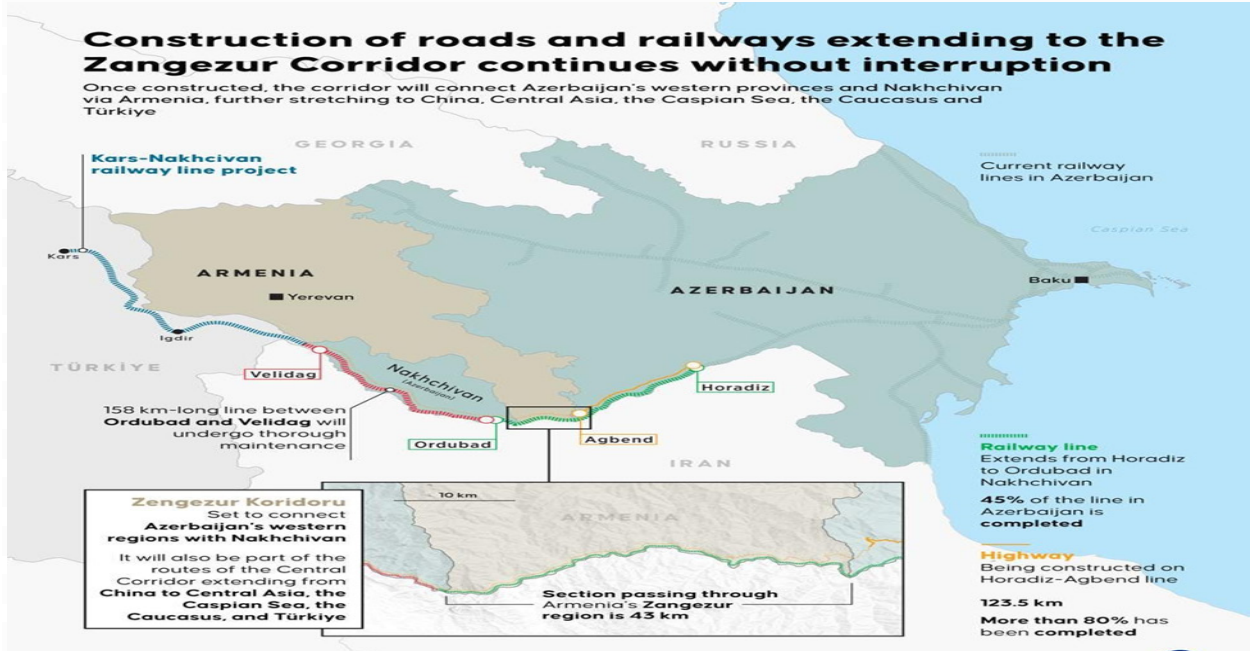


Figure 1.¹⁰

10 America’s High-Stakes Bet On Zangezur: How A U.S.-Led Corridor Could Slash Europe’s Energy Costs and Counter Russia 18:06 https://news.am/eng/news/895072.html#google_vignette

Georgian ports

What is the maritime dimension of the “Turanian Gateway” that forms part of the “Greater Turan” and the US-initiated TRIPP projects, similar to each other, as competitors to the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI)? This is, first of all, the corridor of Islamic countries stretching from the Balkans to Altai through the Bosphorus Strait. For this, Turkey is pedaling ecological problems on the Bosphorus, which became especially acute in 1994, after the sinking of the Cypriot tanker “Nasiya”, when hundreds of thousands of tons of oil spilled into the strait in the center of Istanbul. At that time, the Bosphorus Strait threatened the megapolis with an ecological catastrophe. After that, discussions began on the construction of the “Istanbul Canal” bypassing the Bosphorus and the creation of an environmental fund for the strait. At the same time, restrictions were imposed on the passage of “merchant ships” through the straits, which are free to navigate under the Montreux Convention.

Thus, Turkey has long been using navigation restrictions and may revive the idea of creating a “Straits Environmental Fund” voiced several years ago, which would involve paying a fee for tankers crossing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Ankara explains the introduction of this fee by Turkey’s accession to various environmental conventions.

At first glance, the “Istanbul Canal” will also create certain problems for the ports of the middle corridor in terms of increasing maritime transportation in the Black Sea. However, the construction of a 44 km long, 275 m wide and 20.75 m deep canal near Istanbul can “contribute” to the opening of the Abkhazian section of the Georgian Railway, that is, to the development of land transportation by Russia itself. The so-called. Russia will be primarily interested in the opening of the Abkhazian Railway, because in this way it will gain access to the railway highways of its allies - Iran, India. Through the Georgian Railway, Russia will be able to export oil products to the West not only by sea, but also by land - via the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. This would be much cheaper than transporting oil through the Bosphorus Strait with its expected annual quotas (environmental restrictions), or using the future Istanbul Canal (the construction of which is scheduled for completion in 2027) with paid services, which would significantly increase the cost of Russian and Kazakh oil. The fact is that after the construction of this canal and the transportation of Russian and Kazakh oil through it, Turkey will restrict the free movement of dangerous goods through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits in peacetime, in accordance with environmental requirements. Although the straits are considered neutral waters by the Montreux Convention of 1936 and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, environmental restrictions were rarely used at the time of the adoption of these conventions. Now Turkey can impose such restrictions, which will make the use of the straits very expensive.

The opportunities for sea transportation of cargo for the countries of the South Caucasus have a wide range in their economies. Georgia is one of them and is no exception. Currently, three sea ports and two oil terminals are functional in Georgia, and the construction of an additional one - the Anaklia port - is only a matter of time. This is due to the fact that the existing port and railway infrastructure in Georgia cannot meet modern requirements, especially in the context of the Rus-

sian-Ukrainian war, when they have to cope with an increased volume of cargo.¹¹ The construction of the Anaklia port is not only in the interests of the Georgian side: all countries involved in TRACECA have an interest in the construction of the mentioned port, as this will allow Georgia to transport more cargo supplied by them than it could before¹².

The idea of the “Canal Istanbul” was born 11 years ago, but its implementation began only in 2021 due to internal and external obstacles. The construction of the canal will last 6 years and will cost 15 billion dollars. The above confirms that there is competition in the region for the creation of transport and logistics hubs. Turkey, Georgia and other countries are trying to strengthen their positions in this area. At the same time, geopolitical interests and regional conflicts have a significant impact on these processes. The implementation of the aforementioned “canal” project is a strategic task, which, on the one hand, can defuse the Bosphorus and, on the other hand, increase Turkey’s influence on a global scale - that is, promote the idea of “Greater Turan”.

The increase in the intensity of navigation in the Turkish Straits and the need to build a new canal can be confirmed by the following data: in 1938, 4.5 thousand ships entered the Bosphorus, in 1985 - 24 thousand, in 1996-2000 - already 47-50 thousand ... In an exclusive interview with Trend, Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Adil Karaismailoglu noted that due to the growth of economic activity in the Black Sea basin, this figure may reach 86 thousand in the coming decade. However, according to the Turkish Ministry of Transport, the number of ships passing through the Bosphorus has gradually decreased over the past 15 years: from 88 in 2006 it reduced to 54 in 2020, but increased tonnage.

Geopolitical Calculations and Rivalry

The success of the corridor will fundamentally alter regional power dynamics. Iran faces the prospect of losing 20-30 percent of its transit role, disrupting critical trade links, including the 43000 Turkish trucks that pass through Central Asia each year. Russia faces a loss of \$10-20 billion in revenue over a decade and expects a 10-15 percent reduction in its indirect influence on European energy markets.¹³ (Forbes, 2025).

The “Zangezur Corridor” is a defining test of the US’s ability to create mutually beneficial solutions in conflict regions.

Meanwhile, China plans to increase the efficiency of the Belt and Road by \$20-30 billion by 2030 through improved connectivity. However, Beijing must balance these gains with the risk of reducing its reliance on Chinese-controlled routes. The new “corridor” could turn Turkey into a critical energy hub with direct access to Turkic-speaking countries, potentially bringing it \$10-15 billion in annual transit revenue by 2030.

Some energy companies are also looking to cash in. While the Zangezur deal mentions energy in general, SOCAR is expanding pipeline capacity, while ADNOC will service hydrogen joint ventures. BP and Chevron are forecasting \$5-10 billion in investment from increased export revenues. However, the “political deadlock” could increase the project’s costs by 20 percent, while

11 D. Beradze. In 2023 in Georgia... <https://shorturl.at/e2x6C>

12 Z. Maghradze. Who will listen he will be winner. 2025. <https://tbilisipost.ge/news/zurab-maghradze-vin-moismens-is-moigbs---male-saqartvelos-tsiurad-35-trilionis-tvirtebi-moadgeba-gvinda-rom-fuli-darches-pirvel-rigshi-qartvel-khalkhs-/6248>;

13 Americas high stakes bet... <https://surl.lt/nucdke>

regulatory delays could push the timeline beyond a viable investment horizon.

Turkish businesses operating in the eastern Anatolian provinces predict a 310 percent increase in export volumes if the corridor is implemented, from \$160 million to \$500 million per year. This economic momentum provides a strong incentive for diplomatic engagement.

Conclusions

Despite the compelling economic picture, significant risks remain. Observers place a 60 percent chance of negotiations breaking down, potentially delaying the project by 12-18 months. According to Lloyd's, as of June 2025, if negotiations break down, commodity prices could rise by 20 percent and insurance premiums could rise by 20 percent.

This process has not been without negative consequences for Russia and Iran. Iran has always opposed any changes to the northern borders surrounding the South Caucasus region. The "Zangezur Corridor" would ensure the free movement of people and goods between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan and from there to Central Asia, without passing through Iranian or Russian territory, which would strengthen the positions of anti-Iranian pan-Turkism.

Turkey strongly supports the project. Although Armenia and Azerbaijan previously had good relations with Moscow, the situation has become tense in recent years. According to US officials, the "Zangezur Corridor" would bring billions of dollars in trade turnover to the US annually and reduce the influence of Russia, Iran and China in the region.

Armenia has categorically rejected discussions about leasing or transferring territorial control. Government spokeswoman Nazeli Baghdasaryan has stated firmly that "...Armenia has not considered and will not consider transferring control of its sovereign territory to any third party." This resistance underscores a fundamental challenge facing U.S. mediators.

The success of the Zangezur initiative demonstrates Washington's ability to create solutions that resist the influence of rivals while serving tangible economic interests. Failure could indicate a diminished U.S. ability to shape negative outcomes in conflict regions.

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Z. Maghradze. Who will listen he will be winner. 2025. <https://surl.li/eqdppt> (Geo);
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SECURITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO AND ITS PARTNERS

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the complex security challenges shaping the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region, with a focus on evolving global geopolitical dynamics, regional competition, and the broader transformation of the international security architecture. The region's strategic location and the intersection of diverse interests underscore its vital role as a focal point for both global and regional powers. The study emphasizes that sustainable security should not be defined solely by military resources and defense capabilities; instead, it is closely linked to economic stability, socio-economic development, and the quality of regional cooperation. A key contribution of this paper is its integration of economic and social dimensions into the security discourse, highlighting their direct correlation with long-term resilience and stability. The paper employs a comparative analysis approach, examining international examples to support this argument. For instance, it looks at the United States, where Reagan's economic policy and Milton Friedman's ideas laid the foundation for strengthening defense capabilities, as well as the cases of Finland and Sweden, where high living standards, social stability, and effective governance facilitated enhanced security and successful NATO integration. Based on this analysis, the paper proposes a three-pillar strategic framework to strengthen security in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region:

1. Implementation of economic reforms and promotion of dynamic socio-economic growth.
2. Deepening regional cooperation in military, economic, and political spheres.
3. Closer and more intensive integration with NATO and EU institutional systems.

According to the authors' perspective, this approach not only ensures long-term stability for the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region but also enhances its role as a resilient partner within the global security framework. Consequently, the paper underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary understanding of security, where economic and social dimensions are as crucial as military capabilities.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Black Sea region, security, economic stability, military capabilities, regional integration, global geopolitics

Introduction

The South Caucasus and the Black Sea region are strategically significant areas where geopolitical interests, security challenges, and the activities of international partners converge. Security issues in this region are often analyzed through the lens of military strategies and intelligence services, as well as the accessibility and effectiveness of intelligence information. Additionally, discussions frequently center on the geopolitical ambitions of specific states or alliances, with these interests being evaluated in relation to the security of the countries involved.

However, providing security goes beyond just military capabilities. We believe a country's or region's security is directly linked to its socio-economic development and economic stability. The reasoning is clear: if a state lacks adequate resources, including financial ones, its defense and security systems cannot operate effectively.

Moreover, it is essential for any system, whether in healthcare, defense, sports, education, security, or foreign relations, to be built on a solid economic foundation. Such a system should not rely solely on the skills or judgments of individual leaders but should instead be structured around incentives that reduce the need for direct leadership intervention. Systems founded on weak economic bases tend to be inefficient and are at a higher risk of corruption, which increases the chances of systemic failure.

The Interconnection Between Economics and Security: The Example of Reagan and Friedman

The importance of establishing a sound economic foundation for national security systems is well illustrated by the developments in the United States during the 1980s. Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, served as an advisor to President Ronald Reagan on economic affairs, thus becoming the intellectual pillar of what came to be known as “Reaganomics.” While Friedman did not directly develop defense strategies, his concepts significantly influenced the United States' defense capabilities.

1. Strengthening the Economic Base

Friedman argued that a strong defense must rest upon a robust and flexible economy. Following his recommendations, Reagan reduced taxes and relieved the market of excessive regulation, which accelerated the pace of U.S. economic growth¹.

2. Abolition of Mandatory Military Service

As early as the 1970s, Friedman had actively advocated for the transition to a volunteer, contract-based army. During Reagan's presidency, this model was fully institutionalized: the U.S. military became volunteer-based and operated under a contractual system.

3. Priorities in Government Spending

Friedman maintained that government expenditure should be kept to a minimum, yet he considered defense to be one of the few areas where state spending was justified.

4. The “Strategic Defense Initiative” (SDI, also known as “Star Wars”)

Although Friedman was not the architect of the program, his ideas about free markets and

¹ <https://sur1.li/ozvzko> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

technological innovation provided intellectual support for Reagan's team in justifying investments in military-technological advancements.

The Impact of Friedman's Ideas on National Defense Capacity

1. Economic Growth → Expansion of the Defense Budget

Guided by Friedman's advice, Reagan pursued tax cuts and deregulation. As a result, the economy accelerated significantly, particularly during 1983–1988². A strong economy became the basis for nearly doubling the military budget: defense spending rose from 176 billion USD in 1981 to 321 billion USD in 1989³.

2. Effects of Abolishing Mandatory Military Service

As noted, Friedman opposed conscription. Under his influence, Reagan's administration transformed the military entirely into a contract-based system. This resulted in:

- Higher motivation among service members,
- An increase in professionalism,
- A more technologically driven and effective force.

3. Priorities in Government Expenditure

As highlighted, Friedman believed that governments should minimize excessive spending that hinders economic growth, including social programs. However, he regarded defense as a fundamental responsibility of the state. This position provided Reagan with both economic and intellectual justification for increasing defense spending while simultaneously limiting certain social programs.

Accordingly, in Reagan's reforms:

- Social programs (the legacy of the "Great Society") were curtailed,
- In line with this reasoning, budgetary resources-including those allocated to defense and armaments-were significantly increased.

4. Financing Technological Innovation

Friedman's free-market ideas strengthened the argument that investment in innovation could quickly provide a country with a strategic advantage. This opened the way for the financing of projects such as:

- The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or "Star Wars") - an attempt to create an anti-missile shield,
- The development of stealth technology,
- The modernization of computer and communication systems.

5. The Outcome of the Cold War

In our view, the combination of economic growth, the formation of a professional army, and military investments (all of which were rooted in Friedman's ideas) created a powerful synergy that significantly contributed to the United States' strategic superiority during the Cold War. Accordingly, we argue that America's strategic advantage became one of the decisive factors in bringing the Cold War to an end. The United States succeeded in gaining a substantial advantage over

² *United States GDP*. - <https://surl.lt/kenkcg> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

³ *United States Defense Budget Data* - <https://surl.li/neyyyc> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

the Soviet Union, which was unable to match the pace of technological and defense development due to its stalled economic progress. This is a very huge claim. You need more sources/authors to justify your position. Only Friedman is not enough. Though you can humbly suggest.

Thus, Friedman's main contribution to defense lay in establishing a sound economic foundation, supporting the model of a professional army, and providing justification for innovative military investments. Reagan harnessed these elements to build military superiority, which, in our view, ultimately became one of the key factors in the geopolitical turning point that marked the end of the Cold War.

From this perspective, when discussing the security of Georgia and the South Caucasus, primary attention must be directed toward their economic conditions—that is, the extent to which the countries of the region are prepared to shoulder the “burden” of security. The question is twofold: on the one hand, what contribution can they make to strengthening global security, and on the other, how can they enhance their own security and that of the wider region?

Regional Experience: Finland and Sweden

In recent years, the cases of Finland and Sweden have clearly demonstrated how security policies may change even in traditionally neutral countries. Nations that had long refrained from any mention of NATO membership proceeded to join the Alliance at an accelerated pace:

- Finland joined NATO on 4 April 2023⁴,
- Sweden joined NATO on 7 March 2024⁵.

This development occurred for two main reasons. **Firstly**, both countries possess highly developed defense systems. For example: **Finland** Places particular emphasis on land forces, due to its proximity to Russia and its extensive land border.insert citation here at the end of the sentence. That is how Chicago style applies it.

- It is capable of mobilizing up to 280,000 troops - an exceptionally high number for the region.
- Its reserve system is highly developed.
- Its ground forces are equipped with a wide range of artillery systems, Leopard 2 tanks, and advanced air defense systems.
- Its air force is also strong: Finland has acquired F-35A Lightning II aircraft (a more advanced generation compared to the Gripen), which will significantly enhance its air capabilities in the future.

And Sweden⁶ has traditionally been well-prepared in air and naval components.

- It operates JAS 39 Gripen fourth-generation fighter aircraft and possesses modern aviation infrastructure.
- It maintains a powerful navy, particularly in terms of submarines (such as the A26 *Blekinge*) and modern corvettes.
- Its land forces (*armén*) are comparatively smaller but are highly professional and equipped with modern weaponry.

4 Information on Finland's accession to NATO - <https://surl.li/dihsjq> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

5 Information on Sweden's accession to NATO - <https://surl.li/ytkpmm> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

6 Information on Sweden's defense capabilities - <https://surl.li/vvrfyp> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

Secondly, both Sweden and Finland rank among the countries with the highest living standards worldwide. Without such levels of socio-economic development and the financial resources that naturally accompany them, these states would not have been able to create world-class defense systems.

Human Development and Economic Indicators (2024)

Country	Human Development Index (HDI, 2024)	GDP per capita (2024, USD)
Sweden	HDI \approx 0.959 — among the highest globally ⁷ ; classified as <i>very high human development</i>	57,213 — 15th place worldwide ⁸
Finland	HDI \approx 0.948 — also within the <i>very high human development</i> category, very close to Sweden, though slightly lower on the HDI scale	54,774 — 18th place worldwide

Thirdly, both countries (Finland and Sweden) skillfully leveraged the changing global geopolitical environment. Transformations in the international order facilitated their path to NATO membership. As neighboring states to Russia, their neutrality had long been dictated by Russia’s opposition to their NATO accession. Fearing conflict with Russia, both countries refrained from joining the Alliance and maintained a neutral status. However, as Russia began to weaken in the context of the war against Ukraine, Finland and Sweden seized the geopolitical opportunity and entered NATO. Is this really the main reason or conversely, Russia’s aggression?

It is essential to note that both countries were already well-prepared for membership in terms of defense capabilities and standards of living. Without such readiness, accession would not have been possible. (This also provides a counter-argument to skeptics in our own country who claim that strengthening defense is meaningless, as “Russia cannot be defeated in war.” Such reasoning shifts the discussion to a different dimension, one beyond the scope of this particular paper. We intend to explore this perspective in future research.)

Implications for the South Caucasus and the Black Sea

From all of the above, the answer to the central research question is straightforward: ensuring the security of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea requires, on the one hand, that countries of the region implement reforms capable of producing rapid, transformative socio-economic progress. These reforms would boost the development of these states and draw international attention, not only for their geopolitical significance but also as emerging nations with growing security potential. In this context, the region would be seen not only as a beneficiary of international support but also as an active contributor to NATO, the Black Sea community, and broader global security efforts.

On the other hand, while it may appear utopian to some, the long-term prospect of integration among the South Caucasus states—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—remains critical. If not as

⁷ Human Development Index (HDI) 2025 - <https://surl.li/blwlit> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

⁸ <https://surl.li/ihdyep> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

a confederation, then at least in the form of a military or economic-political union. This is admittedly a long-term vision, but in our view, socio-economic development in the region will naturally generate momentum for such an idea.

Prospects for Socio-Economic Growth and Integration

This paper could have concluded with the foregoing summary. It is crucial to consider how Georgia and the broader region can achieve rapid socio-economic growth and enhance defense while simultaneously establishing a foundation for integration, whether con-federal or military, or economic-political in nature.

1. Achieving Rapid Socio-Economic Growth in Georgia and the Region

In the 21st century, under the conditions of modern scientific and technological progress, the world has become “smaller”—geographical distance no longer presents an obstacle to international cooperation and investment. In effect, the world is “saturated with free capital,” which seeks the most attractive and secure investment environments.

Thus, Georgia and the region must transform into an “oasis of economic activity”—one of the most favorable and secure environments globally for starting and conducting business. This would attract free capital, fueling rapid, transformative economic growth. A benchmark of at least double-digit (10% or higher) annual economic growth should be established for the next 15 to 20 years. Reforms should focus on minimizing the state’s role, adopting liberal policies, and creating an environment that fosters entrepreneurship. If this approach cannot be implemented across the entire region, it is essential that at least one country, such as Georgia, takes the lead and serves as a model for others to follow.

2. Integration of the South Caucasus States

In the long term, we believe integration among Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan is inevitable. If not in the form of a confederal state, then at least as a military-economic-political union. Such integration, in our assessment, would constitute one of the fundamental pillars of regional security. It would:

- Position the South Caucasus as a force to be reckoned with internationally,
- Enhance the region’s role in contributing to global security,
- Enable the region to keep pace with global progress more effectively,
- Allow the region to respond to emerging challenges with agility and efficiency.

Should political will or mutual agreement prove insufficient at present, advancing socio-economic development will, in due course, place integration on the agenda. It is noteworthy that even in the second half of the 18th century, King Erekle II entertained the idea of a Georgian-Armenian state. This initiative, actively promoted by Shamir Shahamirian, a prominent Armenian merchant based in India, envisioned a united polity under Erekle’s leadership. However, the project collapsed following the Persian invasion of 1795 and was subsequently forgotten.⁹

⁹ S. D. Aslanian, „*From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*“. University of California Press, 2011; Aslanian, S. D. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*. University of California Press, 2011.

Current Priorities for the South Caucasus and the Black Sea

One may reasonably argue that the measures outlined above pertain to the medium- and long-term consideration. Thus, the immediate question arises: what must be done today for the security of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea? The answer is simple: The implementation of these measures must begin immediately to enhance the region's appeal to NATO and the broader international community. This will, in turn, encourage external support and assistance¹⁰. Currently, as Russia's influence declines, the United States has grown increasingly active in the region. Washington has taken on the responsibility for the development and security of the Zangezur Corridor, indicating a direct U.S. involvement in the Caucasus to replace Russia¹¹.

Armenia has emerged as a strategic partner of the United States¹². The U.S. now hosts Armenia and Azerbaijan, jointly outlining future partnership strategies and action plans for the Caucasus and the Black Sea region¹³. It should also be noted, however, that the U.S. has suspended the Strategic Partnership Memorandum with Georgia¹⁴. Nonetheless, under appropriate policies, U.S. support and strategic partnership could be restored within a short time-frame.

In summary, countries in the Caucasus region need to adopt the right political orientation and collaborate closely with NATO, the United States, and the European Union. Given Russia's weakened position and the interests of NATO, the U.S., and the EU in the region, this cooperation is crucial. It aligns with the long-term measures previously mentioned and is essential for establishing and reinforcing security guarantees for both the South Caucasus and the Black Sea regions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To strengthen the security of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region, the following measures are essential:

1. Ensuring Rapid Socio-Economic Growth

- Advancing economic liberalization and reducing state intervention in business development,

- Creating an attractive investment environment,
- Achieving and sustaining double-digit economic growth for 15-20 years.

2. Regional Integration

- Enhancing cooperation in military, economic, and political domains,
- Formulating a joint regional security policy among the countries of the South Caucasus.

3. Close International Cooperation

- Establishing and maintaining strategic relations with NATO, the United States, and the European Union,

- Maximizing international support to address regional challenges.

¹⁰ Recommendations and documents for NATO integration (IPAP, MAP) are not focused solely on strengthening defense; they also encompass measures aimed at enhancing the rule of law, strengthening the economy, reducing corruption, and improving social welfare.

¹¹ <https://surl.li/xhjzfv> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

¹² <https://surl.li/iipoin> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

¹³ <https://surl.li/ezfyqg> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

¹⁴ <https://surl.li/tmosta> გადამოწმებული 25.09.2025

In conclusion, the consolidation of regional security can be achieved only through a threefold strategy: strengthening economic capacity, fostering regional cooperation, and securing the sustained support of international partners.

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GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE END OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: THE IMPORTANCE OF RED LINES

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Abstract

This study analyzes the geopolitical implications of the Russia-Ukraine war and argues for the critical importance of establishing "red lines" for ensuring sustainable peace and global security. The research demonstrates that the absence of clearly defined boundaries for aggressor states creates conditions for violence escalation and undermines international stability.

Through analysis of historical precedents, contemporary diplomatic initiatives, and expert assessments, the study argues that any peace settlement without firm constraints on Russia's imperial ambitions will likely result in more extensive conflicts in the future. The conflict transcends regional confrontation boundaries and fundamentally impacts the global security architecture.

The research highlights systemic confrontation between authoritarian and democratic values, representing an existential struggle against the liberal international order. Geoeconomically, the conflict has caused global turbulence, energy and food security crises, particularly acutely affecting developing countries.

The paper analyzes the 2025 Alaska summit between Presidents Trump and Putin and its outcomes. Concurrently, it examines European leaders' positions and the dangers of "appeasement policy" toward Russia, drawing parallels to the historical Munich Agreement. The study concludes that power balance and clear signals to aggressors constitute stronger deterrent mechanisms than general warnings.

The main conclusion establishes that clearly defining "red lines" in international politics is a decisive factor for limiting violence escalation and achieving effective conflict management. The experience gained from the Russia-Ukraine war may become the foundation for a new security architecture, where solid rules and clear boundaries ensure sustainable peace and contribute to preventing large-scale geopolitical crises.

Keywords: red lines, Russia-Ukraine war, geopolitics, international security, appeasement policy, NATO, European security architecture, peace negotiations.

*“You were given the choice between war and dishonour:
You chose dishonour and as a result you will have war.”*

Winston Churchill, 1938

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation, under the order of President Vladimir Putin, launched a full-scale military assault on Ukraine, officially termed a “special military operation.” The attack was carried out along three main directions: from the north through Belarus toward Kyiv, from the east along the Russia-Ukraine border toward Donbas and Kharkiv, and from the south through Crimea toward Kherson and Mariupol. This assault was clear confirmation that Russia had crossed all red lines regarding Ukraine’s sovereignty, a process that began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Donbas.¹

Initially, Russia’s strategy involved a lightning war (“blitzkrieg”) aimed at capturing Kyiv and toppling Ukraine’s government. However, Ukraine’s unexpected and determined resistance, the rapid increase in Western military assistance, and significant flaws in Russian military planning resulted in the collapse of Russia’s initial plan. By the end of March 2022, Russian forces retreated from the Kyiv direction and regrouped in eastern Ukraine, where the conflict transitioned into a phase of positional warfare.

The war has escalated into the largest military confrontation in post-Cold War Europe, causing a significant humanitarian crisis—more than 8 million Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes, both within the country and beyond its borders.² Simultaneously, the conflict has been accompanied by international economic consequences, including a global energy crisis and rising food prices, as Ukraine represents one of the world’s largest grain exporter.

Despite the fact that the international community immediately condemned Russia’s aggression and imposed large-scale sanctions, Russia continued its military campaign, indicating that the “red lines” previously established by the West proved insufficiently clear and convincing to deter the aggressor. Therefore, it can be said that if the current war between Russia and Ukraine does not end in such a way that clear red lines are established for the aggressor, there is a high probability that the world will face a more extensive conflict in the future.

Main Part

The Russia-Ukraine war transcends the boundaries of a regional conflict and has a fundamental impact on the global security architecture. First and foremost, this conflict poses a direct challenge to the international order established after World War II, which is based on principles defined by the UN Charter, such as refraining from the use of force and respecting the territorial integrity of states. When a nuclear power violates these norms, it creates a precedent that may encourage other revisionist states. There are concerns about the possible weakening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, particularly if countries like Russia or China attempt to transfer nuclear technologies to adversaries of the United States.

¹ Michael Kofman and Ryan Evans, “Putin’s War in Ukraine: A Strategic Catastrophe,” *War on the Rocks*, 2023.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Ukraine Refugee Situation,” Operational Data Portal, accessed 2024.

Moreover, the conflict has revealed systemic confrontation between authoritarian and democratic liberal values. Russia's invasion of Ukraine may represent an existential struggle against the liberal international order. The outcome of this conflict will determine how much this order will maintain its legitimacy in the future.

From a geo-economic perspective, the war has caused significant turbulence in the global economy. The conflict in Ukraine has provoked an energy and food security crisis, which has been particularly acutely reflected in developing countries. This indicates that the consequences of European conflict affect the world's most vulnerable nations. The outcome of the Ukraine conflict will determine whether the multipolar world will be organized on principles of cooperation or conflict.

First it should be noted the content of an event held at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where prospects for peace negotiations in the Russia-Ukraine war were discussed. The main idea of the document is that despite the Russia-Ukraine war currently being in a stalemate, Russia is experiencing significant military, economic, and political difficulties. Security experts critically assess the possible future policy of the United States, which might make concessions to Russia, believing that this would only strengthen Putin's imperial ambitions and would not guarantee lasting peace. They support implementing maximum pressure on Russia through strengthening sanctions and increasing aid to Ukraine, in order to create conditions for a peace agreement acceptable to Ukraine. Experts express skepticism about the possibility of achieving lasting peace in the current situation and criticize the US administration's conduct of direct negotiations with Russia without Ukraine's participation. Experts recommend increasing pressure on Russia, strengthening aid to Ukraine, and conducting negotiations with the mandatory participation of Ukraine and European allies. The main message of the document is that a hasty peace agreement based on concessions to Russia will not be sustainable and may further strengthen Russian aggression in the future.³

It is also important to note the significance of the North Atlantic Alliance and also the confrontations and contradictions existing within the organization, for example, including US President Donald Trump's initiative to increase defense spending to 5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These confrontations significantly accelerate the process of global political power realignment. The alliance's strength is directly related to its members' ability to set aside internal disagreements and ensure collective security through unified effort. In this regard, the position of Washington and the European Union is crucial, while the growing influence of Moscow and Beijing poses additional threats to the international security system.

The emerging trends in relations among NATO member countries point to a significant crisis in transatlantic relations and serious challenges regarding NATO's future. In this case, not pursuing an "appeasement policy" toward Russia may prove decisive for the future of European security architecture. This term became particularly well-known in the 1930s, when Great Britain and France pursued a policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany. In historical context, this term is often used with negative connotation and denotes making concessions to an aggressor state in

³ Michael G. Vickers, Seth G. Jones, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) "Russia's War in Ukraine and the Prospects for Peace" 2025.

hopes of maintaining peace, which often backfires and further strengthens the aggressor. A classic example of this is the 1938 Munich Agreement, when Great Britain and France gave Hitler the right to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, which ultimately contributed to the outbreak of World War II.

Regarding a more recent example, this might be the “reset policy” pursued by US President Obama in 2011. When Russia occupied 20 percent of Georgia in 2008, America chose a policy of appeasement. Russia perceived this as Western weakness and in 2014 annexed Crimea, followed by full-scale intervention in Ukraine in 2022.

Attempts to appease dictators are an unsuccessful strategy. They recognize their opponent’s weakness and make even greater demands. Weakness manifests not only in military potential but also in the lack of political will and firmness. Each concession creates a precedent that all aggressive states use and repeat. They try to quickly take advantage of their opponent’s weakness and gain as much as possible. The West understands well that “Chamberlainization” will cause the breakdown of the European security system, and not only Russia, but other powers will also use the precedent of wars of conquest to initiate new conflicts both in Europe and beyond. Currently, European states bear a decisive role. They must make a real choice about their own security and future. In this context, the fate of not only Ukraine, but also of Georgia and other regions of Europe may be decided.

Presumably, Washington will not repeat the same mistakes it made in past decades. Starting with the policy of détente and ending with the reset policy. Russia perceived all those approaches as Western weakness and Russian strength. However, when the West pursued a non-appeasement policy, Russia became weaker, for example, at the concluding stage of the Cold War, the harsh political approaches pursued by US President Ronald Reagan significantly reduced the Soviet Union’s capabilities, which ultimately pushed it toward diplomatic and strategic retreat.

Finally, it should also be noted the meeting held in Alaska in August 2025 between US President Trump and Russian Federation President Putin. This meeting was considered by experts as a significant opportunity for de-escalation of the ongoing war in Ukraine and a step toward peace.⁴ However, several weeks after the meeting, no substantial breakthrough in political and security processes was recorded. The Kremlin continues to demand legitimization of Ukraine’s territorial losses and Ukraine’s refusal to join NATO, which indicates the absence of compromise. Simultaneously, Russia continues military attacks, confirming that the Kremlin uses negotiations as a mechanism for buying time rather than for real de-escalation.

Before and after the Alaska presidential meeting, several significant statements were made by European Union leaders. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated in Canada, before the start of the G7 summit: “We must exert more pressure on Russia to ensure a real cease-fire, bring Russia to the negotiating table and end this war. Sanctions are critically important for this purpose. Last week we presented a proposal for the 18th package of sanctions. I call on all G7 partners to join us in this effort.”⁵ Also, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Secu-

4 Merhat Sharipzhan, „Alaskis shekhvedritan ert’i kvira gavaida: khuti ram, rac unda icodet Ukrainis mshvidobis damkarebis mdzdelobebis shesaxeb“*Radio Tavisupleba*, August 22, 2025.

5 „Ursula von der Leyen – ‘Meti zetola unda movaxdinoT Rusettan, rom uzrunvelyovk’ot realuri ceexlis shetsq’veta, Ruseti molaparakebebis magidastan davsvat da es omi davasruleT – sanktsiebi kritikulad mnishvnelovania’*Interpressnews*, 2025.

rity Policy, Kaja Kallas, stated at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit: “Democracies need firm protection, agreements alone can never guarantee peace, Georgia learned this in 2008.”⁶ Additionally, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed gratitude to US President Donald Trump on social network X, noting that prolonging the war is only Russian President Vladimir Putin’s desire, and Russia tries to make the conflict everyday reality. According to him, to force Russia to stop aggression and achieve real peace and security, strong and decisive actions are needed.⁷ Also noteworthy is the statement by former US President Joe Biden, who criticizes the Trump administration’s strategy that pushes Ukraine toward conceding territory to Russia. According to Biden, this is appeasement policy that will not work. In his opinion, Vladimir Putin considers Ukraine part of Russia and conceding part of the land will not satisfy him. Biden emphasizes that anyone who thinks giving land to a dictator will stop him is simply misjudging the situation.⁸

In addition to the above statements, the issue of possible end of the ongoing war in Ukraine and necessary conditions for it became subject to discussion by European leaders in the format of a “coalition of the willing.” As Poland’s Prime Minister noted, in the short-term perspective, the probability of a direct meeting between Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky is very low. According to Donald Tusk’s statement, Poland does not consider sending military forces to Ukrainian territory even in case of war’s end, but is ready to cooperate with European partners in logistical support direction. Italy expresses an analogous position: according to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Rome does not plan to send a military contingent to Ukraine but is ready to help with training outside the country’s borders. French President Emmanuel Macron responds to the Russia-Ukraine war and emphasizes that if Russia refuses to participate in peace negotiations, Europe and the US will jointly implement a clear reaction. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declares that Ukraine should be formed as a “Steel hedgehog” that will steadfastly withstand both current and future aggressive actions.⁹ In parallel with these statements, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that “Russia is ready to fight to achieve all its goals if Ukraine does not agree to a settlement.”¹⁰ The main preconditions for agreement formulated by the Kremlin continue to include demands for legitimization of Ukraine’s territorial losses, as well as Kyiv’s refraining from NATO integration. Also, according to analysis of an article published by the BBC, the Kremlin speaks to the West aggressively: according to Putin’s statement, peace will be possible only on Russia’s terms, otherwise the war will continue. This uncompromising position is reinforced by several factors. On one hand, Moscow is convinced that military initiative on the front is on its side. On the other hand, Putin’s recent diplomatic steps have increased his confidence. Added to this is the perception of the Alaska summit in Russian media as a confirmation of the West’s inability to isolate Russia. Finally, while Putin describes “light at the end of the tunnel” as a victory prospect, the BBC concludes that this goal remains actually unachievable.¹¹ The war has been ongoing for

6 „Kaja Kallas – ‘Mkholod khelshkrulebebi verasodes idzleva mshvidobis garantias, Sakartvelom es 2008 wels istsavla’ Interpressnews, 2025.

7 „Volodymyr Zelensky – ‘Madlobeli var Prezident Trampis, mzaq’opnistvis, chveni khalkhi daicvas – omi mkholod Putinis survilis gamo grZeldeba, mshvidobis migeba mkholod dzalis meshveobit aris shesadzlebeli’ Interpressnews, 2025.

8 „Joe Biden – ‘Donald Trampis mkhridan Ukrainaze zetolisis ganxorcieleba Rusettan mimart tanamedrove formis dashoshminebis politikaa’ Interpressnews, 2025.

9 „Rodis da ra pirobit dasruleba omi Ukrainashi? – Evropelma liderebma sakitkhze kidev ertxel imsjeles“ *Rustavi 2*, 2025.

10 “Putin Says Russia Will Achieve All Aims Militarily if Ukraine Does Not Agree Deal.” BBC News, 2025

11 “Rosenberg: What’s behind Putin’s Uncompromising Stance on Ukraine?” BBC News, 2025.

four years and peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict remains unachievable. Russia's rigid strategy increases the probability of war continuation. As a result, attempts to establish peace are fragile and unsustainable, which poses a serious challenge to the international security system, including the Black Sea region. Ending the Russia-Ukraine war without establishing red lines for Russia represents a serious challenge.

Conclusion

The course of the Russia-Ukraine war clearly shows that clearly defining “red lines” in international politics is a decisive factor for limiting violence escalation and achieving effective conflict management. International practice demonstrates that power balance and clear signals to aggressors are often stronger deterrent mechanisms than diplomatic statements or general warnings.¹²

From this perspective, maintaining clear red lines is important not only for determining the outcome of a specific war but also for global stability. Uncertainty in international relations creates risks of violence proliferation, while establishing clear rules strengthens normative structures, reduces the probability of violent escalation, and ensures a more predictable environment. Accordingly, precisely establishing clear boundaries can become a convincing mechanism for preventing large-scale geopolitical crises.

The study shows that experience gained from the Russia-Ukraine war may become the foundation for a new security architecture, where solid rules, agreements, and policy commitments based on experience will contribute to the formation of sustainable peace. In this process, it is important to strengthen both international institutions and involve small and medium states, to avoid abuse of power and ensure global security sustainability. As already noted multiple times, if the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine ends without establishing clear restrictions and boundaries for the aggressor, there is a high probability that the world will face an even more extensive conflict in the future.

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¹² Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* 1966

- [Kaja Kallas – Treaties Alone Can Never Guarantee Peace; Georgia Learned This in 2008]. Interpressnews, 2025. <https://www.interpressnews.ge>. Accessed September 10, 2025.
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THE IMPORTANCE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

Energy security remains a critical strategic priority for Georgia, particularly given its geopolitical location in the South Caucasus and historical dependence on imported fossil fuels. This paper examines the role of renewable energy as a multifaceted solution to Georgia's energy vulnerabilities, positioning it as a key instrument of national sovereignty, regional stability, and economic resilience. Drawing on the country's abundant renewable resources—including hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal—this study explores how renewable energy development intersects with broader political, economic, and security considerations.

Georgia's energy sector is marked by a high reliance on hydropower and seasonal electricity imports, exposing it to environmental constraints and geopolitical risks. The strategic integration of diversified renewables offers not only a path toward energy independence but also enhances Georgia's capacity to navigate complex regional dynamics. Investments in solar and wind infrastructure, rural biomass utilization, and emerging geothermal potential contribute to decentralized energy generation, improved grid stability, and reduced reliance on politically sensitive energy imports.

The paper also identifies key challenges to renewable energy deployment, including aging infrastructure, limited private investment, regulatory uncertainty, and environmental trade-offs. Addressing these barriers requires coordinated policy reform, increased international cooperation, and targeted financial instruments. Moreover, public engagement and local capacity-building are essential to ensuring socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable energy transitions.

Ultimately, this study argues that renewable energy development in Georgia transcends technical and economic domains to serve as a cornerstone of the country's strategic independence and foreign policy posture. By leveraging renewable energy to reduce geopolitical vulnerability and align with European energy standards, Georgia can enhance its role as a regional energy hub and strengthen its integration into global energy governance frameworks. The findings underscore the need for a politically informed approach to renewable energy policy in transitional geopolitical contexts.

Keywords: Energy security, Renewable energy, geopolitical positioning, Sustainable energy system and Regional diplomacy.

Introduction

Energy security has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, encompassing political, economic, and technological dimensions. Reliable energy supply, access to domestic and regional energy resources, and energy independence are central determinants of a state's capacity to maintain stable development and assert sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world. In the context of the South Caucasus, Georgia's geopolitical positioning underscores the strategic significance of energy policy, both domestically and in terms of regional diplomacy. Historically dependent on imported fossil fuels and vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations in hydropower generation, Georgia faces critical challenges in securing a stable, self-sufficient, and environmentally sustainable energy system.

The emergence of renewable energy technologies provides a multidimensional solution to Georgia's energy vulnerabilities. Hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal energy not only offer environmentally sustainable alternatives but also present strategic opportunities to enhance national sovereignty, reduce geopolitical dependence, and stimulate economic growth. The development of renewable energy in Georgia is thus not merely a technological or economic undertaking; it is a political strategy, a tool of statecraft that contributes directly to national security, regional influence, and integration with European and global governance frameworks.

Main Part

Geopolitical and Strategic Context of Georgia

Georgia's location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia positions it as a critical node in regional energy transit networks. Bordering Russia to the north, Turkey to the southwest, Armenia to the south, and Azerbaijan to the southeast, Georgia has historically functioned as both a consumer and transit corridor for energy resources from the Caspian region to European markets. Pipelines such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) exemplify the country's strategic importance in transporting hydrocarbon resources, while simultaneously highlighting its vulnerabilities to regional geopolitical tensions.

„The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) has been designed to transport natural gas from the Shah Deniz field as well as other fields of the Caspian basin to Turkey and then from Turkey to the European market.

The length of the pipeline is 691km, with 249km in Georgia. On the border the pipeline is tied to the branch line built by the Turkish side, which connects the SCP to the local gas supply system of Erzurum.“¹

The country's energy policy is inseparable from its foreign policy. Reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels not only mitigates economic and environmental risks but also strengthens political sovereignty, allowing Georgia to pursue independent strategic objectives in its relations with Russia, Turkey, the European Union, and other international partners. The threat of energy coercion, as witnessed in Europe's periodic gas disputes with Russia, underscores the critical importance of energy diversification and domestic resource development.

¹ Geirgian Oil & Gas Corporation. "South Caucasuse Pipeline". <https://shorturl.at/heX3w>

Overview of Georgia's Energy Sector

Georgia's energy sector is characterized by a high reliance on hydropower, supplemented by limited thermal generation and seasonal electricity imports. The country operates over 100 hydropower plants, ranging from large-scale facilities such as the Enguri and Vardnili HPPs to small and medium-sized plants that provide decentralized energy solutions for rural areas. Hydropower contributes approximately 80,5% of Georgia's domestic electricity generation. „Hydro resources are one of Georgia's most important natural riches. Approximately 300 rivers are significant for energy production, with total annual potential capacity of 15 000 MW and production potential of 50 TWh. According to GNERC, however, only 22.5% (3 380.2 MW) are used for hydropower.“²

However, during winter months, when river flows are reduced, electricity imports from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia become necessary to meet domestic demand.

Thermal power plants in Georgia primarily serve to maintain base load and supply during periods of hydrological scarcity. These plants, while reliable, are environmentally costly and economically less competitive compared to renewable alternatives. The growing energy demand driven by urbanization, industrial expansion, and economic development highlights the urgency of diversifying Georgia's energy mix through renewable sources.

Recent investments in transmission infrastructure, including interconnections with neighboring countries and the development of high-voltage transmission lines, have expanded Georgia's role as a regional energy hub. Despite this progress, the dependence on imported electricity continues to pose risks to energy security and national sovereignty, particularly in the context of regional political instability.

Renewable Energy Sources in Georgia

Solar energy offers significant potential, especially in eastern regions like Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Pilot projects in Telavi, Gori, and Bolnisi demonstrate the feasibility of both rural electrification and grid-connected generation. Decentralized solar installations enhance regional autonomy and reduce central grid pressure, while aligning Georgia with EU renewable energy directives, supporting Euro-Atlantic integration and political alignment.

„Solar irradiance in Georgia varies between 1 250 kWh/m² and 1 800 kWh/m² annually, and total solar energy potential is estimated at 108 MW. Household solar water heating systems have been installed in rural areas, where solar energy warms water to 40-50°C.“³

Wind energy, concentrated in Gardabani, Inner Kartli, Kakheti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti, benefits from average wind speeds above six meters per second. Expanding wind infrastructure decreases seasonal dependence on hydropower, increases energy resilience in winter, and provides leverage for regional energy diplomacy and export opportunities.

Biomass and biogas remain underutilized, despite availability of agricultural residues, forestry waste, and biogas resources. Pilot projects in Kakheti and Imereti show potential to reduce rural reliance on imported fuels, promote local economic development, and strengthen energy autonomy, which supports political stability and foreign investment partnerships

² The International Energy Agency. Georgia Energy profile “Energy Security”. <https://shorturl.at/O0lh5>

³ The International Energy Agency. Georgia Energy profile “Energy Security”. <https://shorturl.at/O0lh5>

Geothermal energy, although nascent, is strategically important. Thermal springs in Tbilisi, Abastumani, and Tsikhisdziri, suitable for heating. Geothermal development reduces energy imports, stabilizes socially vulnerable regions, and complements hydropower. Strategically, investing in geothermal aligns Georgia with European energy standards, advances green energy goals, and reinforces sovereignty through indigenous resource utilization.

Overall, Georgia's diversified renewable energy portfolio hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal enhances energy security, reduces dependence on imports, supports rural development, and strengthens geopolitical positioning in the South Caucasus and European energy markets. Strategic investment and international cooperation are essential to realize the sector's full potential, solidifying Georgia as a reliable regional energy partner.

Integrated Renewable Energy Strategy

The strategic integration of hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal resources offers Georgia a pathway to comprehensive energy independence. By diversifying its energy mix, Georgia can reduce reliance on imports, stabilize electricity supply, and enhance resilience against both environmental and geopolitical risks. Furthermore, renewable energy development serves as a platform for regional diplomacy, positioning Georgia as a reliable energy partner within the South Caucasus and for European energy markets.

Political and Security Implications of Renewable Energy in Georgia

The development of renewable energy in Georgia entails substantial political and security implications, underscoring the country's strategic role within the South Caucasus. By reducing dependence on imported electricity and fossil fuels—particularly from politically sensitive neighbors—Georgia enhances its strategic autonomy and strengthens national sovereignty. This autonomy enables the government to pursue domestic and foreign policy goals without being vulnerable to energy coercion, a critical consideration given regional geopolitical tensions.

Diversifying energy sources through hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal projects also strengthens Georgia's negotiating position with neighboring countries. Investments in domestic renewable infrastructure enable the state to act as a regional energy hub and intermediary for trans-Caspian electricity corridors to Europe. Projects such as the planned Black Sea electricity corridor illustrate how renewable energy can reinforce both national and regional political influence.

From a security perspective, renewable energy reduces Georgia's exposure to supply disruptions and geopolitical pressure. By producing energy domestically and diversifying generation sources, the country can mitigate risks posed by seasonal hydropower variability, dependence on imports, and potential regional conflicts. Decentralized renewable systems, including microgrids and rural solar installations, enhance local resilience and social stability, particularly in vulnerable regions.

Georgia's renewable energy strategy is both a political and security instrument. It strengthens national sovereignty, reduces vulnerability to external pressures, promotes regional influence, and enhances domestic stability. By leveraging renewable energy, Georgia positions itself as a reliable

partner for regional energy cooperation and European energy markets, consolidating its role in both geopolitics and security architecture.

Challenges and Risks of Renewable Energy Deployment in Georgia

Despite abundant renewable energy potential, Georgia faces several challenges in fully realizing energy independence.

Technological and Infrastructure Challenges: Aging hydropower facilities require modernization, while integrating intermittent sources like solar and wind demands advanced transmission, storage, and smart grid technologies. Insufficient grid flexibility can cause instability, leading to power shortages.

Financial and Investment Risks: Renewable projects are capital-intensive. Private investment remains limited due to regulatory uncertainty, project delays, and currency risks. Government incentives, transparent legal frameworks, public-private partnerships, and green bonds are essential to attract both domestic and foreign capital.

Regulatory and Policy Challenges: Inconsistent permitting, bureaucratic hurdles, and gaps in enforcement slow project implementation. Continuous adaptation to EU Energy Community directives, sustainability standards, and coordinated government action are necessary to ensure streamlined development.

„The Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC), the electricity transmission system operator - JSC Georgian State Electrosystem (GSE) and the Electricity Market Operator (ESCO) kicked off EU4Energy technical assistance aimed at supporting Georgia in drafting amendments to the current Law on promotion of energy from renewable sources to transpose Renewables Directive 2018/2001 as adapted and adopted by the 2021 Energy Community Ministerial Council.“⁴

Geopolitical and Security Risks: Dependence on winter energy imports from neighbors exposes Georgia to potential supply disruptions. Conflicts or political tensions in the region, as well as risks of sabotage or cyberattacks, highlight the strategic need for secure domestic renewable energy infrastructure.

Environmental and Social Considerations: Large-scale projects may disrupt ecosystems, alter river flows, or occupy agricultural land. Social acceptance is critical; community engagement, benefit-sharing, and decentralized systems foster local support, enhance equity, and strengthen political stability.

Renewable Energy as a Pillar of Georgia’s Strategic Independence

Georgia’s renewable energy sector represents more than an opportunity for economic modernization, it constitutes a central pillar of the country’s strategic independence, political stability, and regional influence. The nation’s abundant hydropower, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal resources provide a solid foundation for achieving energy self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on external suppliers, particularly in a geopolitically sensitive region.

⁴ Energy Community News. “EU4Energy supports Georgia in transposing new Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001 into national legislation” <https://shorturl.at/DIY7E>

Historically, Georgia's reliance on imported electricity during winter months exposed it to economic vulnerability and political leverage from neighboring countries. Renewable energy development mitigates these risks by diversifying the energy portfolio, decentralizing electricity production, and enhancing domestic capacity. Hydropower continues to dominate electricity generation, but its limitations during dry seasons underscore the importance of integrating solar, wind, and biomass resources to stabilize the grid year-round.

Furthermore, renewable energy fosters broader socio-economic development. Small and medium hydropower plants, decentralized solar installations, and biomass projects stimulate rural economies, create employment, and enhance local governance. By empowering communities to participate in energy production, Georgia not only strengthens energy independence but also promotes political inclusion, social stability, and equitable regional development.

Geopolitically, a robust renewable energy sector enhances Georgia's leverage in regional and international affairs. Energy diversification reduces susceptibility to coercion, while export-oriented renewable projects and cross-border energy corridors can position the country as a regional hub, linking European markets with resources from the South Caucasus and beyond. Alignment with European energy standards, climate commitments, and international financing mechanisms further strengthens Georgia's integration into global energy governance frameworks.

However, challenges remain. Infrastructure modernization, investment mobilization, regulatory harmonization, and technology adoption are critical for the sustainable expansion of renewable energy. Equally important are social acceptance, environmental safeguards, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that growth is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient. A coordinated strategy encompassing policy, finance, technology, and diplomacy is essential to overcome these challenges and maximize the sector's benefits.

In conclusion, renewable energy is not merely a technical or economic issue for Georgia—it is a strategic instrument of national sovereignty. By effectively harnessing its renewable resources, Georgia can achieve electricity independence, strengthen political autonomy, enhance economic resilience, and contribute meaningfully to regional energy stability and global climate goals. The path forward requires a holistic approach, integrating infrastructure, regulation, finance, community engagement, and international cooperation. In doing so, Georgia has the potential to transform renewable energy from a sectoral policy priority into a cornerstone of national security, development, and international influence.

Conclusion

In Georgia, renewable energy development is a key pillar of strategic independence, regional influence and political stability. By diversifying its energy portfolio through renewable energy sources, Georgia reduces dependence on imports, strengthens national sovereignty and energy security. Investments in decentralized infrastructure and integration into regional networks further mitigate supply disruptions and position the country as a reliable partner in European and South Caucasus energy markets. Renewable energy also promotes socio-economic development by supporting rural economies, creating jobs, and empowering country side sociality. Despite challenges such as aging infrastructure, regulatory barriers, and technological constraints, a coordinated approach combining policy, investment, and international cooperation can maximize the sector's

potential. Ultimately, renewable energy in Georgia is not just an economic or technical initiative but a strategic tool that reinforces national security, resilience, and regional influence.

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SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA: SECURITY STRATEGIES AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The security strategies and economic perspectives of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region have become a central focus in contemporary studies of international relations and global security. This region holds a special place not only due to its geographical location but also as a critical hub for the transportation of energy resources and transit communications, connecting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Its strategic importance has significantly increased in the context of the war in Ukraine and the growing geopolitical tensions in the region, turning the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin into a kind of laboratory for security policy, energy diversification, and economic cooperation.

The paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical and economic processes in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region, with particular emphasis on the new strategy introduced by the European Union.

This strategy seeks to strengthen the security system in the region, develop energy infrastructure, and support sustainable economic projects. Alongside reinforcing the interconnection between Europe and Asia, it also contributes to attracting investments from international partners.

The paper also analyzes Russia's military and hybrid pressure, which not only poses direct military threats but also complicates the process of ensuring regional security through disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks in the information space. The study examines the growing influence of Turkey and China, their economic and military activities, and considers these factors as having significant impacts on both security and economic perspectives.

From an economic perspective, special attention is given to the development of the "Middle Corridor," which connects Europe and Central Asia through Georgia and Azerbaijan, providing the region with significant transit and trade advantages. The paper also reviews the TRACECA transport initiative and critical energy diversification projects, including the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Shah Deniz gas pipeline, which offer Europe alternative sources of energy supply.

One of the key contributions of the study lies in highlighting the interconnection between security strategies and economic development. It demonstrates that regional stability is unattainable without economic linkages and infrastructural integration, while economic growth and investment attractiveness are directly dependent on a stable and effective security system. Accordingly, the paper reflects not only an analysis of the current situation but also explores the prospects for regional cooperation and the role of major international actors. This provides a foundation for both theoretical analysis and the development of practical recommendations aimed at transforming the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region into a model of security, economic integration, and sustainable development.

Keywords: South Caucasus; Black Sea; Security Strategies; Economic Perspectives; European Union; Energy Security; Regional Cooperation; Hybrid Threats.

Introduction

The South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin have, for centuries, represented one of the most important crossroads of trade, economic, and military interests, where the routes of East and West, North and South intersect. The geostrategic significance of the region is primarily determined by its geographic location, which positions it as a central hub for economic, energy, and political relations between Europe and Asia. In contemporary international politics, the region has become even more critical due to its energy infrastructure, transit routes, security challenges, and the growing competition among global powers.¹

The Black Sea Strategy introduced by the European Union in 2025 aims to strengthen security, promote sustainable development, and ensure climate resilience. This strategy enables the EU to engage more actively in regional processes and to enhance its cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus.² The strategy emphasizes that security and economic development must be addressed comprehensively, as regional stability is directly dependent on infrastructural development and economic integration.³

At the same time, Russia's hybrid actions, the war in Ukraine, as well as the growing political and economic influence of Turkey and China, intensify geopolitical competition and reduce security stability in the region. These factors create a complex security environment where the success of economic projects and the prospects for regional cooperation depend on resilient security systems and coordinated actions by international partners.⁴

In this context, an integrated analysis of security strategies and economic perspectives is essential. Only a unified approach that combines security policy, infrastructural development, and economic cooperation can serve as the foundation for long-term stability and sustainable development in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region.

Main part

1. Security Strategies

The European Union's new vision for the Black Sea region emphasizes strengthening security, energy sustainability, and developing regional cooperation. This serves both the EU's immediate security interests and the long-term stability of the South Caucasus countries. A central element of the strategy is the establishment of a maritime security hub aimed at integrating maritime monitoring, air-sea coordination, and rapid crisis response systems.⁵

Additionally, the strategy includes strengthening transport connections, which involves improving the security mechanisms of the TRACECA and "Middle Corridor" routes. Equally important is the implementation of climate risk response systems, as climate change directly impacts regional security-natural disasters and water resource shortages often act as catalysts for political

1 European Commission and High Representative. 2025. *The EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region 2025*. Brussels: European Commission.

2 Seskuria, T. 2025. *EU Black Sea Strategy: Security, Sustainability, and Climate Resilience*. Tbilisi: Caucasus Policy Institute.

3 G.Pkhaladze, „*South Caucasus Transit Corridors and Energy Security*.“ Tbilisi: Georgian Energy Research Center. 2025.

4 Khylyko, A., Petrov, I., and Ivanov, S. 2022. *Hybrid Threats and Geopolitical Competition in the Black Sea Region*. Moscow: Institute for Strategic Studies.

5 European Commission and High Representative, *The EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region 2025*. Brussels: European Commission. 2025.

tensions. Additionally, the strategy includes strengthening transport connections, which involves improving the security mechanisms of the TRACECA and “Middle Corridor” routes. Equally important is the implementation of climate risk response systems, as climate change directly impacts regional security-natural disasters and water resource shortages often act as catalysts for political tensions.⁶

However, critical analysis indicates that despite ambitious goals, the strategy lacks detailed action plans, funding mechanisms, and clearly defined timelines, which seriously limit its practical implementation. For instance, the idea of the maritime security hub remains at the conceptual stage, and agreement on its operational model is still underway.

An additional challenge is posed by the differing political interests of regional players: Turkey seeks to strengthen its military and economic influence, while Russia, despite its isolation due to the war in Ukraine, continues to maintain a naval fleet in the Black Sea region, creating ongoing security risks.⁷

Moreover, the effectiveness of security strategies largely depends on the domestic political stability of local countries-Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia-and their ability to implement reforms in defense and crisis management. For example, the enhancement of Georgia’s defense

capacities and its cooperation with NATO are important factors for the success of the European Union’s strategy.⁸

Thus, the European Union’s strategy represents an important step towards strengthening security in the Black Sea region; however, its success depends both on the improvement of institutional mechanisms and on balancing the interests of regional actors, as well as allocating specific financial and military resources.

2. Economic Perspectives

Economic development in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region is closely linked to security resilience, political stability, and the involvement of international partners. The development of energy infrastructure and transport corridors serves not only as a foundation for economic growth but also as a strategic instrument for strengthening the region’s geopolitical significance.

The “Middle Corridor,” connecting Europe with Central Asia through Georgia and Azerbaijan, is one of the most significant transit projects offering an alternative to traditional routes and reducing Russia’s influence over the Eurasian transport system. Its development significantly enhances the region’s economic role and ensures broader integration between European and Asian markets. The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Shah Deniz gas pipeline are among the most successful examples of energy diversification. They enable Europe to reduce its dependence on Russian energy resources and strengthen energy security, a concern that has become particularly urgent following the war in Ukraine. These projects not only contribute to energy security but also create thousands of jobs, increase tax revenues, and support the diversification of the regional economy.⁹

6 Seskuria, T. 2025. *EU Black Sea Strategy: Security, Sustainability, and Climate Resilience*. Tbilisi: Caucasus Policy Institute.

7 Khylyk, A., Petrov, I., and Ivanov, S. 2022. *Hybrid Threats and Geopolitical Competition in the Black Sea Region*. Moscow: Institute for Strategic Studies.

8 Pkhaladze, G. 2025. *South Caucasus Transit Corridors and Energy Security*. Tbilisi: Georgian Energy Research Center.

9 European Commission and High Representative. 2025. *The EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region 2025*. Brussels: European Commission

The TRACECA program is another significant initiative aimed at modernizing transport networks, liberalizing trade, and developing logistics infrastructure. Investments made under the program help reduce transit times and costs, which is especially important in the post-pandemic period when global supply chains face serious challenges.

In addition to energy and transport projects, the development of digital infrastructure is also crucial for economic cooperation. **The European Union’s “Digital Silk Road” initiative aims to expand broadband internet networks and develop the digital economy in the region, creating new opportunities for startups and innovative businesses.** However, despite progress, several serious obstacles remain. Political tensions in the region, Russian military aggression, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, and internal political crises create an uncertain investment environment, which often hinders long-term projects. At the same time, the role of international financial institutions is crucial both in funding infrastructure projects and in implementing reforms necessary to improve the business environment.

Thus, the economic perspectives in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region are closely linked to security strategies. Long-term stability and sustainable economic development are impossible without each other; both components are essential prerequisites for one another. Regional cooperation, support from international partners, and multilateral economic integration create the foundation on which both a stable security architecture and modern economic infrastructure can be established.

Conclusion

The strategic significance of the South Caucasus and Black Sea region is based on several interconnected factors—geographical location, energy resources, transit infrastructure, and international political interests. These components create a complex network in which security and economic issues are inseparable. A resilient security system is essential for the functioning of transport, energy projects, and investment infrastructure, while economic integration, energy diversification, and regional cooperation, in turn, lay the foundation for strengthening security. The European Union’s new strategy for the Black Sea region represents a significant platform for strengthening security, economic integration, and the development of energy infrastructure. The strategy includes the establishment of a maritime security hub, modernization of transport routes, and enhancement of mechanisms for responding to climate risks, all of which contribute to reinforcing stability in the region. At the same time, increased EU investment and technical assistance enhance the potential for the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin to become one of the main platforms connecting Europe and Asia.

However, the existing challenges in the region continue to pose serious obstacles. Russia’s military and hybrid influence, which includes not only direct military force but also information and cyber operations, significantly limits the effectiveness of security strategies. The growing economic and political influence of Turkey and China creates an additional competitive environment, where the European Union is compelled to develop more flexible and multifaceted approaches. Considering these challenges, the success of regional security and economic integration depends not only on the involvement of international organizations and major powers but also on strength-

ening the domestic institutions of local states. The harmonization of legal frameworks, combating corruption, and managing hybrid threats are critical elements that determine the region's long-term stability.

Moreover, the development of infrastructure projects-including the Middle Corridor, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, and the Shah Deniz gas pipeline-not only generates economic benefits but also strengthens regional cooperation, fostering deeper political dialogue and conflict prevention. These projects create a form of economic interdependence that could become the foundation for long-term peace and stability.

Thus, the sustainable development of the South Caucasus and Black Sea region requires an integrated approach that combines security policy, economic strategies, and international cooperation. Only under such circumstances can the region be transformed into a key hub for global security and economic integration.

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THE ENEMY IS BIG, BUT THE WILL TO DEFEND OUR HOMELAND IS BIGGER

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Abstract

This article offers a thorough examination of Georgia's military policy, emphasizing the ongoing dangers faced by more powerful regional adversaries. Georgia faces particular difficulties as a small country at a geopolitical crossroad, requiring a proactive and well-thought-out military strategy. To overcome these obstacles, Georgia needs to create a strong defense framework that will be coordinated at the national and international levels and is distinguished by strong national defense measures and strategic consistency. The article explores how Georgia's defensive posture has been influenced by historical events, such as previous wars and the impact of its proximity to strong neighbors. It also looks at the state of security today, emphasizing the sustained military conflicts in the area and the need for a proactive defense approach. The overall goal of the suggested defense strategy for small countries like Georgia is to promote a thorough and adaptable approach that balances military preparedness with active citizen participation and solid international alliances. This multidimensional strategy aims to build societal resilience and increase Georgia's capacity to successfully discourage and respond to aggression, ensuring that all citizens are ready to contribute to national security. Georgia seeks to improve its standing in a risky geopolitical landscape by emphasizing cooperative efforts with partners and adopting cutting-edge defense technologies.

Keywords: Resistance, Total Defense, Resilience, conventional, asymmetric, geopolitical location, special tactics, strategy, irregular, Comprehensive Defense, Interagency Cooperation.

Introduction

Historically, Georgia has been a victim of aggression from many powerful states, which attempted to gain influence over the small country due to its significant geopolitical location¹. Adversarial forces always greatly outnumbered Georgian forces in terms of manpower and resources². The fact that Georgia with its small nation still exists today indicates that brave and motivated ancestors with strong combat spirit effectively combined special tactics and strict terrain features to resist, survive, and preserve culture and religion³. Thus, Resistance is not a new strategy for Georgia as a small state against way stronger power. It only needs to shape the current understanding of the defense approach from conventional to asymmetric⁴. The Caucasus region is one of the most significant areas of the former use something else because it serves as a bridge connecting Europe and Asia, is traversed by the ancient Silk Road, and is home to numerous oil and gas routes⁵. It should be mentioned, however, that Georgia serves as a strategically significant hub for the whole Caucasus⁶. Georgia's political course, the Western vector, of entering the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance while simultaneously positioning the country as a safe, peaceful, and economically appealing democratic state, has further strained relations between Georgia and Russia⁷. Russia views all of this as a danger. Even with the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Georgia still faces a threat from Russia⁸. Russian military superiority (incomparable superiority in missile and artillery means, air supremacy, naval fleet, and superiority in cyber means), the Caucasus region's current tense situation (the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan), international terrorism, domestic political tension, and current economic and social issues are all major issues for Georgia⁹. Given the foregoing, Georgia's primary challenge is how to maintain its tolerance as a nation with diverse nationalities, religions, customs, and cultures while achieving national unity and using combined forces to neutralize the invader's aggression in the event of a conflict. Consequently, small countries should be prepared for both conventional and unconventional warfare against bigger enemies¹⁰. If the entire nation is conquered and the country loses its sovereignty, it should fight on based on the principles of national resistance. These issues—total defense, task management, resilience building and resistance, irregular combat methods, and small unit combat tactics—are becoming increasingly important, considering the asymmetric and unequal ratio of forces and capabilities¹¹. According to the above-mentioned analysis, defeating the aggressor through sustained, powerful national resistance and coordinated resistance reached within the framework of the nation's total defense is the selected defense strategy for a small state like Georgia against the aggression of a much larger and stronger invader¹². It should be clarified here what “continuous, strong national independence” means: a blend of robust state thought and strong unity among Georgians with backing from abroad.

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12 „In what ways can small countries keep a large country from militarily dominating them?“, <https://surl.li/agxonf>

Main Part

Georgia's defense system is founded on the idea of "total defense" in light of the threats and scarce resources the nation faces.¹³ In case of an armed attack by another state, "total defense" or "comprehensive defense" refers to the coordinated and unified deployment of all available national resources, including military and civilian ones, to safeguard the nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Additionally, complete self-defense strengthens the country's resilience and offers robust, ongoing international support. More specifically, the entire defense doctrine requires all citizens to protect their nation, regardless of their age, gender, or ethnicity. Its goal is for every citizen to examine and comprehend that their own nation is their own defense. Generally speaking, just 2% of the population is represented by the military, which bigger adversary would swiftly defeat and destroy¹⁴. As a result, the nation's destiny in such a situation rests on the unity and fighting spirit of the whole population. In such a scenario, the aggressor could take over a portion of the nation while it is in total defense. Under such circumstances, complete defense in the conquered territory will progressively turn into resistance, which includes carrying on the conflict using both traditional and unconventional means. The objective of total defense, as seen from the perspective of national resistance, is to organize and oppose the enemy's forces of powerful, uncompromising, and long-lasting resistance in any conquered region¹⁵. The attacker must believe that he would suffer enormous losses as a result of the act. As a result, resistance, resilience development, and the prudent use and allocation of people and material resources should all be taken into account during the planning, preparation, and implementation stages of total defense. In addition to numbers, reasonableness encompasses moral and psychological qualities, drive, tenacity, age, skill, and experience.

Total defense and, in the event of a full or partial occupation of the nation, the government and its designated agencies should be in charge of the resistance movement; all planning and actions should be coordinated.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it should incorporate all of the nation's organizations and institutions. The process of interagency cooperation must be strengthened in order to attain the unification of the state's overall resources and capacities, both during times of peace and during times of crisis and war.¹⁷ In order to build, coordinate, and synchronize the lines of endeavor that comprise the national resistance, a specific government element must be established.¹⁸ This body's primary responsibility will be to make recommendations that support national defense. It will supervise and coordinate the planning and preparation of both civil and military defenses. This agency creates proposals for interagency agreements, domestic law and policy changes, and agreements with partners and allies. Decision-makers from key agencies must be involved to carry out the required actions quickly and effectively. It should be taken into account when implementing total defense and resistance that one's forces and resources should not be depleted during the

13 „NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY OF GEORGIA“ <https://surl.li/mvvylyf>

14 Nikoloz Khachidze, „Challenges of the Implementation of Total Defence (Military/Civil Defence) in Georgia“, Military Papers, 2022, <https://surl.li/utlbdy>

15 Vepkhvia Grigalashvili, „Total Defence: A Comprehensive Approach to National Defence Governance“, International Journal of Scientific and Management Research, January 2023 <https://surl.li/sufkyp>

16 Kevin D. Stringer, „Building a Stay-Behind Resistance Organization: The Case of Cold War Switzerland Against the Soviet Union“, National Defense University Press, June 20, 2017, <https://surl.li/iyjqpw>

17 „The Importance of Interagency Collaboration in National Security“, Virginia Commonwealth University, April 27, 2023. <https://surl.li/zsfceh>

18 „Conseil National de la Resistance (CNR)“, <https://surl.li/jksrun>

transition from the peace period to the crisis, from the crisis to the war situation, and from the war situation to the occupation period.¹⁹ Any transitions, however, must be effective, seamless, and well-planned. This is accomplished by anticipating and determining the location, time, and point of decision-making throughout the phase planning process, as well as the suitable indicator of the start of each phase.

Total defense and resistance consist of the following primary elements:

1. Military (all power formations);
2. Civil (private, public, and civil sectors);
3. Assistance from abroad;
4. Crucial and economic infrastructure.

Apart from these elements, coordination inside and across departments is crucial for both resilience development and resistance, as well as for overall defense²⁰. During times of peace, the aforementioned cooperation should be planned and established to guarantee ongoing collaboration and efficient mutual assistance of different roles and areas during times of war and land occupation. However, it should be mentioned that the most efficient strategy to fight against the aggressor is for the people of the country to have the resolve to resist and defend their country at any cost.²¹

The safety and security of a nation will be greatly influenced by its demographic resources, or population, particularly when dealing with protracted conventional conflicts. For little nations with sparse populations, the problem may be considerably more severe. The nation must concentrate on growing its economy in these situations in order to draw in additional resources and people. Strong economic growth can also enable the nation to make investments in its armed forces, strengthening its defenses against possible threats.²² Furthermore, tiny nations can boost their prospects of success and fortify their position in the case of a protracted conventional conflict by forming strategic alliances with other nations.²³ In the face of any possible threat, tiny nations must be proactive and take action to guarantee their safety and security. Regarding guns and ammunition, each nation has its own restrictions. There is a limit to how much even the most powerful countries can accumulate. On the other hand, smaller nations are frequently at a considerable disadvantage during times of conflict due to their considerably smaller populations and ammunition. For example, without the assistance of the United States, NATO, and its allies, Ukraine would not be able to repel an attack from a bigger and more powerful nation like Russia.²⁴ Smaller nations are severely disadvantaged by the absence of a strong arsenal. Conventional warfare is usually linked to clear-cut, standardized strategies that are simple for adversaries to recognize and evaluate.²⁵ Such strategies can leave adversary open to attack in the modern period. This is because of the ease with which their movements, artillery preparations, aviation, and activities may be identified and neutralized. This makes it simpler for their rivals to predict their next movements and adjust their tactics

19 „Preparing for War: Resource Management in the Modern Marketplace“, <https://surl.lt/knnvoc>

20 „Total defence“, <https://surl.li/rvcktt>

21 „Ukraine plans to create a Kill Zone with drone lines up to 30 km on the front – Shmyhal“, September 14 2025, <https://surl.li/wnweep>

22 Benedict Clements , Sanjeev Gupta and Saida Khamidova , „What Makes Military Spending Rise? It’s Economic Growth—and What That Means for Future Geopolitics“, May 12, 2023, <https://surl.li/uvdnzu>

23 „Alliances and Strategic Partnerships in 21st Century“, <https://surl.li/cepzxc>

24 „NATO Support to Ukraine as One of the Most Important Aspects of the War“ <https://surl.li/yqnisl>

25 „Finding Balance Between the Conventional and Unconventional in Future Warfare“, <https://surl.li/fpkama>

accordingly. In the end, the adversary may be at a disadvantage and find it more challenging to accomplish its goals on the battlefield.

A small country is disadvantaged in a conventional fight since enormous armies are involved and massive attacks are used. This results in a large number of losses and casualties in a short amount of time. For a small nation, such losses might have disastrous implications since it might not have the money or means to cover the voids left by the loss of equipment and staff. On the other hand, minor nations use distinct strategies in irregular or unconventional conflicts. Hit-and-run tactics and small units are used to escape being targeted by more powerful forces.²⁶ This causes confusion and a lack of focus in the fight by making it harder for a larger force to identify the enemy's true objectives. Larger and more powerful states are unable to undertake decisive battles and enormous strikes in this situation. This is because the smaller nation's unconventional tactics make it challenging for the larger force to launch an effective attack. Consequently, the greater force might sustain heavy casualties and fail to accomplish its goals. Therefore, small nations can effectively defend themselves against larger and more powerful ones by engaging in unconventional warfare. It enables them to avoid the devastating losses that might result from traditional conflicts and to make the most of their limited manpower and resources. Such kinds of tactics and techniques were used in the past and in modern warfare, where they were tested successfully and had a great impact on the adversary.

Conclusion.

In summary, Georgia's historical fortitude in the face of adversity demonstrates a strong sense of identity. The country is at a crucial geopolitical juncture and is constantly threatened by a stronger Russia, unstable conditions in the neighborhood, and a number of internal problems. Georgia must therefore not rely exclusively on traditional military tactics. Rather, it is crucial to have a complete defense architecture that incorporates military capabilities, civilian operational competence, interagency cooperation, and economic development. In order to ensure that every person is aware of their responsibility to protect the country, it is imperative that the entire population be involved in this plan. By employing non-traditional combat techniques, preparing for resistance in the case of occupation, and investigating novel strategies, Georgia can impose substantial costs on any aggressor. In the end, the nation's security and survival will depend on how united its people are, how well its democratic institutions function, and how steadfastly they maintain their independence. By combining its historical fortitude with contemporary defensive tactics, Georgia sets itself up to face difficult obstacles while preserving its independence, cultural legacy, and goals for the future.

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RUSSIAN POLITICAL INTERESTS IN BLACK SEA REGION AND NEW REALITIES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF RUSSIA-AZERBAIJAN AND RUSSIA-ARMENIA RELATIONS)

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Abstract

The Black Sea region has maintained its status as one of the key geopolitical nodes of Eurasia over the past decades, and with the transformation of the international relations' global system, the Black Sea region is acquiring an increasingly significant role in ensuring regional and international security. The region's geostrategic location, its resource endowment, and the confluence of interests among leading global and regional actors such as Russia, North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries, the European Union, Ukraine, etc., contribute to the complex military-political situation. Since 2014, the region has been experiencing the consequences of the escalating conflict between Russia and the West, leading to the militarization of the Black Sea, increased military activity, and growing instability. The article examines key threats and challenges to security in the Black Sea region, with the example of the South Caucasus, particularly the deterioration of Russia-Azerbaijan relations, and issues of regional security. Particular attention is being paid to Russia's interest in the region, and changing positions and seesaw policies of small countries. Against the backdrop of global changes, the weakening of the previous unipolar model, the strengthening of multipolar trends, and the emergence of new centers of power, the Black Sea region's importance as an arena of geopolitical competition is growing. Under these circumstances, an analysis of its current state and development prospects is particularly relevant for both the theoretical understanding of international processes and the practical provision of regional and global security. The occupied and annexed territories have been used by the Russian Federation as buffer zones for the spread of political, economic, and military influence, and therefore, the identified territorial conflicts have the prospect of remaining frozen for a long time. Russia's approach to the Black Sea Region after the dramatic loss of geopolitical space because of its defeat in the Cold War is associated with the preservation of the existing situation. All Russian military and political mechanisms in the Region are subordinated to the logic of protecting and preserving the regional status quo that emerged after the end of the Cold War.

Keywords: Black Sea region, Russia, security, geopolitics, international relations

Introduction

The existing system of international relations is being transformed by objective competition between the main, but opposite trends, globalization and regionalization as manifestations of the universal world order and the logic of “spheres of influence”. In this competition, the desire to control key regions of the world remains the primary imperative of powers: both those supporting a unipolar world and those supporting a multipolar one. One of the key regions is the Black Sea region (BSR), which in modern world politics has a strategic position at the intersection of the interests of key players. When exploring the region, the problem of defining its boundaries arises. The coastal principle allows us to identify seven states: Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova, which have access to the shores of the Black Sea. The Black Sea area is also included by experts as part of the Black Sea-Caspian region. Analysts most often include the following countries in this region: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine. An analysis of Russian foreign policy in relation to the disintegration of the USSR allows us to conclude that all geopolitical initiatives of the Russian Federation were aimed at maintaining the stability of its position as a factor in ensuring national security. Maintaining its geopolitical position is being pursued through three approaches: military-political activity aimed at preventing a new non-regional player or the expansion of a hostile military-political bloc into the Black Sea. Eurasian integration initiatives aim to rebuild the post-Soviet space, and the development of new pipeline projects enables Russia to maintain its position in energy transport flows within its southern corridor, from the Caspian region to the Mediterranean. All three areas of Russia’s foreign policy in the Black Sea region are being implemented in a highly competitive environment.¹

Its strategic location at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the presence of important energy and transport routes, and the intersection of interests of leading global and regional actors such as Russia, NATO countries, the EU, Turkey, Ukraine, etc., determine its high significance in the system of international relations. Since the early 2010s, particularly following the events of 2014 and the subsequent escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the region has faced a profound transformation of its security system. The militarization of its waters, the increasing number of military incidents, the expansion of NATO’s presence, and the intensification of sanctions and information confrontation have contributed to the formation of a new architecture of confrontation in the Black Sea region.

Methodology and Theoretical Frame

The study is based on certain documents, research, and reports using the methods of comparative and geopolitical analysis, and a systematic approach to the issue. This gives us the opportunity for a comprehensive examination of the Black Sea region’s security issues in the context of the new world order. Thus, to identify significant directions and factors influencing regional security, a critical analysis of official documents from international organizations such as NATO, UN, EU, government strategies, and the doctrines of the Russian Federation and coastal states is conducted.

1 A. Irkhin, & O. Moskalenko, “The Black Sea region in the competition of geopolitical projects of the great powers in 1991-2019.” *Vestnik RUDN (International Relations 2021)* 498—516.

Particular attention is paid to expert reports and monitoring of current events using open sources of information, including media, databases, and analytical platforms. The application of the mentioned methods provides a deep understanding of geopolitical processes in the Black Sea region, enables correlating the dynamics of changes in the balance of power, and assesses the impact of global transformations on regional security.

The theoretical basis for the paper is a comprehensive approach that combines classical geopolitics, international relations theory, and military-strategic analysis. The Black Sea region serves as a key intersection of great powers' interests and a space for implementing their strategies in the context of a shifting global balance of power. In this particular case, it is worth highlighting the theory of Realism that emphasizes the struggle for power and influence in the anarchic international system. The Black Sea region is seen as an arena for realizing national interests and ensuring security. The concept of a new world order is associated with the transformation of the global system after the end of the Cold War, the change in centers of power, and the emergence of multipolarity. Security theory is an interdisciplinary field that studies how individuals, societies, states, information, and infrastructure can be protected from various threats. It covers a wide range of issues, from national and international security to information, environmental, economic, and personal safety.² Since our paper deals with regional security, we have to point out the concept of regional security complexes (RSC), which was introduced in the 1980s by B. Buzan and O. Wæver, key figures of the Copenhagen School.³

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the Black Sea region as an arena of geopolitical confrontation in the context of the transformation of the modern world order, as well as to identify key factors influencing regional security and sustainability. In this case, we have to point out such points as the analysis of the geopolitical significance of the Black Sea region in the context of the contemporary international order. Moreover, to identify the key players in the geopolitical confrontation in the Black Sea region and their interests. Furthermore, it is important to determine the prospects for the development of the Black Sea region as an arena of geopolitical conflict amid a changing global balance of power.

Main Part

Weakening of Russia's Positions in the Region (on the example of Azerbaijan and Armenia)

After the dissolution of the USSR, geopolitical attention to Eurasia increased exponentially. The US, EU, and China monitored the situation in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia most closely. For Russia, these regions have always been and continue to be of interest from a national security perspective. It is through the prism of national interests and national security that Russia has always viewed the Crimean Peninsula. In the post-Soviet period, Russia assumes that the nature and quality of geopolitical threats from the south changed dramatically, and fundamentally new vulnerabilities emerged, often not only regional but also macroregional in nature. According to the Russian Federation, political thought, the emergence of new challenges and

² Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (New York, 2007).

³ Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers the Structure of International Security* (New York, 2003).

threats was accompanied by growing competition between global and regional political actors for Russia's geopolitical influence. This competition was waged not so much for resources as for the ability to control geopolitical points and lines in the region, to strengthen one's position in the region, and limit the claims of one's opponents. The reaction to this was the incorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol into Russia, motivated by the need to ensure Russia's national security. This, in turn, provoked a very violent reaction from global and regional geopolitical players, driven by their geopolitical interests.

In the interests of ensuring national security and stability, Russia has placed great emphasis on maintaining Ukraine, along with the Crimean Peninsula, and the South Caucasus States within its geopolitical orbit since the independence of the former Soviet republics. The loss of influence in the second-largest republic of the former Soviet Union by population, industrial base, and military-political resources was recognized by the political class as a geopolitical catastrophe. Moreover, the Russian-Ukrainian border stretches over 2,200 km. An important factor is also the immediate proximity of Ukraine to the Russian capital and the Volga region, the political and industrial centers of Russia. In this case, it is worth recalling the world of Z. Brzezinski,⁴ who is considered one of the leading American political scientists, that Russia would not be able to become a great Eurasian power without losing Ukraine.

The extremely painful period for Russia was the Ukrainian state's separation from the post-Soviet landmass of what for centuries was considered Russia, culminating not only in a shift in official Kyiv's geopolitical vector but also in the complete loss of all key ties between Russia and Ukraine. Two so-called color revolutions, a coup d'état, the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, the outbreak of civil war in the southeastern regions, the declaration of statehood in the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic, and the annexation of Crimea.⁵

As for the Caucasus States, here we can say that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced the challenge of national disintegration and was not particularly active in foreign policy due to numerous domestic problems. However, it gradually gained a foothold in both domestic and foreign policy. With the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister in 1996, Russia asserted itself as a global actor in world politics, including in the Caucasus. After Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia gained strength both politically and economically. Much had already been lost in the Caucasus, but Russia gradually began to become more active in this area as well. The South Caucasus is a region of vital Russian interests. For Russia, the South Caucasus is also important for maintaining stability in the North Caucasus. Due to its importance, the South Caucasus factor has found a place in Russia's policy documents. Russia cannot tolerate the destabilization of the situation in the South Caucasus. It is worth noting that the South Caucasus is a region where the geopolitical interests of Russia, the United States, NATO, the European Union (EU), and China intersect.

To explain the relations and interests of the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus, we

4 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperative* (New York: Basic Books 1998).

5 Z. Gapizov, "Positions of Key Geopolitical Actors on the "Crimean Issue" *Central Russian Journal of Social Sciences* (15/3 2020): 244-257.

have to look at the relations between countries separately, since Russia has and has always had a personal and certain approach and interests to each country. Thus, the relations with Azerbaijan were developing dynamically, particularly in the economic sphere. Azerbaijan is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, Azerbaijan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 1999.⁶ Military-technical cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan is limited to the supply of Russian weapons to this Transcaucasian republic. Some experts linked this episode to Baku's refusal to renew the lease agreement for the Gabala radar station on terms acceptable to Russia.⁷

Given Azerbaijan's rich hydrocarbon reserves, many foreign companies are investing in this sector of the Azerbaijani economy. The Russian company Lukoil has excelled in this area. Between 1995 and 2009, it invested over \$1 billion in the local economy, implementing a number of projects in various sectors. The Lukoil Overseas group operates in gas and condensate production. In Azerbaijan, Lukoil Overseas is a member of the consortium for the exploration and development of the Shah Deniz offshore gas condensate field, holding a 10% stake in the project.⁸ Russian-Azerbaijani energy cooperation is well-developed. Fruitful cooperation in gas sales continues between Russia's Gazprom and Azerbaijan's SOCAR. In the oil transit sector, 1,997.3 thousand tons of oil were pumped through the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline in 2012.⁹ Over the past 30 years, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, more than 250 bilateral documents have been signed between the two countries, and important steps have been taken to implement them. Here should be mentioned the recent and one of the most important ones, signed on January 22, 2024, a Roadmap for the development of key areas of Azerbaijani-Russian cooperation for 2024–2026 was signed in Baku. The roadmap outlines specific steps to develop cooperation in the areas of trade, economic and investment activities, transport, industry, agricultural and food security, energy, tourism, humanitarian and social development, as well as innovation and information technology.

It should also be noted that Russian-Azerbaijani relations are not without problems. Chief among these are the delimitation of the state border and the Samur River, as well as the status of the Caspian Sea. The border issue was resolved with the signing of the State Border Treaty and the "Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rational Use and Protection of Water Resources of the Transboundary Samur River" in 2010.¹⁰

However, the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia are entering a new phase marked by rising tensions, strategic rethinking, and geopolitical implications for the entire South Caucasus. The Baku-Moscow axis, once built on pragmatism, is now tottering due to mutual mistrust, stra-

6 K. Marabyan, "Contemporary Russia Policy for the Southern Caucasus." *Review of International Relations* (MGIMO 2014): 92-100.

7 "Moscow and Baku cannot agree on the Gabala Radar Station," *BBC News*, February 29, 2012 <https://surl.li/zywrhk>

8 Asian Development Bank, *XARR Report on Lukoil Overseas Shah Deniz Stage II Gas Field Expansion Project* (Manila, 2012), 45, <https://surl.li/iqxnui>

9 Mina Muradova, "Russia and Azerbaijan Terminate Baku-Novorossiysk Agreement," *CACI Analyst*, June 28, 2013, <https://surl.li/ifobnd>

10 International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, *Selected Agreements on Transboundary Waters: Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (1992–2019)* (Tashkent: Scientific and Information Center for Water Coordination, 2019), PDF, <https://surl.li/jssepf>

tegic disagreements, and increasingly harsh rhetoric. Personal ties between Presidents Aliyev and Putin have long been a stabilizing factor, helping to smooth out institutional tensions. The downward trend in Azerbaijani-Russian relations became evident after Russian air defense systems shot down an Azerbaijani passenger plane in December 2024. This egregious incident prompted an immediate diplomatic response from Baku, including demands for an official apology, accountability, and compensation. It was used by Aliyev to change his political vector toward Turkey and Pakistan, deepening partnership with Israel, and developing relations with China. In the case of Turkey, Azerbaijan restored its relations soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Turkey was indeed the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, and since then, the countries claim that they are two countries, one nation. Tensions further escalated in June 2025 following mass arrests of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg, which many in Baku perceived as a deliberate and organized act of persecution or intimidation. Whether this was a localized power struggle or a Moscow-sanctioned operation, it has far-reaching political implications.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev openly and, one might say, demonstratively supports Russia's main opponent and enemy - Ukraine. While the confrontation between Russia and Azerbaijan was extremely tense, a telephone conversation took place between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky thanked Ilham Aliyev for his support for Ukraine and its territorial integrity. We have to highlight that it is vital for Russia to maintain economic ties with Azerbaijan.

Russia's war with Ukraine and isolation by a series of Western sanctions made Azerbaijan an important logistical partner for the West. Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has been actively investing in transport infrastructure on Azerbaijani territory and in projects along the Russia-Iran-India route. The Kremlin has transformed itself from a staunch ally of Armenia into a friend of Azerbaijan, helping Ilham Aliyev, with direct military support from Turkey and technical assistance from Israel, to retake Nagorno-Karabakh. After the war ended, Moscow, Ankara, and Baku began demanding that Armenia open the so-called "Zangezur Corridor", a transit route in the south of the country that would connect Turkey and Azerbaijan and therefore Russia and Turkey by land, be under their control, and, consequently, cut off the Armenians from Yerevan's last potential regional ally, Iran. It was one of the reasons that Yerevan began seeking security guarantees from the West, which led to sharp opposition from the pro-Russian opposition and the Patriarchate to Prime Minister Pashinyan.

The successful restoration of the territorial integrity became a personal success of Ilham Aliyev and raised his political image. The confrontation with Moscow brings significant benefits to Azerbaijan on the international stage. Here, we have to highlight that the country did not have it before. Moreover, Baku wants to present itself to the West as a reliable partner in the energy sector and a stable secular alternative in the region. Confronting Moscow, Azerbaijan wants to show that it is a strategic partner of the West, especially in the energy sector. The drastic reduction in Russian influence in Azerbaijan and thus in the region is being perceived sharply in Russia. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has achieved what would have recently seemed unthinkable in the post-Soviet space. Russian authorities and propagandists did not condemn the Azerbaijani leader for pushing Russia out of the region. On the contrary, they did their utmost to justify this state of affairs. They blamed the Armenian leadership and Nikol Pashinyan, who himself recognized Azerbaijan within its 1991

borders and trusted Brussels and Washington, which, according to the Kremlin's logic, cannot lead to anything good.¹¹

Even though Russia helped Azerbaijan to restore its territorial integrity to spite Armenia, especially its Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, whose anti-Russia attitude was at its peak in 2020, the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia are still deteriorating. According to the Secretary of the Armenian Security Council, the so-called 44-day war in the fall of 2020 would not have begun "without Russia's permission." Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan stated that Russia "seized" Nagorno-Karabakh and subsequently handed it over to Azerbaijani control. He added that it happened when they were completely dependent on Russia. Russia took Nagorno-Karabakh from them, returned it to Azerbaijan, and then left. That was the reality.¹² Pashinyan has repeatedly pointed out that the Russian military has failed to fulfill its mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, including protecting the region's population.

In this case, it should be pointed out that for most of their history, relations between Russia and Armenia have been distinguished by particular openness, a high level of trust, and warmth, borne of the closeness between the two peoples. Russia's war against Ukraine further undermined Yerevan's trust in Moscow. By diverting Russia's attention to Ukraine, Baku was able to launch an attack on Armenia in 2022. Pashinyan's appeals to Russia and the CSTO for military assistance were unsuccessful, fueling anti-Russian sentiment in Armenia and prompting Yerevan to turn to the West for assistance. However, since 2022, bilateral relations have cooled. One of the key factors of this is the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, the Second Karabakh War, and its consequences. Current global political processes have forced Russia and Armenia to reconsider their approaches to bilateral cooperation. Moscow has begun to focus more attention on developing economic ties with other regional players, with whom it maintains constructive relations, Azerbaijan and Turkey.¹³ For this reason, Yerevan is shifting toward European Integration and is trying to establish closer ties with extra-regional players, seeking alternatives to partnerships in the areas of security and economic cooperation. There is an unprecedented deterioration in Russian-Armenian relations. This, in turn, further narrows the room for maneuver that Russia could use to regain its position in the South Caucasus. The question about why Russia betrays its ally in the South Caucasus might give the following idea. Russia never liked the Pashinyan government, because it replaced a pro-Russian kleptocratic government through a "velvet revolution." Maybe giving Baku *carte blanche*, Russia hoped that the Armenian population would not tolerate the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and demand Pashinyan's resignation. Thus, as we see, Armenia is slowly but surely increasing its rhetoric and diplomatic activity against Russia. Yerevan has nothing to lose, as Russia is tired of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian decisions and the unfavorable situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, for the moment, Armenia cannot afford serious changes in its foreign policy, as Yerevan is quite dependent on Russia.

11 Russif Huseynov, "The Rupture of Azerbaijani-Russian Relations: From Pragmatism to Polarization," IPG Journal, July 24, 2025, <https://surl.li/ckoewr>

12 Armen Grigoryan, "Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia: 'Russia seized Nagorno-Karabakh' and 'returned it to Azerbaijan'," Delfi RU, June 26, 2024, <https://surl.li/zdbkix>

13 Tigran H. Meloyan, Russian-Armenian Interaction at the Current Stage: Analytical Note No. 59, November 2019 (Moscow: Russian International Affairs Council), PDF, <https://surl.li/ccqcrmq>

Conclusion

Russia, reasserting its role in the post-Soviet space, is seeking to strengthen its position in the Black Sea region by incorporating the region's countries into Eurasian integration projects. The Russia-Ukraine war has demonstrated the limits of this strategy and shaped the contours of a new approach to the region, based on strengthening its naval presence and dominating the Black Sea region's energy infrastructure. Currently, the region, in its various configurations, represents the locus of regional and global politics, possessing vast natural resources and strategically important transport and energy corridors, where two trends in the development of the modern system of international relations have collided: globalism and regionalism, the logic of a universal world order, and the implementation of mechanisms of spheres of influence.

The modern international situation is much more difficult for Russia today than ever before; it is in economic isolation and is the target of threats and challenges. In this regard, Russia is taking very important measures, which include the modernization of its army, the development of security systems within the CSTO and the CIS, close cooperation with China, and the countries of Asia and Latin America. All these measures clearly show that Russia is ready to repel external attacks from the West and realize its national interests at any cost. Despite the West's harsh reaction to Russia's military actions, it was soon forced to pursue a policy of warming relations with Russia, as Russia gave the West a direct hint that if Russia needed the West, the West also needed Russia.

The main challenge for Russia in the Black Sea Region is the NATO factor. The expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance and the approach of its troops are perceived as the most serious threat to the national interests and security of the Russian Federation. To prevent this threat, the Russian Federation has used such methods as inspiring ethnic and religious conflicts. In addition, to ensure national security, Russia has placed its military bases in the separatist territories. With this step, it has strengthened its position and controls the entire Region. Therefore, in the light of the modern challenges of global and regional security, it will never allow NATO troops to approach it at a dangerous distance.

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THE GEOSTRATEGIC ROLE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA BASIN FOR THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE AND ITS PARTNER COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This paper, “The Geostrategic Role of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea Basin for the North Atlantic Alliance and Its Partner Countries,” explores the extent and nature of international organizations’ engagement in promoting secure development and preserving stability within these regions. The study analyzes their strategic interests and objectives, alongside the potential threats and risks that may emerge in the process. Special attention is devoted to the political, military-strategic, and economic agendas of non-regional actors, whose involvement exerts a considerable influence on the security environment and long-term stability of the South Caucasus and Black Sea Basin states.

A significant part of the topic involves the study and analysis of activities oriented toward future outcomes, which helps to identify and distinguish concrete and important developments in relation to other parallel processes. The discussion pays particular attention to the region’s persistently turbulent environment, shaped by the overlapping or intersecting interests of various external actors, military conflicts, newly established economic zones, states’ political aspirations, strategically significant transport routes, and energy transit corridors.

Due to the region’s strategic location—offering short, convenient, stable, and reliable transport and communication routes for transferring energy resources from Central Asia toward Europe—the principal challenge lies in strengthening the security sector of the regional states and providing them with strategic support. This is of critical importance for enhancing and sustaining their capacity to act effectively.

The paper’s originality lies in highlighting, for the first time, the South Caucasus and Black Sea region not only in geopolitical terms but primarily through its geostrategic and military-strategic significance. This approach is essential for assessing the region’s operational-strategic role and for analyzing military operations within a broader security context. Its uniqueness is further underscored by the inclusion of an analysis of recent armed conflicts.

In the concluding part of the paper, we have examined the objectives of countries interested in the region’s growing potential, along with the investments mobilized for large-scale infrastructure projects and the security sector. The analysis clearly highlights the trends of increasing strategic support for the region and the strengthening of its capacities—military, military-political, economic, and financial—benefiting all actors involved in the ongoing processes. Ultimately, this dynamic is expected to create unprecedented security guarantees for certain states of the Black Sea Basin.

Keywords: security, stability, strategic support, South Caucasus, Black Sea Basin, threats, international organizations, military strategy.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of modern technologies, coupled with the growing global demand for natural resources, has significantly accelerated extraction processes. This dynamic has, in turn, created an urgent need to deliver energy resources to different parts of the world in the shortest possible time and under favorable conditions. As a result, the modernization of existing transport and communication routes, along with the development of alternative corridors, remains a critical priority.

The onset of the most active phase in linking Asia and Europe can be traced to the post-Soviet period, which opened access for Western countries to territories and states that had long been closed and inaccessible. Economic spaces, infrastructure and communication projects centered on natural resource transit, large-scale investment flows, the strengthening of the security sector, and enhanced cooperation in this field—together with the promotion of peaceful coexistence among states, economic growth, and social stability—emerge as key factors. These dimensions warrant particular attention as they represent essential directions for the future, laying the groundwork for closer cooperation with states in specific geographic regions.

Relations between individual states, as well as the interest of international organizations in non-member countries, are inevitably shaped by the pursuit of mutual benefits. Such benefits must be reciprocal, as the unilateral imposition or enforcement of interests is likely, in the short term, to generate public dissatisfaction within the host country at all levels. This, in turn, may result in the deterioration or severance of relations and a significant erosion of trust.

These interests are diverse and often determined by a state's geographical position, which frames its strategic importance and lends it particular weight. Political, military, military-political, economic, military-economic, social, and cultural dimensions all play a crucial role in shaping cooperative relations among states and fostering peaceful coexistence. Achieving this requires systematic and coordinated measures that ensure the continuity and sustainability of such cooperation.

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In examining the strategic significance of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin, it is essential to emphasize the role of geography, which shapes the dynamics of all actors engaged in the region. These actors—whether fully or partially involved—exert influence over the political,

military, and economic processes of the states concerned, as well as over each country's specific needs, ambitions, and future objectives. This interplay provides a basis for outlining and analyzing the region's overall strategic landscape.

The region's geographic location represents a critical intersection of the interests of multiple states. Within this context, the establishment of friendly and balanced relations, coupled with the formulation of carefully analyzed and forward-looking strategies, becomes imperative. Such strategies must ensure that all parties have the opportunity to derive equitable benefits. Of particular importance are the factors of security, protection, and long-term stability, since these conditions render the region considerably more attractive and favorable for sustained investment.

The creation and maintenance of a long-term stable environment requires joint efforts directed toward the establishment and modernization of a unified security sector. Such a framework should, in the future, provide firm guarantees of security to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of implemented infrastructure projects and the preservation of a stable environment over the long term—not only within individual states of the region but across the region as a whole.

The above considerations clearly demonstrate that the interest of developed and industrialized states in particular regions is driven by outcome-oriented objectives. These objectives encompass not only financial benefits but also the expansion of influence in political, economic, and military domains. The pursuit of such influence is often accompanied by the promotion of progressive processes across various sectoral directions within specific geographic areas. However, these same processes may provoke irritation among other states with competing interests in the region, giving rise to different types of risk factors, generating long-term tension points, and potentially fueling the escalation of armed confrontation.

Main Part

In the aftermath of the disintegration of the post-Soviet space, a period of profound transformation commenced in the political, economic, and military life of several states of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin. This era necessitated the independent existence and development of sovereign states. Such development entailed a transition from the Soviet system to alternative political structures, the arduous process of constructing economies from a zero baseline, the elaboration of renewed and multidimensional standards of national defense and security, and the pursuit of foreign policy along fundamentally different trajectories.

The abrupt nature of these changes, coupled with the unpreparedness of many states to confront them, resulted in the inheritance of nearly devastated polities, manifested in economic collapse, civil wars, and interstate armed conflicts. These factors further exacerbated an already multidimensional crisis. The situation likewise proved unfavorable for developed Western countries, as it generated large-scale migration flows, the necessity for humanitarian interventions, and rising trends in criminal activity. Confronting these adverse processes required the mobilization of substantial financial resources directed toward stabilization, particularly the containment of hostilities, the neutralization of economic collapse, and the resolution of political crises.

The developments described above, which unfolded in the relatively recent past, drew consid-

erable attention from Western states and international organizations, thereby shaping a process of Western engagement directed toward outcome-oriented objectives. These objectives were focused on the establishment and development of state institutions, the creation of a security sector and the enhancement of defense capabilities, the promotion of economic progress, and the provision of a stable environment.

The Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus constitute a strategically significant space where the interests of the Russian Federation and those of the Western world intersect, as the region functions as a corridor linking Europe and Asia. For Western international organizations, including the North Atlantic Alliance, the region has been conceived as an alternative transit route for energy resources, bypassing the politically unstable Russian Federation, which persistently manipulates energy supply issues in its relations with Europe.

Nevertheless, the region's importance extends beyond its role as an energy transit corridor. One of NATO's key strategic priorities also lies in the enlargement of the Alliance's borders and the reduction of Russia's political and military presence and influence. Accordingly, the efforts of NATO and its partner states are directed toward ensuring stability in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region while counterbalancing the expanding influence of the Russian Federation.

NATO's active engagement in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin, aimed at expanding its influence, dates back to 1992. This involvement has been shaped by the transformation of the post-Soviet space and the effort to overcome the geopolitical challenges posed by the Russian Federation. The implementation of such objectives would be unattainable without reliable allies in the region, represented in this case by Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, all of which have been participants in NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative since 1994. These countries constitute NATO's partner states, each with shared as well as distinct interests, and since their departure from the post-Soviet sphere, they have designated a pro-Western orientation as a priority for their state development.

The interests of NATO and its partner countries, together with the results achieved in the political, economic, and military domains over the past three decades, have played a significant role in deepening their relationships and in laying the foundation for advancing cooperation to a higher level in the future. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it is important to consider concrete examples of interactions among states in the Black Sea basin and South Caucasus regions that have been directed both toward fostering economic development and strengthening military potential.

The alliance between the Republic of Turkey, as a member state of the North Atlantic Alliance, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, as a partner state, constitutes a significant development in the South Caucasus region. This alliance encompasses not only military cooperation but also an extended period of economic development and remains a promising direction for future progress. Diplomatic relations between them were established in 1992 and have been preserved to the present day, during which time several important energy projects have been implemented¹, such as

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1 M. Komakhia, "South Caucasus Energy Corridor", Tbilisi, 2024, pp. 19-31. <https://shorturl.at/Wddaz>

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- **The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Oil Pipeline** — one of the most significant strategic projects of Turkish–Azerbaijani cooperation. It provides for the transportation of oil to the world market bypassing the Russian Federation, with Georgia serving as the transit country.

- **Shah Deniz (Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum Gas Pipeline)** — another major project, aimed at supplying Georgia and Turkey with natural gas. This project also serves as an alternative route to reduce complete dependence on gas imported from the Russian Federation.

TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline) — a pipeline extending from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to Greece, and continuing onward through the territories of Greece, Albania, and Italy. The pipeline consists of three segments: the first covers the territories of Azerbaijan and Georgia, known as the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP); the second runs through Turkey, known as the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP); and the third extends across Greece, Albania, and Italy, referred to as the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).

Its principal objective is, at the initial stage, to significantly reduce Europe’s dependence on the Russian Federation for natural gas, with the long-term aim of eliminating such reliance altogether.

The **Baku–Tbilisi–Kars Railway** represents a communication corridor of considerable regional importance, linking NATO member Turkey with its partner states, Georgia and Azerbaijan. This project further strengthens Georgia’s role as a transit country and establishes an alternative transport and communication route between Asia and Europe. Strategically, it is designed to reduce dependence on railway networks passing through Iran and the Russian Federation.

As noted above, relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan are not confined solely to the economic projects listed; rather, the two countries also maintain close and effective cooperation in the military sphere. This cooperation was initiated in 1992 through agreements on collaboration in the defense sector with NATO member states. Following Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Karabakh War in 2020, the *Shusha Declaration* on strategic partnership with Turkey was signed. The declaration encompasses joint defense commitments, combined military exercises and training, the production and transfer of necessary armaments, and technological cooperation.

According to the declaration, Turkey and Azerbaijan conduct comprehensive field exercises involving air, land, and artillery units, along with specialized training for special forces and mountain warfare divisions. Collectively, these developments underscore Turkey’s successful efforts, as a NATO member, to expand its influence in the South Caucasus and Black Sea basin. At the same time, they point to a relative reduction in the influence of the Russian Federation and Iran—politically, economically, and militarily.

The realization and activation of the aforementioned economic projects were undertaken by bypassing the Republic of Armenia, a decision rooted in decades of strained and adversarial relations between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Armenia. Nevertheless, following the conclusion of the

Second Karabakh War and Armenia's subsequent shift toward a pro-Western political orientation, an alternative option to the so-called "Middle Corridor" has gained prominence — the "Zangezur Corridor."

If implemented, the Zangezur Corridor would serve multiple strategic purposes. On the one hand, it would link Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, thereby granting direct access to the Republic of Turkey. On the other hand, it would provide Turkey with a secure route to the states of Central Asia within the framework of the *Organization of Turkic States*. Beyond its regional implications, the corridor's operation would also deliver considerable economic benefits to the Republic of Armenia, which has long endured economic isolation due to tense relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Given that a significant share of Armenia's economy remains heavily dependent on the Russian Federation, the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor would simultaneously create a direct gateway to Europe, transforming Armenia into a transit country. Such a development could contribute to stabilizing and diversifying its economic position, particularly in the event of a partial or complete rupture in trade relations with Russia.

The activation of this corridor remains the subject of intense debate, as such a profound geopolitical shift inevitably produces both advocates and detractors. Central to this discussion is the mediating role of the United States in advancing a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia and in facilitating the opening of their borders. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, this process is perceived as the encroachment of an extra-regional power and a potential precursor to the deployment of U.S. military forces along its frontier. Against the backdrop of deteriorating U.S.–Iran relations over the past decade, coupled with the uneasy dynamics of Turkish–Iranian relations, the prospect of opening the "Zangezur Corridor" is interpreted in Tehran as a direct military and geostrategic threat.

The operationalization of this corridor would signify a significant expansion of Turkish influence — and, by extension, that of the North Atlantic Alliance — directly adjacent to Iran's borders. It would simultaneously entail the loss of Armenia as a regional ally, the intensification of U.S.-driven economic isolation, and the increased likelihood of a Western military presence in the region. For Iran, an additional concern lies in the potential deepening of Armenia's cooperation with the United States and NATO across political and military spheres. Such developments could seriously undermine, or even paralyze, Armenian–Iranian relations in virtually all dimensions.

From the perspective of Georgian analysts and political scientists, the implementation and commissioning of the "Zangezur Corridor" project represents a complex economic dilemma. The corridor has the potential to serve as a catalyst for new geostrategic realignments and economic transformations. Particular emphasis has been placed on its implications for the "Middle Corridor," as its freight capacity could diminish in favor of the Zangezur Corridor as an alternative route.

The Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus have increasingly emerged as a geostrategic arena where the interests of major powers with ambitious regional agendas converge. Each actor seeks not only to preserve but also to expand its influence. Among the key players are the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, both of which have seen their influence in the region decline substantially over the past decade. The presence of Western international and collective

security organizations along their borders has accelerated this downward trajectory, fundamentally reshaping the balance of power. Meanwhile, the growing involvement of Western institutions and the influx of large-scale investments into the South Caucasus and the accessible Black Sea states have further constrained the regional influence of both Russia and Iran.

The erosion of Iran’s influence in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region has recently been underscored by the initiation of peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan under U.S. mediation. A central element of this process has been Azerbaijan’s consolidation of control over the Karabakh territories incorporated under its jurisdiction, situated directly along Iran’s northern frontier. For Tehran, this represents not only a strategic loss but also the empowerment of an unfriendly neighbor with additional leverage over sensitive sections of its northwestern border. Equally concerning is the prospect of the “Zangezur Corridor” entering into operation — a route that would connect Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan along the entirety of Armenia’s border with Iran — which poses another significant challenge to Iran’s regional standing.² The roots of open hostility between Iran and Azerbaijan can be traced to 2016, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s official visit to Baku laid the foundation for strategic cooperation between the two states in political, economic, and military spheres. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the emergence of Azerbaijan as a strategic ally of what it defines as a “Zionist state” directly on its border has been perceived as a profound and enduring threat.

Iran’s diminishing influence is further compounded by Armenia’s pronounced pivot toward a pro-Western orientation, despite its traditional alignment with Russia, and by the involvement of the United States — an extra-regional actor — in the modernization of the Zangezur Corridor.³

Against the backdrop of persistent U.S.–Iran tensions, this development constitutes yet another source of strategic vulnerability for Tehran. Moreover, the risks posed by U.S. engagement extend beyond its physical presence. Should the Zangezur Corridor become fully operational with substantial American involvement, Iran would face the effective closure of its overland transit routes via Armenia to Georgia and, subsequently, to Russia. For a country already constrained by far-reaching Western economic sanctions, such an outcome would intensify its isolation and severely curtail its connectivity with its key strategic partner, the Russian Federation.

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2 L. Pertaia, “Iran and Russia cannot agree on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Zangezur Corridor” Tbilisi, 2024.

<https://surl.li/woqjxv>, Megrelishvili S., Dzandzava N., “Zangezur Corridor and Long-Term Peace Prospects”, Tbilisi, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/ILS20>, G. Tsikarishvili, “Fear of Iran’s Encirclement - Tensions Between Tehran and Baku”, 2021. <https://surl.li/cc/mmpfwv>

3 Ravandi-Fadai L., “From the Threat of War to Negotiations”, 2025. <https://surl.li/qeudvo>

4 G. Tsikarishvili, “Fear of Iran’s Encirclement - Tensions Between Tehran and Baku”, 2021. <https://surl.li/ugpytg>

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One of the principal actors in the South Caucasus and Black Sea basin is the Russian Federation⁵, which, in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, assumed a destabilizing role in the political trajectories of the post-Soviet states of Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This approach has contributed to a marked decline in Russia’s political, economic, and military influence across the region. The Federation’s rigid policies, coupled with its imperial ambitions to reassert comprehensive control over the Caucasus and the Black Sea — primarily aimed at curbing Western influence in the post-Soviet space — have yielded several notable consequences, including:

Armed conflicts in Georgia provoked by Russia:

- **1991–1993:** Violent overthrow of the national government and civil war.⁶
- **1992–1993 in Abkhazia and 1991–1992 in the South Ossetia region:** Armed conflicts with separatist forces encouraged by Russia, ultimately leading to the occupation of both regions.⁷
- **2004:** A brief armed conflict in the South Ossetia region.
- **2008:** The Russo–Georgian war.

Armed conflicts between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia:

- **1992–1994:** The First Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict.⁸
- **2020:** The Second large-scale Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict,⁹ marked by Russia’s passive stance toward its ally Armenia¹⁰.
- **1992–1994:** The First Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict.
- **Russia’s military campaigns in Ukraine:**¹¹
- **2014:** Armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, during which Crimea, as well as parts of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, were occupied.
- **2022:** The Russian Federation’s so-called “special military operation,” which escalated into a protracted war that continues to this day.

In order to halt developmental processes and obstruct the expansion of collective international security organizations, such an approach has significantly damaged the diplomatic and good-neighborly relations of the Russian Federation with post-Soviet states. As a result, Russia

5 Ravandi-Fadai L., “From the Threat of War to Negotiations”, 2025. <https://surl.lu/rbixkd>

M.Manchkhashvili, “Russia and the South Caucasus”, Tbilisi, 2019. pp. 73-88. <https://surl.lu/skcgqhw>

6 D. Pipinashvili, “Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Problems of Regional Stability”, Tbilisi, 2009. pp. 85-161.. <https://surl.li/emwdlx>

7 I.Gurgenashvili , “Anatomy of the Karabakh Conflict”, Tbilisi, 2020. <https://shorturl.at/ezuao>

8 D. Batashvili , “Immediate Geopolitical Consequences of the Second Karabakh War”, Tbilisi, 2020. <https://shorturl.at/xopv1>

9 B. Kobakhidze, “Karabakh Conflict: Past, Present, Future”, Tbilisi, 2020. <https://shorturl.at/W9IQI>

10 G. Antadze, “The Russo-Ukrainian War through the Prism of Geopolitical Theories”, Tbilisi, 2023. <https://surl.cc/adtlhk>

G. Antadze, G. Karalashvili, “Military-Political Aspects of the Russia-Ukraine War and Possible Development Scenarios of Hostilities”, Tbilisi. <https://shorturl.at/AWRMD>

11 M.Ukleba., M. Tsikhelashvili, “South Caucasus-China Relations in the Context of Economic Development”, Tbilisi, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/MG0oJ>

has experienced a sharp decline in influence across political, economic, military, and social domains, accompanied by a notable erosion of its credibility. This is evidenced by the minimal level of Russia's presence in the South Caucasus, where its only remaining foothold, both politically and militarily, is the Republic of Armenia and the 102nd military base in Gyumri. Even this presence, however, has been called into question in the aftermath of Armenia's defeat in the Second Karabakh War and its subsequent radical shift in political orientation.

Among the important extra-regional actors interested in the geostrategic location of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin is the **People's Republic of China**.¹²

The "Belt and Road Initiative," launched by China and already in the process of implementation, represents a major economic project. A component of this initiative is the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, as well as the ongoing construction of the Anaklia deep-sea port. These projects have the potential to transform the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin into a logistics hub connecting China and Europe. However, recent developments in U.S.–China relations — particularly in the fields of trade and economic exchange — may exert a negative impact on the full realization of the corridors envisaged within this project.

Against the backdrop of the considerable interest and competition over the South Caucasus and Black Sea basin region¹³ among Western international organizations and alliances, as well as various regional and extra-regional actors, another significant geostrategic space of attention is the **Republic of Georgia**.¹⁴ Owing to its strategic geographic location as a bridge between Asia and Europe, Georgia occupies a central role in regional dynamics. The priorities of the country are directed toward maintaining long-term internal stability, ensuring a secure environment for the effective functioning of the Middle Corridor, and enhancing its transit functions with the ultimate aim of fostering economic development and securing financial benefits.

Close bilateral political, economic, and military cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, combined with Georgia's geostrategic location, has laid the foundation for the implementation of major economic projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Shah Deniz (Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum) gas pipeline, and the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway. The functioning of these already completed projects is crucial not only for economic development but also for safeguarding national security against potential covert or overt aggression by hostile regional actors. This is because the secure operation of the above-mentioned projects is a matter of direct concern for Western international and collective security organizations.¹⁵ The security of the Middle Corridor, which transports energy resources across Georgian territory, constitutes a significant challenge for the economically developed countries of the West. This, in turn, has prompted substantial inflows of investment aimed at strengthening Georgia's security sector.

Of particular importance in this regard are the multinational military exercises conducted in Georgia under the auspices of the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance,¹⁶ such as: **Multi-**

12 V.Papava. "One Belt One Road Initiative" and Georgia", Tbilisi, 2017. <https://surl.lt/geroqn>

13 G. Markhulia, „West or East - Georgia's Geopolitical Trajectory“, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/giCzc>

14 Chitadze N., "Geopolitics", Tbilisi, 2011. Chapter X, pp., 295-309., pp.,332-337. <https://shorturl.at/32Br1>

15 Kogan I., "Trilateral Cooperation in the Field of Military and Energy Security: Reactions of Moscow and Washington", 2014. <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/opinion-papers/17-expert-opinion-geo.pdf>

16 Dzebisashvili Sh., "Membership Action Plan (MAP) - A Lever of Military Deterrence, or Fiction?", Tbilisi, 2022. pp. 4-19, <https://shorturl.at/Bm86N>, Lezhava N., "Prospects of NATO-Georgia Cooperation, Taking into Account the Experience of the Ongoing War in Ukraine", Tbilisi, 2022 pp. 36-4o8. <https://shorturl.at/Bm86N>

national military exercise *Agile Spirit*, held annually since 2011, involving units from all branches of the armed forces.

- **Multinational military exercise *Noble Partner***, held annually since 2015, involving almost all branches of the armed forces, with the exception of naval forces.

These exercises are aimed at enhancing military readiness, achieving interoperability with NATO forces, and approximating Alliance standards, ultimately serving the synchronization of combat operations with the armed forces of NATO member and partner countries. One of the key factors behind holding such exercises in Georgia is the strengthening of the country's defense capabilities and security guarantees, demonstrated through the presence of reliable partners.

- The multinational military exercise *Agile Spirit*, conducted annually since 2011, involves the participation of units from all branches of the armed forces.

- The multinational military exercise *Noble Partner*, held annually since 2015, brings together nearly all branches of the armed forces, with the exception of naval forces.

These exercises are designed to enhance overall military preparedness, foster interoperability with the armed forces of the North Atlantic Alliance, and promote alignment with established standards, thereby ultimately contributing to the synchronization of combat operations alongside NATO member and partner states. The conduct of such exercises in Georgia constitutes a significant factor in reinforcing the country's defense capacity and strengthening its security guarantees, while simultaneously underscoring the presence of reliable and credible partners.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates with clarity the profound geostrategic importance of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea basin for the North Atlantic Alliance and its partner states. Close political, economic, and military cooperation in the region is aimed at maintaining stability, ensuring a secure environment, facilitating the implementation of large-scale economic projects, and diversifying energy supply routes toward European countries. This region constitutes a geostrategic space of intersecting interests, where the patterns of acquisition, maintenance, expansion, and diminution of influence among the world's major powers become particularly pronounced against the backdrop of emerging geopolitical realignments.

One of the most critical factors in the transportation of energy resources from Asia to Europe is the minimization of transport costs, a goal particularly facilitated by the South Caucasus "Middle Corridor." Nevertheless, cost-efficient transportation alone does not provide sufficient guarantees for the successful execution of large-scale energy-transit projects. Ensuring long-term stability and security is equally essential, requiring the development and reinforcement of the security sectors in host countries. This, in turn, highlights the ongoing necessity for sustained investment in defense and security within energy-transit states, alongside the systematic organization of multinational military exercises designed to enhance combat readiness, synchronize operations, and demonstrate military capabilities.

As noted above, the region frequently experiences significant overlaps of political, economic, and military interests among both regional and non-regional actors, generating a turbulent environment that substantially undermines regional stability. In response, Western international orga-

nizations have sought to strengthen strategic cooperation with the countries of the region, enhance the transit potential of the South Caucasus, and develop alternative routes that bypass the Russian Federation, thereby reducing energy dependency on it.

Despite the region's turbulent conditions, resulting from the incompatibility of political and military interests among engaged states, its development as an economic zone remains an ongoing process, providing benefits to both investors and host countries. Consequently, the secure and stable development of the region relies on the continued presence of sustained interest, as well as the cultivation of the most balanced possible relations with all regional actors.

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DRIVERS BEHIND THE STRATEGIC FORMATION OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK REGION

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the key factors contributing to the strategic significance of the South Caucasus and Black Sea region in contemporary international relations and security architecture. The research explores geopolitical, geoeconomic, military, and energy-related dimensions that define the region's unique role as a strategic hub where the interests of East and West, North and South converge.

Special attention is given to historical developments, regional conflicts, and the evolving dynamics of global competition. The study examines NATO's growing involvement and the interests of its partners, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in security, energy diversification, and infrastructure development. The research concludes that the region is not only a strategic space but also a gravitational center of geopolitical opportunities and risks, whose importance continues to grow in the context of global stability.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Black Sea Region, NATO, Global Powers, Regional Security, Energy Politics, Geoeconomics

Introduction

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region has emerged as one of the most strategically significant areas in contemporary international politics and global security architecture. Its geographic location - serving as a bridge between Europe and Asia - positions the region at the intersection of competing interests among global and regional powers.

Historically, the strategic importance of the South Caucasus and Black Sea has been shaped by its natural resources, cultural diversity, and geopolitical positioning. For centuries, this region has been a focal point for empires and international actors, functioning as a crossroads for geopolitical rivalries, trade networks, and cultural exchanges.

In the modern era, driven by globalization, energy competition, and evolving security challenges, the region continues to play a pivotal role in shaping international agendas. The South Caucasus and Black Sea are no longer peripheral zones; they constitute a strategic platform with direct implications for the stability of both Europe and Asia.

Recent geopolitical shifts, the growing importance of energy transit routes, and NATO's increasing engagement have further elevated the region's relevance. Russia's assertive foreign policy, the clash of Western and Eastern interests, and ongoing regional conflicts have created a complex and dynamic environment that demands comprehensive analysis.

This study aims to identify and examine the key factors contributing to the strategic transformation of the South Caucasus and Black Sea region. It also explores the role and interests of NATO and its partners in shaping the region's security and development trajectory.

The research objectives include:

- Analyzing the geopolitical, geoeconomic, and security landscape of the region;
- Identifying the interests of regional and global powers;
- Assessing NATO's strategic involvement and partnerships;
- Evaluating the significance of energy and infrastructure projects;
- Defining key trends and future prospects.

The methodology is based on both primary and secondary sources, employing historical and analytical approaches. The study draws on historical records, contemporary academic literature, and reports from international organizations such as NATO and the European Union, providing a comprehensive overview of the region's evolving strategic dynamics.

Main Part

I. Factors Driving the Evolution of the South Caucasus and Black Sea Region

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region represents a geographically unique area that connects Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Strategically located along key transportation and energy corridors, the region has evolved into a critical hub for global trade and energy transit. The Black Sea serves as a natural maritime gateway to European and Asian markets, while the South Caucasus functions as a "geopolitical bridge" linking North and South, East and West.

Historically, this region has been a focal point of interest for various empires and states. Since antiquity, the Black Sea has played a vital role in trade and military communications. Greek col-

onies and later the Roman Empire utilized the sea as a tool of economic and military influence. During the medieval period, the region became a strategic gateway for the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, whose control over the area enabled expansion into the Balkans, southern Russia, and the Middle East.

In the 19th century, the South Caucasus and Black Sea became central to the Russian Empire's strategic ambitions. Following the Crimean War (1853-1856), Russia's growing dominance in the Black Sea significantly altered the balance of power, prompting Britain and France to reinforce their positions in the region to counter Russian expansion toward the Middle East.¹

During the Cold War, the Black Sea emerged as a major theater of confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet Union established military superiority in the region and deployed extensive infrastructure throughout the South Caucasus.²

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region gained renewed strategic importance. Newly independent states sought to define their foreign policy orientations, while Russia attempted to maintain its influence, leading to persistent tensions. This dynamic attracted the attention of international actors such as NATO, the European Union, the United States, and Turkey.³

These historical developments laid the foundation for the region's transformation into a key component of the global balance of power. The accumulated geopolitical experience continues to shape the strategic role of the South Caucasus and Black Sea in the contemporary international system.

Today, the region is a convergence point for the strategic interests of global powers including Russia, Turkey, the EU, and the United States. For Russia, the area serves as a security buffer and a zone of influence. For Western actors, it offers alternative routes for energy diversification and transportation. Turkey, as a NATO member, seeks to strengthen its presence in both the Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus, intensifying regional competition.

Against this backdrop, the geopolitical significance of the South Caucasus and Black Sea continues to grow, generating both security challenges and new opportunities.

II. Geoeconomic Factors

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region serves as one of the principal energy corridors connecting the Caspian Sea's oil and gas resources to European markets. Azerbaijan's energy fields - particularly Shah Deniz and Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli - play a pivotal role in shaping the region's geoeconomic strategy.⁴ To facilitate the transport of these resources, several strategic pipelines have been constructed, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and the South Caucasus Pipeline. These routes contribute to energy diversification and reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy supplies.

Numerous infrastructure projects have further enhanced the region's role as a transportation and logistics hub. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, linking Asia and Europe, stands out as a major

1 Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 103–110.

2 S. Neil MacFarlane, *Western Engagement in the Caucasus and Central Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 14–16.

3 Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, (I.B. Tauris, 2013), 400.

4 Brenda Shaffer, *Energy Politics*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 200.

artery that promotes trade growth and deepens regional integration.⁵ Additionally, Black Sea ports play a crucial role in cargo transit and international trade. These infrastructure initiatives are supported by both regional and global actors, amplifying the region's geoeconomic significance.

Economic cooperation in the South Caucasus and Black Sea region is conducted through various multilateral formats. Organizations such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) foster deeper economic ties and attract investment.⁶ The European Union and China also actively participate in financing and developing infrastructure projects, reflecting the region's growing importance in global geoeconomic dynamics.⁷

Alongside cooperation, the region faces intense competition over resources, markets, and transport routes, often leading to political tensions. The interplay between collaboration and rivalry underscores the complexity of the region's economic landscape and its strategic relevance in global energy and trade networks.⁸

III. Security Environment and Military Factors

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region has long been characterized by ethnic, religious, and political diversity, which has frequently served as a source of tension and conflict.⁹ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, several "frozen conflicts" emerged, significantly impacting both the South Caucasus and the broader Black Sea security landscape.

In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) have posed major challenges to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity since the 1990s.¹⁰ The 2008 Russo-Georgian War further escalated tensions, resulting in Russia's recognition of both regions as independent states and the deployment of Russian military bases therein.¹¹ This development has weakened not only Georgia's security architecture but also the broader regional stability, amplifying Russia's military influence in the Black Sea basin.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia remains another critical challenge. The 44-day war in 2020 significantly altered the regional balance of power, yet the core issues remain unresolved, leaving the situation fragile and prone to renewed escalation.¹²

The Transnistrian conflict in Moldova also affects Black Sea security. Russia's military presence in Transnistria poses a persistent threat to Moldova's sovereignty and adds further risks to regional stability.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and its ongoing war in Ukraine have transformed the security dynamics of the region. These developments represent not only regional threats but also global challenges, directly impacting European security and NATO's strategic posture. The intensification of regional and international security crises underscores the urgency of addressing these conflicts.

The persistence of unresolved conflicts hinders regional cooperation, obstructs economic de-

5 Z. Shiriyev and K. Kakachia, *The South Caucasus: Between Integration and Fragmentation*, (European Policy Centre, 2015), 110.

6 Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), About BSEC, www.bsec-organization.org.

7 European Commission, *EU Connectivity Strategy for Asia*, 2018.

8 Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, (I.B. Tauris, 2013), 400.

9 Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2018), 312.

10 Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, (I.B. Tauris, 2013), 400.

11 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, (Indiana University Press, 1994), 419.

12 Zaur Shiriyev and Kornely Kakachia, *The South Caucasus: Between Integration and Fragmentation*, (European Policy Centre, 2015), 110.

velopment, and increases the risk of military escalation. External powers - including Russia, Turkey, the European Union, and the United States - often leverage these conflicts to advance their geopolitical agendas, complicating efforts to establish peace and stability.

The development of military infrastructure and NATO's growing involvement have significantly influenced the region's security architecture. NATO actively collaborates with regional countries through joint exercises, defense sector reforms, and capacity-building initiatives.¹³ Regular naval patrols and drills in the Black Sea aim to strengthen regional security and counterbalance Russia's military presence. Meanwhile, Russia continues to maintain military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, contributing to heightened tensions and persistent security risks.¹⁴

Key security challenges in the region include frozen conflicts, risks of military escalation, hybrid threats (such as cyberattacks and disinformation), transnational crime, and terrorism. Russia's military buildup in the Black Sea, particularly following the annexation of Crimea, has shifted the regional power balance and increased NATO's security demands. Additionally, energy and transport infrastructure in the region are frequent targets of sabotage and cyberattacks, further exacerbating security vulnerabilities.¹⁵

IV. The Role of NATO and Its Partners in the Region

For NATO, the South Caucasus and Black Sea region represents a strategic space critical to the Alliance's eastern flank security, energy diversification, and transportation infrastructure.¹⁶ The Black Sea basin includes NATO member states - Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria - as well as key partners such as Georgia and Ukraine. This configuration enables NATO to strengthen regional security architecture and counterbalance Russian influence.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the strategic importance of the Black Sea region has grown significantly. NATO's strategic documents emphasize the region's role in energy transit, military mobility, and rapid crisis response.¹⁷ The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that Black Sea security is directly linked to the broader European and Euro-Atlantic security system.

NATO actively cooperates with Georgia and Ukraine through various formats, including the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), and the NATO-Ukraine Commission.¹⁸ These partnerships encompass joint military exercises, defense sector reforms, cybersecurity enhancement, and the development of crisis response capabilities.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, NATO has intensified its support for Ukraine across military, humanitarian, and technical domains. This includes the provision of weapons, intelligence sharing, and logistical assistance.¹⁹ NATO member states also participate in Black Sea security initiatives, such as joint maritime patrols and exercises, aimed at strengthening regional stability and defense capabilities.

13 NATO, Relations with Georgia, 2023, www.nato.int.

14 Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, (I.B. Tauris, 2013), 400.

15 Brenda Shaffer, *Energy Politics*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 200.

16 NATO, NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022. www.nato.int.

17 NATO, Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank, 2023. www.nato.int.

18 NATO, Relations with Georgia, 2023. www.nato.int.

19 NATO, NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, 2023. www.nato.int.

The Alliance seeks to enhance the defense resilience of partner countries, enabling them to independently address hybrid and conventional threats. For Georgia and Ukraine, deepening cooperation with NATO is viewed as a key guarantee of national security and sovereignty.²⁰ Both countries actively contribute to NATO missions and operations, implement defense reforms, and strive to meet Alliance standards. The war in Ukraine has further solidified Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and underscored the critical importance of NATO's support.

NATO's partnership also includes efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, counter hybrid threats, and protect critical infrastructure.²¹ The war in Ukraine has revealed that the defense capabilities and democratic resilience of partner countries are directly tied to the stability of regional and European security systems. However, NATO's involvement often provokes criticism and military responses from Russia, exacerbating regional tensions.²²

V. Regional and Global Competition

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region has become a focal point of intersecting interests among global powers, including Russia, Turkey, the European Union, and the United States. For Russia, the region holds both historical and strategic significance, serving as a security buffer, a means of controlling energy and transportation routes, and a platform for maintaining influence across the post-Soviet space. Russia's military presence in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Crimea reinforces its geopolitical posture and poses ongoing challenges to Western actors.

Turkey, as a NATO member and regional power, seeks to expand its influence in the Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus. Ankara actively participates in energy and infrastructure projects, supports Azerbaijan, and aims to strengthen its role in both economic and military spheres. Turkey's involvement notably increased following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, during which it provided substantial military and political support to Azerbaijan.

The European Union operates in the region primarily as an economic and political actor, promoting democratic reforms, economic integration, and energy diversification. Initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership aim to bring regional countries closer to European structures and enhance stability. However, the EU's influence in the security domain remains limited, particularly in the face of Russia's military assertiveness.

The United States' interests in the region encompass security, energy diversification, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Washington actively supports Georgia's and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, engages in military training and security programs, and backs the development of energy infrastructure. Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the U.S. has significantly increased its military and financial assistance to Kyiv, further elevating its role in the region.

The dynamics of cooperation and competition in the region are multifaceted. On one hand, multilateral formats such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) aim to deepen economic ties and promote regional stability. Energy and transportation projects - such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway - contribute to regional integration and connectivity.

20 Z. Shiryev and K. Kakachia, *The South Caucasus: Between Integration and Fragmentation*, (European Policy Centre, 2015), 110.

21 European Commission, *EU Support for Security Sector Reform in the Eastern Partnership*, 2021.

22 Brenda Shaffer, *Energy Politics*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 200.

On the other hand, intense competition over resources, markets, and spheres of influence persists. The confrontation between Russia and the West, the growing influence of Turkey and Iran, and conflicting interests among local states often lead to heightened tensions and increased security risks. The ongoing war in Ukraine has further intensified this competition, as Western actors seek to diminish Russian influence and bolster the defense capabilities of partner countries.

In this context, the South Caucasus and Black Sea region remains an epicenter of regional and global rivalry, where stability and security are continuously shaped by the balance of interests among both internal and external actors.

Conclusion

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region has emerged as one of the central epicenters of global geopolitical and geoeconomic processes. Its strategic location - linking Europe and Asia - along with its abundant energy resources and vital transportation corridors, defines its growing importance on the international stage.

Over the past decade, the region's strategic relevance has intensified, particularly following Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. The Black Sea basin has become a direct arena of confrontation between NATO and Russian interests. Additionally, the need for energy diversification and the search for alternative supply routes to Europe have elevated the region's role in global energy security. The development of transportation and logistics corridors has further enhanced its significance in global trade.

This study identifies several key factors that have contributed to the region's transformation into a strategic space:

- **Geographic location:** The South Caucasus connects the Black Sea with the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, while the Black Sea serves as a central maritime link between Europe and the Middle East.

- **Natural resources:** The region is rich in agricultural lands (e.g., Ukraine's fertile black soil), forests (Caucasus, Balkans), fisheries, and mineral deposits (coal in Donbas, oil and gas in the Black and Caspian basins, manganese in Georgia).

- **Transit corridors:** The region serves as a major transit route for Caspian energy resources to European markets, supporting diversified transportation and logistics networks.

- **Cultural diversity:** The Black Sea region is marked by ethnic, religious, and cultural plurality, contributing to its unique socio-cultural dynamics.

- **Security challenges:** The region faces serious threats, including frozen conflicts, terrorism, and hybrid warfare. Russia's military presence and aggressive policies pose persistent risks to regional stability.

The combination of these factors demonstrates that the South Caucasus and Black Sea region constitutes a "strategic node" whose stability, security, and development have decisive implications for both regional and global security.

Recommendations

For NATO and its partners, active engagement in the region is essential—not only in military terms but also through deeper economic and energy cooperation:

- Strengthen defense capabilities: NATO and its partners should enhance the defense resilience of regional states, expand joint exercises and technical support, and develop capacities to counter hybrid threats.

- Promote infrastructure and investment: Regional countries should be integrated into new global infrastructure projects, with support for investment and energy security, including in renewable energy sectors.

- Support democratic reforms: Continued backing for democratic reforms in regional states will foster resilience and contribute to stability, economic integration, and enhanced security across the South Caucasus and Black Sea region.

The region's strategic importance will continue to grow, requiring more active and coordinated policies from NATO and its partners in the areas of security, economic development, and democratic institution-building. Effective conflict resolution mechanisms and trust-building among local states are essential for long-term regional stability.

In the long-term perspective, the South Caucasus and Black Sea region is poised to become a strategic framework for NATO and its partners, supporting energy diversification, security enhancement, and global stability. This research confirms that the region is not only a strategic space but also a gravitational center of geopolitical opportunities and challenges, whose significance is steadily increasing in the context of international security and energy policy.

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INFORMATION WARFARE AND DISINFORMATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES

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Abstract

The Black Sea region, due to its geopolitical location and energy, security, and transport importance, has become one of the main targets of modern hybrid wars. Information warfare, as a critical component of hybrid operations, is intensively used by external and internal actors to influence public opinion and weaken democratic institutions. Disinformation campaigns in the region aim to exacerbate internal instability in countries on the path to Western integration, discredit Western values, and disrupt national unity.

Disinformation in the Black Sea region is not just a side effect of individual crises; it is a strategic, long-term tool aimed at transforming the political course of states, undermining public unity, and discrediting democratic institutions. Foreign and domestic actors operating in the region use the information space as a low-cost, yet high-impact tool, the impact of which goes far beyond the scope of conventional propaganda.

In terms of security, the Black Sea region is the epicenter of growing conflicts, occupations, and hybrid threats. The importance of the Black Sea region is not limited to local politics - it affects the stability of the entire Eurasian space. That is why combating disinformation in the region is not only a matter of national security but also part of a broader international agenda.

Against the backdrop of geopolitical confrontations, occupations, cyber threats, and internal political disagreements, disinformation remains one of the most powerful hybrid threats for the Black Sea region. Its impact is systemic: it leads to a decrease in trust in state institutions, increases public polarization, undermines the authority of the media, and creates confusion among citizens, which ultimately delays or hinders democratic reforms.

The paper examines the challenges of information security in the Black Sea region and focuses on both tactical and strategic use of disinformation. The paper discusses various disinformation tools that purposefully work to incite public conflicts and reduce trust in society.

The paper also discusses the obstacles that hinder the fight against disinformation: lack of information among the population, weak regulations, institutional imperfections of fact-checking, propaganda messages, etc.

The fight against information warfare in the Black Sea region can only be strengthened through an integrated, long-term, and inclusive approach that simultaneously combats both the symptoms of disinformation and its fundamental causes.

Keywords: hybrid warfare; information warfare; disinformation; Black Sea region; media resilience; democracy; strategic communication; security.

Introduction

Hybrid warfare has emerged as one of the most complex and systemic challenges in contemporary international relations. Its essence lies in the integrated use of both military and non-traditional instruments: political, economic, cyber-security, and informational mechanisms. This format enables an influence that far exceeds the boundaries of conventional military confrontation. Within this context, information warfare and disinformation acquire particular significance, as their deliberate use has become one of the most effective instruments of modern power.¹ The manipulation of information erodes public trust, undermines democratic institutions, and diminishes the structural resilience of states under conditions of external pressure. If a bullet kills the body, disinformation destroys the mind and the will.²

The Black Sea region represents one of the most vulnerable and strategically significant arenas within these processes. Its geopolitical position between East and West renders the region a permanent arena of clashing interests.³ Here, the political and strategic vectors of Russia, NATO, and the European Union intersect, making the security of Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Bulgaria especially vulnerable to information operations and disinformation campaigns.⁴ Accordingly, disinformation cannot be regarded merely as a technical problem of the information environment; it is directly connected to regional stability, the prospects for democratic transformation, and the sustainability of the overall security architecture.⁵

Relevance of the Study:

The relevance of this study is determined by a number of factors that assign special importance to the informational dimension of hybrid warfare.

First, contemporary conflicts are increasingly less likely to be resolved solely on the battlefield. The decisive part of the struggle often shifts into the informational domain, where public attitudes are shaped and political agendas are manipulated.

Second, the Black Sea region lies at the intersection of global energy and transit routes, which makes it an especially attractive target for disinformation operations. Owing to this geostrategic significance, information warfare exerts a direct influence on the security of the region's states and on their foreign policy choices.⁶

The third factor is related to the complexity of democratic processes. Disinformation campaigns in the region have repeatedly influenced election outcomes, perceptions of foreign policy orientation, and the deepening of social polarization.

The example of Ukraine vividly demonstrates that, since 2014, information operations conducted by Russia have constructed the narrative of "NATO aggression" and "Ukrainian neo-Na-

1 S. Chkopoia, "Information Warfare in the Modern Political Theory," *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi (USBED)* 3, no. 4 (2021): 105–16.

2 L. Anghel, *Analysis of Hybrid Risks and Information Warfare in the Black Sea Region* (CMJ Publishers, 2025).

3 European Commission, *EU Strategic Approach: Black Sea Strategy* (Brussels: European Commission, 2025).

4 Scott Lee, Andrew Michta, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Peter Jones and Lisa Bembenick, *NATO 2027: European Leadership Will Be Key to Deterrence Against Russia* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2025).

5 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Navigating Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2024).

6 Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), *Countering Hybrid Warfare in the Black Sea Region* (Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2024).

zism.”⁷ deliberately distorting reality in international discourse. In Georgia, particularly after the 2008 war, disinformation campaigns intensified with the explicit aim of polarizing society. A similar situation exists in Moldova and Bulgaria, where information operations are frequently directed toward destabilizing domestic political processes.⁸

Review of Existing Research

A review of existing research demonstrates that the issue has been actively studied at both the international and local levels. Studies emphasize the systemic nature of disinformation and its multifaceted political consequences. Nevertheless, the unified picture of disinformation in the context of the Black Sea region has been comparatively underexplored, which necessitates additional research.

Disinformation should not be viewed as an accidental or localized problem, but rather as a strategic weapon that systematically threatens democracy and stability in the Black Sea region.⁹

Disinformation in the Black Sea region is not merely an accompanying factor of individual crises, but constitutes a strategic, long-term instrument aimed at reshaping the political course of states and dismantling social cohesion. Consequently, an effective fight against disinformation requires a unified, multi-level policy that integrates state strategic communication, societal media literacy, and international coordination.

Instruments and Mechanisms of Disinformation

Within the framework of hybrid warfare, disinformation is often employed as a “low-cost, high-impact” weapon. Its primary instruments include:

1. Social media platforms — Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, YouTube: arenas where botnets and trolls generate the viral dissemination of false information.
2. Troll factories and botnets — organized groups that create the illusion of a “public consensus.”
3. Fake news production — specifically designed websites and channels that distribute distorted information.
4. Religious and cultural channels — rhetoric framed as the defense of traditional values (“Europe is taking away our identity”), particularly in Georgia and Moldova.
5. Synergy with cyberattacks — technical sabotage accompanied by information panic campaigns (for instance, attacks on Ukraine’s energy systems).
6. Deepfakes and algorithmic propaganda — emerging technologies that fabricate an illusion of credibility and complicate the process of fact-checking.¹⁰

In the Black Sea region, disinformation:

- is systematically integrated into hybrid warfare strategies;
- aims at polarizing societies, discrediting institutions and obstructing the Western trajectory;

7 B. Mueller, Benjamin Jensen, Brandon Valeriano, Ryan C. Maness, and Jose M. Macias, *Cyber Operations during the Russo-Ukrainian War* (2023).

8 Chatham House, *Understanding Russia’s Black Sea Strategy*, Chatham House Report (London: Chatham House, 2025).

9 B. Cozma, *Rethinking the Fight Against Disinformation in the Black Sea Region* (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund [GMFUS], 2024).

10 Samson Olufemi Olanipekun, *Computational Propaganda and Misinformation: AI Technologies as Tools of Media Manipulation*, ([PDF](#)) [Computational propaganda and misinformation: AI technologies as tools of media manipulation](#)

- operates in parallel with military as well as political crises;
- relies heavily on exploiting local vulnerabilities (historical traumas, religious and cultural identities, political divisions).

At the same time, each country has undertaken certain measures: Ukraine has mobilized international support; Georgia has strengthened fact-checking initiatives; Moldova has attempted political reforms; and Bulgaria has sought closer alignment with European Union frameworks. Nevertheless, the overall picture demonstrates that disinformation continues to be one of the most powerful and difficult-to-manage threats in the region.

Consequences and Threats

Disinformation in the Black Sea region functions as a strategic instrument aimed not merely at managing individual political crises, but at producing long-term structural changes.¹¹

Key consequences include:

1. Delegitimization of democratic institutions — disinformation deliberately undermines trust in parliaments, courts, and electoral administrations.
2. Societal polarization — societies are divided into “pro-European” and “anti-Western” camps, which diminishes the possibility of political compromise.
3. Erosion of trust — the loss of confidence in media and official sources drives audiences toward alternative, often harmful, channels of information.
4. Destabilization of security — disinformation facilitates the mobilization of protests, deepens political crises, and destabilizes the regional security architecture.
5. Strengthening of external influence — Russia and other actors successfully employ information operations to weaken support for Western institutions.¹²

The main threats are:

- the hindrance of democratic transformation;
- the discrediting of foreign policy orientation;
- the breakdown of societal cohesion;
- an increase in military and political security risks.

Combating disinformation requires a multi-level approach:

1. At the state level

- Development of strategic communication — the establishment of a unified strategic communication center that responds to disinformation in a coordinated manner.¹³
- Strengthening cyber security — taking into account the synergy of informational and technical threats.
- Legislative frameworks — regulating the deliberate dissemination of false information and enhancing cooperation with platforms.¹⁴

11 U.S. Congress, *Black Sea Security Act of 2023 (S.804)*, Washington, DC, 2023.

12 EUvsDISINFO, *EEAS Special Report Update: Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation around the COVID-19 Pandemic*, March 2020, <https://sur.lilizftzm>

13 E. Shubitidze, *Transformation of Information Warfare Methods Against the Background of the Development of Modern Communication Capabilities* (Tbilisi: CCSD, 2021).

14 I. Rotaru et al., *Russian Disinformation in the Black Sea Region* (Cham: Springer, 2023).

2. At the societal level

- Media literacy programs — fostering critical thinking in schools and universities.
- Support for fact-checking — strengthening independent platforms such as *Myth Detector*

and *FactCheck*.

- Civic activism — public campaigns against disinformation.

International Level

• Integration with NATO and EU frameworks — leveraging the experience of the East Strat-Com Task Force and the NATO StratCom COE.

• Regional cooperation — the establishment of joint monitoring and data-sharing platforms among Black Sea states.

- International fact-checking networks — coordination at the global level.

Disinformation in the Black Sea region is not merely a temporary problem but a long-term strategic weapon that impedes the democratic development of states. Its effects weigh heavily on public trust, political stability, and regional security.

The solution is possible only through an integrated approach:

- strong state strategic communication;
- society-based resilience grounded in education;
- close cooperation with international partners.

Through this pathway, it is possible not only to defend against information warfare but also to create a positive agenda that makes democracy and security more resilient.¹⁵

Conclusion

The study has revealed that disinformation in the Black Sea region is not a one-time crisis phenomenon, but rather a systemic and strategic weapon integrated into hybrid warfare. Case studies of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Bulgaria demonstrate that disinformation is deliberately directed toward:

- the delegitimization of democratic institutions,
- the deepening of societal polarization,
- the erosion of trust in media and state institutions,
- and the discrediting of the Western orientation of foreign policy.

Recommendations

The fight against disinformation requires multi-level and coordinated policies.

1. At the state level — strengthening strategic communication, ensuring rapid and transparent communication during crises, and improving cyber security standards.

2. At the societal level — integrating media literacy into the education system, supporting fact-checking, and encouraging civic activism.

¹⁵ *NATO Review*, “Algorithmic Invasions: How Information Warfare Threatens NATO’s Eastern Flank,” April 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_197350.htm

3. At the international level — fostering regional and global cooperation, adapting the experiences of NATO and the European Union, and creating joint monitoring platforms.¹⁶

Future Perspectives

The future indicates that information warfare will become even more deeply integrated with technological development: artificial intelligence-generated deepfakes, algorithmic manipulation, and the ultra-rapid dissemination of information will further complicate the detection and control of disinformation. Against this backdrop, it is especially important to:

- strengthen regional cooperation among Black Sea states,
- develop global fact-checking networks,
- institutionalize information resilience based on education and research.

Final Considerations

In conclusion, disinformation in the Black Sea region is not only a threat but also a test for democracies: whether they can act in unity, with coordination and transparency, under conditions of crisis. Victory in the information war means not only refuting falsehoods but also strengthening the immunity of society, which ensures a safer, more resilient, and more democratic future. Winning the information war does not mean merely telling the truth—it means reinforcing society’s immunity against disinformation.

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¹⁶ Scott Lee, Andrew Michta, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Peter Jones, and Lisa Bembenick, *NATO 2027: European Leadership Will Be Key to Deterrence Against Russia* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2025).

- Lee, Scott, Andrew Michta, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Peter Jones and Lisa Bembenick. *NATO 2027: European Leadership Will Be Key to Deterrence Against Russia*. Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2025.
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INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GEORGIA: HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The modern world of the 21st century is distinguished by a multitude of pressing challenges, among which one of the most significant is the prevention of armed conflicts and wars. The issue of war prohibition was first raised after World War I within the framework of the League of Nations and was later reflected in the Charter of the United Nations. Clearly, one of the most critical needs in international politics remains peaceful coexistence, which necessitates international cooperation.

Georgia, due to its geopolitical location, has always been actively involved in global political processes throughout centuries. The country's political developments - its continuous struggle for the preservation of state independence, the promotion of national interests, development, and security - have consistently driven Georgia to engage in the international arena in pursuit of progress-oriented, peaceful cooperation.

It is a fact that World War I brought the issue of universal peace to the forefront of the international agenda. Consequently, from the early 20th century, international organizations began playing a pivotal role as mechanisms for ensuring national security, peaceful conflict resolution, protection of human rights, and overall socio-political and economic development. For Georgia - a peace-oriented country that has always prioritized cooperation as a strategic guarantee of both security and development - international collaboration has been viewed as one of the most essential issues of national survival. Therefore, research on this topic remains highly relevant, considering Georgia's persistent efforts to uphold its national interests.

In the paper, the analysis of the research problem is conducted using the following methods: the qualitative research method; the historical analysis method, which includes the examination and analysis of existing secondary sources related to the research topic; situational analysis (case study), which involves interpreting the political processes under investigation within the context of the accompanying circumstances; and descriptive methods, applied to a wide range of collected materials, including both primary and secondary sources.

The paper explores both international and domestic political processes in Georgia, with a particular focus on efforts toward peaceful coexistence, the prospects for South Caucasus regional integration, and the strategic interests of global political actors in the region. These factors significantly influence peace, justice, partnership development, and regional stability.

Based on the findings presented in this research, it is confirmed that Georgia's political elite, throughout various stages of the country's history, has consistently sought to strengthen peaceful coexistence on the international stage by engaging with international organizations. This is further evidenced in contemporary efforts aimed at enhancing international cooperation for peace and justice - both within the South Caucasus and on a broader global scale. As such, the issue remains relevant from both a scientific and practical standpoint in the context of global interests in peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Georgia, foreign policy, international organizations, League of Nations, geopolitics, security.

Introduction

The beginning of the 20th century was a significant period in global politics. During this time, as always, the desire of small states to engage in international organizations, along with the challenges related to this, became especially evident. This is due to the fact that small states often lack sufficient political, economic, or military resources to influence global processes independently. However, integration into international organizations gives them the opportunity to strengthen and protect their interests through collective efforts. Small states actively seek to use diplomacy, negotiations, and coalition-building to ensure their participation in the decision-making processes of organizations. This not only contributes to strengthening their security and bringing economic benefits, but also promotes the consolidation of international legitimacy and the sense of political and legal equality. As a result, under globalization, small states manage to increase their role and integrate into the global political system through international organizations.

In the Georgian context, at the beginning of the 20th century, the issue of involvement in international organizations and obtaining external support carried multiple layers of significance. In particular, political aspects were at the forefront: during the period of restored independence (1918–1921), the country aimed to strengthen its state sovereignty. Representation and recognition in international organizations served as important sources of legitimacy. This meant becoming part of the international community and legally establishing statehood. At the same time, the young state needed foreign trade relations, financial assistance, and economic integration. Involvement in international organizations created opportunities to support economic stabilization. For Georgia, external threats were particularly acute; therefore, international support was regarded as a guarantee of security and a mechanism for protecting independence.

The aim of the presented paper is to study Georgia's relationship with international organizations and to present an analysis of historical interactions, to evaluate the influence of political processes on the country's political, economic, and security development. Additionally, the paper aims to identify past experiences that remain important for Georgia's current foreign and domestic policies.

The objectives of this paper are: to examine the influence of international political processes and determine the role of leading states within them; to assess the efforts of Georgia's political elite in maintaining political sovereignty and statehood (1918–1921), ensuring security, and exploring opportunities for international cooperation; and to highlight historical experiences that remain relevant to contemporary Georgian realities.

At the present stage, global and regional organizations are among the main instruments of international relations. They play a major role in facilitating cooperation among states, coordinating interests, and regulating conflicts. Accordingly, Georgia - as a country oriented towards peace and development - is focused on broad international cooperation.

The function of global organizations is to ensure international security, regulate global economic processes, protect human rights, and promote sustainable development. In general, the activities of these organizations create a shared framework in which states - regardless of their power - participate in shaping the international agenda.

Georgia's Relationship with International Organizations: A Historical Retrospective

The First Georgian Non-Governmental Organization

The first Georgian non-governmental organization - the Society for the Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians - left a significant mark on the history of Georgia¹. As such, a renewed understanding and analysis of its activities remains relevant at every stage of the country's historical development.

In the Georgian context, the protection of national interests has always been a matter of ongoing concern, with the Georgian intelligentsia playing a crucial role. In 1879, in order to awaken, protect, and develop national self-consciousness, the Georgian intellectuals established a public organization - the Society for the Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians. Before the outbreak of World War I, the society successfully achieved its goals and developed into an organization around which the entire nationally conscious Georgian public rallied². Its educational activities expanded significantly: schools were founded; libraries and reading rooms were opened; popular books and textbooks were published; a central library-museum was established; and particular importance was given to the preservation and care of Georgia's national material and spiritual heritage. The creation of a pantheon of notable Georgian figures and similar efforts contributed significantly to the awakening of national identity among the population. However, the outbreak of World War I and the subsequent political developments hindered the society's work³.

After the declaration of Georgia's independence in 1918, the Society for the Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians officially transferred its schools, reading rooms, and all affiliated institutions to the state. In fact, with renewed strength, the society began to publish books once again.

After the establishment of the Soviet regime in Georgia, the Society for the Spreading of Literacy continued to exist formally from 1922 to 1927 under the new name "Book Publishing and Dissemination Society," with a restructured board. In December 1925, by the decree of the People's Commissariat for Education, the society's library, museum, and archive were transferred to Tbilisi State University. In 1927, the society ceased to exist.

The activities of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy covered the entire country. Its primary goal was to restore the national consciousness of the Georgian people and, through the spread of education, to preserve the essential features of statehood. Archival materials and various studies confirm that its educational work extended from Abkhazia to Saingilo⁴.

This society played an immensely important role in preserving and developing the Georgian language and national consciousness. Special emphasis should be placed on the involvement and significance of women in this work - at a time when the issue of women's equality was not even properly raised in Europe. The organization is credited with introducing a range of progressive approaches that had a substantial impact on the country's future development, leaving an indelible mark on Georgia's history.

1 Oliver Raisner, *The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians*, 2017., <https://surl.li/rllxal>

2 Tamaz Jologua, *The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians: 100 Stories*. Artanuji, 2019.

3 Trophime Khundadze, *The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians (Essays Based on Archival Materials, 1879-1927)*. State Publishing house „Soviet Georgia“, Tbilisi, 1960, pg. 149.

4 National Archives of Georgia. *The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians: Digital Document Collection*. <https://surl.li/rkxkpu>

The First Independence Period of Georgia and Efforts Toward International Recognition (1918–1921)

During the years of Georgia's state independence (1918–1921), the country's political elite, motivated by the goal of peaceful coexistence, sought membership in the first international organization founded by states — the *League of Nations*. For Georgia, it was crucial whether the League would recognize it as a sovereign state and whether it would grant the right to participate as a full member in this union of nations. The League of Nations' primary objective was to ensure international peace through the imposition of punitive sanctions and the use of force against aggressors.

It is a fact that, following the First World War, the issue of international peace acquired particular importance. Achieving universal peace became a reflection of heightened civilizational consciousness. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference - held to deliberate on the consequences of World War I - many important decisions were made, which were especially significant from a political perspective for the world and, in particular, for Europe. Of note was the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which laid the legal foundation for a new international political and economic order. The League's charter came into force on January 10, 1920, having been signed by 44 states⁵.

At the Paris Conference, it was decided to establish the League of Nations—an international organization designed to prevent violence and war, to ensure collective security, and to establish universal peace throughout the world. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson played a key role in the creation of the League and the post-war international order. His “Fourteen Points” served as the basis for the new international framework⁶. Particularly attractive for Georgia was Article 10 of the League's Covenant, which obligated all members to respect and preserve the independence and territorial integrity of every other member.

Importantly, a Georgian delegation was present at the Paris Peace Conference. Driven by Georgia's core national interests—sovereignty and security—they actively pursued accession to the League. However, due to the lack of sufficient attention from Western countries, only 10 out of the 24 participating states (while 16 votes were required for admission) voted in favor of Georgia's membership. Thus, the League of Nations ultimately refused to admit the Democratic Republic of Georgia. As a result, Georgia was left alone in the face of Soviet Russia, which, despite committing in Article II of the May 7, 1920 treaty “*to refrain from interfering in Georgia's internal affairs,*”⁷ carried out military aggression in February–March 1921, effectively ending the existence of Georgia's First Republic⁸.

It is important to emphasize that the League of Nations, as an organization oriented toward universal peace, holds a significant place in the history of global politics and international institutions. Later, the United Nations and its specialized agencies - focused on human rights, labor, health, and many other fields - would follow the path laid out by the League, ultimately achieving the successes we observe today.

⁵ Vakhtang Kharumidze, *International Organizations*, Ilia Chavchavadze Society for International Cultural and Educational Relations, “Knowledge”, Tbilisi, 2004.

⁶ Alexander Rondeli, *Journal for Youth* “My World.” no. 1, 2013, pg. 63. <https://surl.it/rdybuk>

⁷ Georgian Association of the League of Nations. *Georgia, Territory and Population – History – Literature and Art – Political Situation*, Paris, 1937.

⁸ Otar Janelidze, *Essays on the History of the Democratic Republic of Georgia*. Parliament of Georgia, National Library of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2018.

When discussing the independent Georgia's participation in the international sphere, it is worth noting the efforts and cooperation of Georgian representatives in a strategic plan for uniting the then-prominent Central and Eastern European countries. This initiative envisioned the formation of a large federation to ensure regional security and stability, known as the so-called "Three Seas Initiative", in which Georgia sought to participate between 1919 and 1921. The initiative was aimed at deterring Russian aggression and halting the forcible export of the Bolshevik revolution.

However, the Soviet regime envisioned a different future for Georgia. Consequently, the country's efforts and aspirations in this direction remained unfulfilled.

The Next Stage After the Restoration of Independence (1991–2000s)

Following the restoration of its state independence, Georgia, as a subject of international law, sought to establish its place within the international system and build diplomatic relations with various countries. Cooperation with international organizations became one of the most critical aspects of the country's foreign and domestic policy, shaping Georgia's long-term development trajectory.

Georgia became a member of the United Nations on 31 July 1992, shortly after declaring independence. Since then, the UN system has operated in Georgia through various institutions, funds, programs, and specialized agencies whose support encompasses a wide array of fields: human rights, economic welfare, health, education, industry, agriculture, environmental protection, gender equality, effective governance, and the rule of law. Overall, these initiatives aim to improve the social and economic conditions of the population, with the ultimate goal of ensuring peaceful national development. This support continues today and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - including poverty eradication, environmental and climate protection, and the promotion of peace and prosperity for all people worldwide.

One of the most significant milestones in Georgia's international integration was its accession to the Council of Europe. On 4 March 1993, the Parliament of Georgia submitted a request for the country to be granted *Special Guest Status* in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. After several stages of engagement, on 27 January 1999, the Assembly adopted Resolution 209, recommending that the Committee of Ministers invite Georgia to become a full member. Consequently, Georgia officially joined the Council of Europe on 27 April 1999 as its 41st member.

Simultaneously, relations between Georgia and the European Union also began to take shape. Since 1993, the EU's economic assistance to Georgia was structured around three key areas: humanitarian, financial, and technical aid. Since then, cooperation has continued across numerous sectors, supported by the signing of several important partnership documents. Georgia became a participant in the Eastern Partnership initiative, which supports the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and aims to strengthen relations between the EU and partner countries by offering tangible prospects for closer integration. The Eastern Partnership, which has started in 2009, has played an instrumental role in bringing partner countries closer to the European Union. The cooperation is founded on shared fundamental values - democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights (The August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia accelerated this pro-

cess and positively influenced the EU's response to the initiative)⁹. Georgia actively participates in the Eastern Partnership's multilateral dialogues and sectoral cooperation, particularly within the frameworks of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and various civilian programs. Importantly, Georgia has also been involved in regional projects within the Eastern Partnership, which have significantly contributed to infrastructure development, disaster management, knowledge and experience exchange, and strengthening people-to-people connections¹⁰.

A critical milestone in Georgia-EU relations was the signing of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), in June 2014. The agreement's priority areas reflect core EU values - democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law - which also serve as the foundation for political and economic integration¹¹.

On 8 November 2023, the European Commission, in its Enlargement Package report, recommended that the European Council grant Georgia candidate status for EU membership. Subsequently, on 14 December 2023, Georgia officially obtained EU candidate country status.

Following the restoration of independence, Georgia also joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which in 1997 was replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Practical bilateral cooperation began earlier, in 1994, when Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. After the Rose Revolution in 2003, cooperation deepened significantly with the launch of extensive reforms¹². Georgia has actively supported NATO-led operations, demonstrating its commitment to international security.

In response to Russia's aggression against Georgia in August 2008, NATO held an emergency session on 19 August 2008, during which foreign ministers urged for a peaceful and lasting resolution to the conflict¹³, and reaffirmed their support for Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, as recognized under international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. NATO condemned the use of force as inconsistent with peaceful conflict resolution obligations and expressed serious concern over Russia's disproportionate military actions in so-called South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The alliance demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian territory in accordance with the EU-mediated six-point ceasefire agreement.

On 27 August 2008, NATO allies also condemned Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia as independent states and called for the revocation of this decision¹⁴. NATO has since continued to support Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

9 European Union, Eastern Partnership, About the Eastern Partnership, <https://surl.li/diyrsm>

10 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Roadmap for Georgia's EU Integration, 25.02.2019, <https://surl.li/nmyntq>

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Association Agreement. <https://surl.li/ujcjuk>

12 NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, 2025, Relations with Georgia, <https://surl.li/svgebp>

13 NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, 09 Apr. 2009, Statement, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, <https://surl.li/yycqay>

14 NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, 27 Aug. 2008, Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia, <https://surl.li/wsmrys>

Conclusion

Based on the materials discussed in this paper, it is evident that the first Georgian non-governmental organization, the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, established 145 years ago on the basis of national interests and common goals, had a significant impact on the country's development.

In the early 20th century, integration into international organizations represented a critically important path for Georgia to strengthen its sovereignty and secure its statehood.

The League of Nations, as the first international organization for political cooperation among independent states, laid the foundation for many initiatives focused on human welfare and future-oriented development. These efforts were later continued by the United Nations and its affiliated institutions.

Since the restoration of Georgia's state independence in 1991, one of the priority directions of the country's foreign policy has been the overcoming of challenges related to multilateral cooperation and integration into international organizations, motivated by the overarching interest in peaceful coexistence and comprehensive development.

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STOCHASTIC MODELING APPROACHES FOR SECURITY RISK ASSESSMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND BLACK SEA REGION: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO AND PARTNERS

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Abstract

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region is one of the most strategically sensitive areas in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Complex geopolitical dynamics, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, and the growing role of cyber and hybrid threats demand innovative analytical approaches that can capture systemic uncertainty. This paper focuses on advanced stochastic models, particularly Semi-Markov processes and M/G/1 queuing systems in random environments, as methodological tools for analyzing resilience. Such models allow a more realistic assessment of uncertainty, irregular event timing, cascading disruptions, and systemic stress under dynamic conditions. By linking probabilistic modeling with strategic risk assessment, the study highlights how NATO and its partners can strengthen resilience, improve early warning, and safeguard cyberspace and critical infrastructure domains.

Keywords: South Caucasus and Black Sea region; Euro-Atlantic security; Critical infrastructure resilience; Cyber and hybrid threats; Stochastic modeling; Strategic risk assessment

Introduction

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region occupies a crucial position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Its geostrategic importance is matched by persistent security challenges, ranging from unresolved conflicts to intensifying cyber and hybrid threats. For NATO and its partners, ensuring stability and resilience in this environment requires analytical tools that can capture complexity, randomness, and uncertainty. Traditional deterministic approaches often fail to account for the unpredictable nature of modern threats—whether sudden cyberattacks, disruptions in communication networks, or cascading failures in energy systems. Stochastic modeling provides a powerful alternative¹. By integrating Semi-Markov processes and queuing theory into risk analysis, researchers and policymakers can better understand how systems operate under uncertain and adversarial conditions². This paper introduces a framework for applying stochastic models to regional security challenges. It shows how mathematical tools originally developed for structural control and communication networks can be adapted for risk assessment in the South Caucasus and Black Sea context³. The analysis has two objectives: first, to demonstrate the relevance of stochastic modeling for practical security planning; and second, to highlight its strategic implications for NATO and partner states.

Main Part

Modeling Security under Uncertainty

Instead of technical derivations, this section provides an accessible overview of how stochastic models capture the behavior of systems under uncertainty. In security terms, these uncertainties may represent irregular cyberattacks, unexpected infrastructure breakdowns, or unpredictable escalation of political tensions. Semi-Markov processes are especially useful because they allow us to describe situations where disruptive events occur at irregular intervals—much like real-world crises. The M/G/1 queuing model, in turn, provides an analogy for systems under stress: communication networks, border control operations, or energy grids can all be seen as “servers” that may become overloaded under pressure. By combining these models, it becomes possible to estimate not only average performance but also the likelihood of extreme disruptions—long waiting times, overload, or systemic collapse. This focus on “tail risks” is particularly important in defense and security planning, where rare but severe events can have disproportionate consequences.

Applications to Security in the South Caucasus and Black Sea Region

The South Caucasus and Black Sea region represents one of the most strategically sensitive areas in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, and recent developments illustrate why advanced stochastic modeling is needed⁴. In the field of cybersecurity, the Russia–Ukraine conflict provides a clear example of irregular attack patterns. Massive DDoS operations and malware such as HermeticWiper appeared in bursts, separated by periods of relative calm, mirroring the stochastic

1 Kulkarni, V. G. (1995). *Modeling and Analysis of Stochastic Systems*. Chapman & Hall.

2 Zwart, B., Boxma, O., & Borst, S. (2004). *Queueing in Random Environments*. Operations Research Letters.

3 NATO (2023). *NATO’s Strategic Concept 2022*. Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

4 Kulkarni, V. G. (1995). *Modeling and Analysis of Stochastic Systems*. Chapman & Hall.

transitions between benign, probing, and attack states ⁵. Modeling such dynamics helps NATO and its partners assess the probability of system saturation, the expected time to recovery, and the effectiveness of adaptive defense mechanisms. Critical infrastructure protection presents another urgent application. Energy corridors such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan and Baku–Supsa pipelines are essential for Europe’s energy security but vulnerable to both physical sabotage and cyber-attacks on supervisory control systems. A stochastic framework makes it possible to represent operational states, model disruptions as random arrivals, and forecast recovery times or service delays ⁶. This analysis provides decision-makers with concrete estimates of resilience, clarifying the benefits of redundancy and alternative supply routes. Hybrid threats further complicate the regional picture, as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and conventional pressures overlap. Semi-Markov processes are particularly well suited to capturing escalation dynamics, showing how systems may remain in a low-threat state before shifting abruptly to high-threat regimes. This ability to anticipate transition points offers NATO and its partners a valuable planning advantage, enabling preemptive action rather than reactive crisis management. ⁷

Strategic Implications for NATO and Partners

The broader strategic value of stochastic modeling lies in its capacity to transform abstract probability into practical insight ⁸. Scenario testing allows analysts to explore how multiple, simultaneous risks—cyber, infrastructure, and political—interact to affect regional stability. Resource allocation decisions can then be guided by quantitative assessments of where investments in redundancy, defense technologies, or rapid-response units will yield the greatest resilience ⁹. At the same time, probabilistic analysis strengthens strategic communication, enabling NATO and partner governments to explain complex risks to domestic and international audiences in credible, data-driven terms. Most importantly, embedding such models into long-term strategic planning enhances interoperability and foresight. Rather than reacting to crises after they unfold, NATO and its partners can anticipate escalation, prepare for cascading disruptions, and ensure coordinated resilience across the Euro-Atlantic space ¹⁰.

Conclusion

Stochastic models bridge the gap between abstract mathematics and real-world security needs. For the South Caucasus and Black Sea, where uncertainty and unpredictability are defining features, these models provide NATO and its partners with a rigorous but intuitive toolset. By focusing on probabilities of extreme events, resilience measures, and adaptive strategies, stochastic modeling contributes directly to better planning and stronger regional security. The example of

5 Kulkarni, V. G. (1995). *Modeling and Analysis of Stochastic Systems*. Chapman & Hall.

6 Kakubava, R., Salia, N., & Giorgadze, V. (2022). *New Methods of Stochastic Systems in Mathematics Modeling*. International Conference on Innovations and Modern Challenges.

7 National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (2021). *Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

8 Healey, J. (2022). *Cybersecurity and the Russia–Ukraine War: Lessons for NATO*. Atlantic Council Issue Brief.

9 NATO (2023). *NATO’s Strategic Concept 2022*. Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

10 NATO Defense College (2022). *The Black Sea and NATO: Strategic Challenges*. Rome.

Russia's cyberattacks on Ukraine in 2022 illustrates this point vividly ¹¹. Attacks came in irregular waves, overwhelming critical systems during peak phases while remaining silent at other times. Semi-Markov models capture this irregular timing, enabling NATO and its partners to anticipate not just *average* risk, but the *worst-case scenarios* that can destabilize entire sectors. Linking such case studies to the South Caucasus and Black Sea context demonstrates how probabilistic modeling can directly inform both military preparedness and civilian resilience planning.

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¹¹ Kakubava, R., & Salia, N. (2024). Analysis of Time Measures for the M/G/1 System in a Random Environment. nCSIT Conference.

DEFENSE EXPENDITURES AND GEOPOLITICAL RISK IN NATO COUNTRIES: THE BLACK SEA AND SOUTH CAUCASUS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study examines the defense expenditures of NATO countries in the context of geopolitical risks in the Black Sea and South Caucasus. The Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus have historically constituted a geostrategic buffer zone between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, and the region has gained renewed importance in the aftermath of the 2008 Russia–Georgia War, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These developments have altered NATO’s strategic calculus and brought questions of deterrence, force posture, and military spending to the forefront of security studies. While much of the existing literature approaches the subject of NATO’s eastern flank either normatively, focusing on political discourse and alliance commitments, or descriptively, emphasizing case-specific security dilemmas, systematic quantitative evidence remains comparatively scarce. Addressing this gap, the present research adopts a data-driven, comparative framework that seeks to uncover the measurable impact of geopolitical risk and geographical proximity on defense spending behavior among NATO member and partner states. The primary aim is to compare the defense expenditures of NATO member or partner countries in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region with those of the major members of NATO’s Western bloc during the 2010–2024 period, and to analyze the extent to which geographical proximity influences these expenditures. By integrating theoretical insights on alliance burden-sharing with empirical statistical analyses, the study contributes to the broader literature on international security and defense economics. Secondary data were employed, and statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings demonstrate that increases in Russia’s defense expenditures have had a significant and positive impact on the defense budgets of Black Sea and South Caucasus countries, with this effect intensifying particularly after 2014 and 2022. Positive correlations were also observed in non-regional NATO members such as Germany, France, and the United States; however, the magnitude of these effects remained more limited compared to regional states. Overall, the study highlights that geographical proximity and threat perception play a critical role in shaping defense budgetary decisions. In doing so, it underscores the importance of viewing NATO’s eastern flank not merely as a peripheral security theater but as a central determinant of alliance-wide defense planning. The results suggest that sustaining deterrence in the region will require not only increased resource allocation but also closer alignment of strategic priorities between regional states and NATO’s leading powers.

Keywords: NATO, Black Sea, South Caucasus, Defense Expenditures, Defense Economics

Introduction

Defense expenditures have historically constituted one of the most concrete indicators of states' security policies, serving as a fundamental determinant of military power-building, deterrence, and strategic autonomy. In classical international relations theories, defense budgets are regarded not only as a reflection of military capacity but also as an indirect expression of states' threat perceptions. During the Cold War, the bipolar security architecture shaped the defense spending of NATO and Warsaw Pact countries along a clear axis of rivalry. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the emergence of a unipolar system led to a relative decline in defense budgets among NATO members. However, geopolitical shocks such as the 2008 Russia–Georgia War, the 2014 Crimea Crisis, and the onset of the Russia–Ukraine War in 2022 reversed this trend, accelerating a renewed rearmament process within the European security architecture.¹

The Black Sea and South Caucasus regions represent some of the most vulnerable yet strategically significant areas of NATO's eastern flank. Owing to their role as crossroads of energy corridors, critical transportation routes, and NATO's direct defense planning, these geographies have become increasingly central to the global security equation. Nevertheless, for a considerable period, defense expenditures in this region remained lower compared to NATO's western members, generating certain gaps in deterrence and logistical sustainability. Since 2014, significant increases have been observed in the defense budgets of regional NATO members such as Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria, while NATO partners such as Azerbaijan and Georgia have prioritized military modernization projects in their budgetary agendas. Yet these increases have remained insufficient to establish a symmetrical balance against the defense expenditures of Russia—and, more recently, Iran, which has expanded its influence in the region.²

In this context, not only the quantitative levels of defense spending but also their sensitivity to geopolitical risk are of critical importance. The intensifying naval competition in the Black Sea, the evolving armament dynamics in the South Caucasus after 2020, and Russia's persistent military presence in the region collectively underscore the continuous need for higher defense budgets on NATO's eastern flank. The central aim of this study is to analyze the trajectory of defense expenditures of NATO members and partners in the Black Sea and South Caucasus between 2010 and 2024, and to compare these trends with those of non-regional NATO members in order to evaluate the impact of geographical proximity on defense spending. For this purpose, the SIPRI Military Expenditure dataset is employed, contrasting the average expenditure levels of regional NATO states with those of the Western bloc, while also incorporating Russia and Iran's military spending patterns during the same period into the assessment of the regional balance of power.³

This study makes a twofold contribution to the literature. First, it provides a systematic comparative analysis that captures the trajectory of defense investments across NATO's eastern flank, with particular emphasis on the Black Sea and South Caucasus. Second, by placing the geographic risk factor at the center of the analysis, it demonstrates that defense expenditures should

1 DiGiuseppe, M., Aspide, A., & Becker, J. Threats and the Public Constraint on Military Spending. *British Journal of Political Science*, 54(3), (2023). 649-666.

2 Anastasov, P. (2018, Mayıs 25). Karadeniz bölgesi: önemli bir kavşak. NATO: <https://surl.lu/oypxwm>

3 Becker, J. (2021). Defence spending, burden-sharing and strategy in NATO's Black Sea littoral states: domestic, regional, and international systemic factors. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(3), 393-413.

be evaluated not only in terms of economic capacity or NATO burden-sharing debates, but also in light of regional threat perceptions. In doing so, the study offers a data-driven foundation for decision-makers, emphasizing the necessity of strengthening defense budgets and enhancing logistical capacity along NATO's eastern frontier, while also developing strategic implications for future policy planning.

Main Part

NATO, the Black Sea, and South Caucasus Geopolitics

The Black Sea and the South Caucasus have historically constituted one of the most critical buffer zones in Eurasian geopolitics and are often defined as a security complex where great power rivalry has persisted over time. The Black Sea, beyond being a maritime domain, serves as a strategic corridor connecting Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, while also holding a pivotal position in terms of energy routes, maritime transportation, and military basing. For NATO, the Black Sea is not merely a body of water but rather the first line of defense for the security of its eastern flank. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 fundamentally altered the regional balance, strengthening Russia's naval and air capabilities in the area and prompting NATO to sustain a long-term deterrence posture.⁴

The South Caucasus, as a direct extension of the Black Sea, carries strategic significance for NATO in terms of energy security and the protection of east–west trade routes. Comprising Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, the region presents a multi-actor security environment due to its location at the crossroads of Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. The 2008 Russia–Georgia War revealed the fragility of the regional security architecture, while the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and subsequent developments accelerated processes of military modernization and regional armament dynamics. Iran's expanding influence in the South Caucasus, coupled with Russia's military bases and exercises in the area, has further reinforced a growing perception of security risk along NATO's eastern flank.⁵

Accordingly, the geopolitics of the Black Sea and South Caucasus is not merely a regional concern but also a decisive factor directly shaping NATO's collective defense and burden-sharing mechanisms. NATO's littoral members in the Black Sea (Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria), alongside close partners such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, have sought to increase their defense expenditures in recent years in order to close the security gap. Yet, given Russia's strengthened Black Sea Fleet and modernized land–air assets, as well as Iran's growing UAV capabilities, the adequacy of these increases for deterrence remains contested. Thus, the Black Sea and South Caucasus should be regarded in NATO's strategic planning not only as a frontline theater but also as a key geopolitical variable that directly influences defense budgets and decisions on military modernization.⁶

4 Kollakowski, T. (2025). War in the Black Sea: The revival of the *Jeune École*? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 48(4), 898-930.

5 Karagiannis, E. (2012). The 2008 Russian–Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism. *European Security*, 22(1), 74-93.

6 Gioe, V. D., Miron, M., & Ozawa, M. (2025). Reassessing NATO's deterrence and defence posture in the Baltics: rebalancing strategic priorities to counter Russian hybrid aggression. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 41(1), 145-165.

Defense Expenditures

Defense expenditures refer to the total financial resources allocated by states to ensure national security, enhance military capacity, and maintain the sustainability of the armed forces. These expenditures are not limited to the procurement of weapons and ammunition; they also encompass salaries of military and civilian personnel, social benefits, pension payments, research and development (R&D) activities, infrastructure investments, strategic reserves, contributions to peacekeeping missions, and disaster management efforts. Thus, defense budgets represent a multilayered structure with economic, social, institutional, and international dimensions. Rather than being perceived solely as a financial burden, they should be considered as the fiscal projection of national security strategies.⁷

The economic, social, and strategic impacts of defense expenditures have long been a subject of debate in the literature. Empirical studies initiated by Benoit (1973) examined the relationship between defense spending and economic growth. Within this context, the Keynesian approach suggested that such expenditures stimulate demand-driven growth by increasing employment, whereas the Neoclassical perspective emphasized the opportunity costs, arguing that they may generate inefficiencies in resource allocation. Contemporary security literature, however, has expanded this debate beyond the realm of political economy, situating defense spending within the broader framework of international security. Accordingly, defense expenditures are interpreted in relation to deterrence, balance of power, and collective security mechanisms.⁸ Within the NATO context, this perspective has underscored the commitment of member states to allocate at least 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defense. Particularly along the Black Sea and South Caucasus axis, achieving this target is deemed critical not only for burden-sharing within the alliance but also for ensuring regional deterrence. The measurement and reporting of defense expenditures may vary across states. Some countries, for security reasons, do not disclose all items of their budgets. Nevertheless, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), by adopting NATO's standardized classification, provides comparable international datasets. This classification includes not only arms and equipment procurement but also infrastructure projects, R&D investments, social transfers, and contributions to international operations. Table 1 presents the expenditure categories recognized by NATO, along with their respective definitions.

Expenditure Element	Expenditure Item	Description
Logistics Expenditures	Storage	Expenditures related to the storage of all military goods and raw materials to ensure the continuity of national security.
	Production and Transportation	Covers the costs of producing weapons and ammunition and integrating them safely into logistic operations.
	Procurement (Purchase)	Budget item allocated for the purchase of weapons, ammunition, and related equipment.
	Supply	Includes expenditures for the supply of various materials and services required in defense activities.
	R&D	Resources allocated for research and development projects aimed at advancing defense technologies.

⁷ NATO. (2024). *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)*. Brüksel: NATO.

⁸ Benoit, E. (1978). Growth and Defense in Developing Countries. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 26(2), 271-288.

Domestic Joint Expenditures	Gendarmerie	Expenditures from the joint security budget for the military-related tasks of the gendarmerie forces.
	Coast Guard	Expenses covered by the joint budget for coast guard units responsible for maritime security and border control operations.
	Police Forces	Includes expenditures from the joint security budget for police duties considered within the scope of military security.
	Disaster Management	Costs associated with assistance and support activities conducted by military units during natural disasters or crises.
	Civil Defense Expenditures	Budget allocated for civil defense activities aimed at protecting the population during disasters and states of emergency.
Foreign Joint Expenditures	External Mltry. Dept	Budget item for principal and interest payments of debts incurred during wartime.
	NATO/UN Expenditures	Resources allocated to contributions for NATO or UN peacekeeping operations to support international peace and security missions.
	Foreign Aid	Includes financial or equipment-based military assistance provided to allied or friendly countries.
Salary Payments	Military Personnel Salaries	Covers the salaries, allowances, and other financial entitlements of military personnel serving in the armed forces.
	Civilian Personnel Salaries	Includes salary and social benefit payments for civilian staff employed in defense institutions.
	Retired Personnel Pensions	Payments of pensions and related social benefits to retired military and civilian personnel.
Social Expenditures	Family Support Costs	Expenses for housing, healthcare, and social support services for military personnel and their families.
	Veteran and Martyr Support Costs	Covers social support payments to personnel injured or disabled during service and to their families.
Administrative Expenditures	Administrative Costs of Military Units	Covers maintenance, operation, and general service expenses for the administrative functioning of defense institutions.
	Construction and Infrastructure Costs	Covers construction, maintenance, and repair costs of military infrastructure projects such as barracks, bases, and housing.
	Other Expenses	Represents a general classification heading for all other financial items defined in the defense budget.

Table 1 – NATO Defense Expenditure Categories⁹

In this context, not only the volume but also the composition of defense expenditures carries strategic significance. A country that allocates a substantial portion of its budget to personnel costs will inevitably achieve different levels of military effectiveness and long-term capacity compared to a country that channels the same amount of resources into advanced technology and R&D investments. Therefore, analytical assessments should consider not only nominal spending levels but also indicators such as the share of defense in GDP, per capita expenditure, and purchasing power parity, while also examining the specific domains toward which these expenditures are directed.

This study examines the defense expenditure trends of NATO member and partner countries in the Black Sea and South Caucasus for the period 2010–2024, compares these trends with those of other NATO members, and incorporates the expenditures of Russia and Iran to provide a holistic assessment of the regional balance of power. In doing so, the analysis underscores not merely the quantitative magnitude of defense budgets but also their relationship with perceptions of geopolitical risk, highlighting the necessity of increasing defense spending in this region.

⁹ SIPRI. (2025, Eylül 5). SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. SIPRI: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/frequently-asked-questions?utm>

Methodology

Research Design

This study examines the defense expenditures of NATO member and partner countries in the Black Sea and South Caucasus by comparing them with Russia’s defense expenditures over the same period, in order to assess the extent to which changes in Russia’s regional military spending have influenced the budgetary decisions of these states. The research also incorporates NATO members that are not geographically proximate to the region into the analysis, thereby aiming to evaluate whether geographical proximity serves as a determinant in shaping expenditure responses.

By testing the reflection of the geographic risk factor on defense budgets, the study seeks to determine whether states sharing borders or close neighborhood ties with Russia are more sensitive to increases in its defense spending. Accordingly, the research design is comparative and explanatory in nature, following a two-stage analytical plan: in the first stage, Black Sea and South Caucasus countries (Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) are compared with Russia; in the second stage, NATO members outside the region are included, and the correlations between their expenditures and those of Russia are analyzed. In this way, the study compares the responses of regional and non-regional NATO members, testing whether the “border effect” is statistically significant.

Data Set and Sample

The data employed in this research consist of annual defense expenditures covering the period 2010–2024. Information on defense expenditures was obtained from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database. NATO member states and close partners located in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region (Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) are defined in the analysis as the “regional group.” Major NATO members outside the region (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, and the United States) are included in the model as the “comparison group.” Russia is designated as the primary reference actor and the independent variable of the study. In this way, the reactions of both regional and non-regional NATO countries to Russia’s expenditure trends can be systematically assessed. Complementary statistics for the countries included in the sample are presented in Table 2.

YEAR	Russia	Bulgaria	Romania	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Türkiye	United States	France	Germany	Greece	Italy	Spain
2010	58.720	833	2.086	1.477	454	17.650	738.005	52.044	43.026	8.164	32.021	19.711
2011	70.238	758	2.380	3.080	469	17.006	752.288	54.121	45.163	7.129	33.829	19.695
2012	81.469	722	2.103	3.246	492	17.694	725.205	50.217	43.798	5.915	29.781	18.861
2013	88.353	812	2.453	3.368	442	18.428	679.229	52.001	44.243	5.655	29.957	17.243
2014	84.697	748	2.691	3.427	416	17.577	647.789	53.135	44.663	5.531	27.701	17.179
2015	66.422	633	2.581	2.901	300	15.669	633.830	45.647	38.170	4.818	22.181	15.187
2016	69.245	671	2.644	1.397	315	17.828	639.856	45.703	39.910	4.963	25.033	14.014
2017	66.913	720	3.622	1.529	321	17.823	646.753	47.628	42.281	5.088	26.448	16.044
2018	61.609	961	4.359	1.672	334	19.649	682.491	51.321	46.498	5.757	28.420	17.823

2019	65.201	2.159	4.613	1.854	311	20.437	734.344	50.455	49.079	5.383	26.381	17.189
2020	61.713	1.119	5.052	2.238	288	15.783	778.397	53.423	53.319	5.773	32.929	17.432
2021	65.908	1.275	5.301	2.703	300	15.255	806.230	58.735	56.513	8.300	36.233	19.544
2022	102.367	1.437	5.188	2.991	401	15.037	860.692	54.677	56.153	8.745	34.692	20.307
2023	109.204	1.990	5.628	3.562	508	19.578	916.015	59.492	67.285	7.015	36.933	23.821
2024	148.967	2.330	8.716	3.777	616	24.979	997.309	64.675	88.458	8.022	37.965	24.615

Table 2 – Defense Expenditures of Sample Countries, 2010–2024 (Million \$)¹⁰

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of the defense expenditures of regional countries and Russia between 2010 and 2024. The data reveal that, following 2014, the upward trend in regional countries accelerated, and in 2022, parallel to Russia’s sharp increase in spending, NATO members such as Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria also recorded significant budgetary surges. This pattern indicates that the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries exhibit more sensitive expenditure responses to security threats originating from Russia.

Variables and Measurement Method

In this study, the dependent variable is defined as the annual defense expenditures of NATO member or partner states in the Black Sea and South Caucasus (Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Azerbaijan). The data cover the period 2010–2024 and were obtained from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, expressed in millions of U.S. dollars. The primary independent variable of the study is Russia’s annual defense expenditures for the same period. This allows for a statistical examination of the relationship between changes in Russia’s spending and the expenditures of regional states.

In the second stage of the analysis, the same approach was applied to major NATO members located outside the region (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, and the United States). In this framework, the defense expenditures of these countries were also treated as dependent variables. Accordingly, the impact of changes in Russia’s expenditures on both neighboring states and geographically distant NATO members was tested in a comparative manner.

Method of Analysis and Hypotheses

In the first stage of the research, descriptive statistics were employed to reveal the defense expenditure trends of the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries, as well as NATO’s major non-regional members, during the period 2010–2024. Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationships among the variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient is obtained by dividing the covariance of two variables by the product of their standard deviations, and it is expressed by the following formula:¹¹

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\text{cov}(x, y)}{SD_x \times SD_y}$$

¹⁰ SIPRI. (2025, September 5). SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. SIPRI: <https://surl.li/bjldvq>

¹¹ Patrick, S., Christa, B., & Lothar, S. A. (2018). Correlation Coefficients: Appropriate Use and Interpretation. *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, 126(5), 1763-1768.

In this formula, $\text{Cov}(X, Y)$ represents the covariance between Russia's defense expenditure (X) and the defense expenditure of the country under analysis (Y), while SD_x and SD_y denote the standard deviations of these two variables, respectively. The Pearson correlation coefficient measures both the direction and the strength of the linear relationship between the two variables; a value of +1 indicates a perfect positive relationship, -1 a perfect negative relationship, and 0 the absence of a linear relationship.

Following the correlation analysis, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted in order to estimate the direction and magnitude of the relationship. Regression analysis enables the measurement of the extent to which the dependent variable—national defense expenditure—is affected by changes in the independent variable, namely Russia's defense expenditure.¹² The regression coefficient (β_1) indicates quantitatively how much the defense spending of a given country increases or decreases in response to a one-unit increase in Russia's expenditures. The regression model employed in the study is formulated as follows:

$$ME_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RE_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

In this equation, ME_{it} denotes the defense expenditure of country i in year t ; RE_t represents Russia's defense expenditure in the same year; β_0 is the constant term; and β_1 captures the effect of changes in Russia's spending on the dependent variable. ε_{it} refers to the error term. The analysis was conducted separately for both regional countries and non-regional NATO members, thereby allowing for a comparative assessment of their responses to Russia's expenditure levels. For all statistical tests, a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$) was adopted.

The main objective of this research is to comparatively examine the impact of changes in Russia's defense expenditures on the defense spending of NATO member or partner states in the Black Sea and South Caucasus, as well as on major NATO members outside the region. Accordingly, the following hypotheses have been developed:

- **H₁:** *There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and the defense expenditures of NATO member or partner states in the Black Sea and South Caucasus during the period 2010–2024.*
- **H₂:** *There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and the defense expenditures of major NATO members that are not geographically proximate to the region during the period 2010–2024.*
- **H₃:** *The response of Black Sea and South Caucasus countries to increases in Russia's defense expenditures is statistically significantly stronger than that of NATO members outside the region.*

Limitations

The scope and methodological choices of this study were shaped within certain assumptions and limitations. First, the analysis period was restricted to the years 2010–2024. This decision was made to ensure that the dataset covered a time frame in which the data are both reliable and compa-

¹² Jeffrey, W. (2012). The Simple Regression Model. U. o. Wisconsin–Madison içinde, *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach* (s. 838-843). Ohio: South-Western Cengage: University of Wisconsin–Madison.

rable, while also including key turning points in the regional security architecture such as the 2014 Crimea Crisis and the 2022 Russia–Ukraine War. Although data from earlier years are available, the initial post–Cold War era was excluded from the analysis due to uncertainties in NATO–Russia relations, gaps in the datasets, and issues of methodological consistency.

Second, the sample selection was limited to NATO member or closely associated partner states located in the Black Sea and South Caucasus (Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Azerbaijan). Although Georgia and Azerbaijan are not NATO members, their inclusion is justified by their close cooperation programs with the Alliance, their contributions to peacekeeping operations, and their strategic relevance to regional security. This approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of security perceptions along NATO’s eastern flank.

Third, a comparison group was constructed consisting of NATO’s major non-regional members (the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Greece). This selection reflects countries with the largest shares of NATO’s global defense budget, while at the same time providing a benchmark for states not directly exposed to regional security threats. In this way, the impact of geographical proximity on defense expenditures could be measured more effectively.

Finally, Russia’s defense expenditures were chosen as the independent variable in the model. This decision is grounded in the fact that Russia constitutes the principal actor in the Black Sea and South Caucasus security environment, plays a decisive role in most regional crises, and is explicitly identified as the primary threat in NATO’s strategic documents. Other actors, such as Iran, or broader global defense spending trends were not incorporated into the analysis, since the central objective of this research is to assess the regional implications of NATO–Russia interaction. These choices should therefore be taken into account in the interpretation of the results, and it should be noted that the study specifically addresses defense spending dynamics shaped by Russia-related threat perceptions.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

In the first stage, descriptive statistics of the annual defense expenditures of the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries, along with NATO’s major non-regional members, were examined. Table 3 presents the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation values for both groups. The table reveals that, although the absolute expenditure levels of regional countries are relatively low compared to those of Russia, a clear upward trend has emerged after 2014 and became particularly pronounced following 2022.

Country	Minimum	Maximum	Mean / Average*	Standard Deviation
United States	\$ 633.830	\$ 997.309	749228,9	107651,5
Germany	\$ 38.170	\$ 88.458	50570,6	12958,11
Azerbaijan	\$ 1.397	\$ 3.777	2614,8	840,373
Bulgaria	\$ 633	\$ 2.330	1144,53	576,016
France	\$ 45.647	\$ 64.675	52884,93	5144,579
Georgia	\$ 288	\$ 616	397,8	98,088
Spain	\$ 14.014	\$ 24.615	18577,67	2888,038

Italy	\$ 22.181	\$ 37.965	30700,27	4718,469
Romania	\$ 2.086	\$ 8.716	3961,13	1843,366
Türkiye	\$ 15.037	\$ 24.979	18026,2	2509,05
Greece	\$ 4.818	\$ 8.745	6417,2	1347,806
Russia	\$ 58.720	\$ 148.967	80068,4	24368,01

Table 3 – Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Countries

As shown in Table 3, during the period 2010–2024, the United States recorded the highest average defense expenditure, while Western European countries such as Germany and France maintained moderate levels, and the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries remained at relatively lower levels of spending. Russia’s average expenditure exceeded that of all regional countries, with its sharp increase after 2022 being particularly noteworthy. This pattern reflects the intensification of security perceptions in the region and demonstrates that defense expenditures on NATO’s eastern flank have accelerated significantly.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The linear relationship between Russia’s defense expenditures and the defense expenditures of the countries included in the sample was tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients and significance levels on a country-by-country basis.

Country	N	Pearson r	p (Sig. 2-tailed)	Statistically Significant
United States	15	0,756	0,001	Evet (p<0.01)
Germany	15	0,838	0	Evet (p<0.01)
Azerbaijan	15	0,714	0,003	Evet (p<0.01)
Bulgaria	15	0,624	0,013	Evet (p<0.05)
France	15	0,717	0,003	Evet (p<0.01)
Georgia	15	0,78	0,001	Evet (p<0.01)
Spain	15	0,737	0,002	Evet (p<0.01)
Italy	15	0,566	0,028	Evet (p<0.05)
Romania	15	0,667	0,007	Evet (p<0.01)
Türkiye	15	0,617	0,014	Evet (p<0.05)
Greece	15	0,418	0,121	Hayır (p>0.05)

Table 4 – Correlation Analysis

The findings indicate that Russia’s defense expenditures are generally positively and statistically significantly correlated with the defense expenditures of the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries. The highest correlation coefficients are observed for Germany ($r = 0.838$; $p < 0.01$) and Georgia ($r = 0.780$; $p < 0.01$). Türkiye ($r = 0.617$; $p < 0.05$), Romania ($r = 0.667$; $p < 0.01$), and Bulgaria ($r = 0.624$; $p < 0.05$) also exhibit significant positive relationships. Among NATO’s non-regional members, the United States ($r = 0.756$; $p < 0.01$) and France ($r = 0.717$; $p < 0.01$) show high correlations as well; however, in the case of Greece, the relationship is positive but not statistically significant ($p = 0.121$).

These results demonstrate that increases in Russia’s defense spending are closely monitored by both regional states and certain major NATO members, and are reflected in their own defense budgets. The fact that coefficients are statistically significant for border and nearby countries in particular supports the argument that the geographic risk factor plays an influential role.

Regression Analysis

The impact of changes in Russia's defense expenditures on the defense spending of the countries included in the sample was examined using simple linear regression analysis. Table 5 presents the regression coefficients, R² values, and significance levels on a country-by-country basis.

Country	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	Sig. F	B (Constant)	B (RSH)	Std. Error (B)	t (B)	p (B)
United States	0,756	0,572	0,539	73067,46	17,389	0,001	481656,1	3,342	0,801	4,17	0,001
Germany	0,838	0,702	0,679	7343,799	30,588	0	14902,88	0,445	0,081	5,531	0
Azerbaijan	0,714	0,509	0,472	610,9	13,493	0,003	644,184	0,025	0,007	3,673	0,003
Bulgaria	0,624	0,39	0,343	466,871	8,311	0,013	-37,418	0,015	0,005	2,883	0,013
France	0,717	0,514	0,477	3720,813	13,764	0,003	40762,55	0,151	0,041	3,71	0,003
Georgia	0,78	0,609	0,579	63,671	20,225	0,001	146,341	0,003	0,001	4,497	0,001
Spain	0,737	0,543	0,508	2026,481	15,435	0,002	11586,19	0,087	0,022	3,929	0,002
Italy	0,566	0,321	0,268	4036,05	6,135	0,028	21921,71	0,11	0,044	2,477	0,028
Romania	0,667	0,445	0,403	1424,745	10,436	0,007	-80,655	0,05	0,016	3,23	0,007
Türkiye	0,617	0,381	0,333	2049,277	7,987	0,014	12940,36	0,064	0,022	2,826	0,014
Greece	0,418	0,175	0,111	1270,548	2,754	0,121	4565,462	0,023	0,014	1,66	0,121

Table 5 – Regression Analysis

The regression results presented in Table 5 reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and the annual defense expenditures of the countries included in the sample. The explanatory power of the models is high, with R² values of 0.702 (F = 30.588; p < 0.001) for Germany, 0.609 (F = 20.225; p < 0.001) for Georgia, and 0.572 (F = 17.389; p < 0.001) for the United States, respectively. These results indicate that Russia's expenditure trend accounts for 70.2%, 60.9%, and 57.2% of the variation in defense spending in these countries. Among the Black Sea and South Caucasus states, the coefficients were found to be positive and statistically significant for Azerbaijan (B = 0.025; t = 3.673; p = 0.003), Romania (B = 0.050; t = 3.230; p = 0.007), Türkiye (B = 0.064; t = 2.826; p = 0.014), and Bulgaria (B = 0.015; t = 2.883; p = 0.013). This finding demonstrates that every USD 1 billion increase in Russia's expenditures is associated with a statistically significant rise in the defense budgets of these countries.

Similarly, positive relationships were identified among NATO's non-regional members. In particular, the coefficients for France (B = 0.151; p = 0.003) and Spain (B = 0.087; p = 0.002) indicate that Russia's expenditure increases are significantly reflected in these countries' budgets. In contrast, the model for Greece did not reach statistical significance (F = 2.754; p = 0.121), suggesting that Greece's spending patterns are determined more by other regional factors and domestic economic constraints than by Russia's defense trends.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Russia's defense expenditure trajectory constitutes a significant geopolitical factor influencing budgetary decisions not only in the Black Sea and South Caucasus but also among major NATO members in the Western bloc. This underscores that Russia's deterrent capacity and its role in shaping regional security dynamics directly affect defense allocations within NATO.

Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis (H₁) proposed in this study posited that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and those of NATO member or

partner states in the Black Sea and South Caucasus. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis strongly support this hypothesis. For Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, and Azerbaijan, correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level; for Georgia, the relationship was found to be particularly strong ($r = 0.780$) and statistically significant. The regression models further confirmed these findings, with the explanatory power of the models reaching notable levels in Georgia ($R^2 = 0.609$) and Romania ($R^2 = 0.445$).

The second hypothesis (H_2) suggested a similar relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and those of NATO's major non-regional members. The findings indicate that the models are statistically significant for the United States ($R^2 = 0.572$; $p < 0.01$), Germany ($R^2 = 0.702$; $p < 0.001$), France ($R^2 = 0.514$; $p < 0.01$), and Spain ($R^2 = 0.543$; $p < 0.01$). In all cases, the coefficients were positive, showing that increases in Russia's expenditures were mirrored in the defense budgets of these countries. This evidence demonstrates that Hypothesis 2 is supported.

The third hypothesis (H_3) posited that the Black Sea and South Caucasus countries would respond more strongly to increases in Russia's defense expenditures than NATO members located outside the region, with the difference being statistically significant. A comparison of regression coefficients shows that countries geographically proximate to Russia—such as Türkiye ($B = 0.064$), Romania ($B = 0.050$), and Bulgaria ($B = 0.015$)—displayed relatively higher coefficients, with R^2 values reaching noteworthy levels. However, some major NATO members, such as Germany and the United States, also demonstrated high correlation coefficients and significant regression models. Therefore, H_3 is partially supported: the influence of geographical proximity and threat perception is confirmed, yet it is also evident that NATO's major global actors are sensitive to Russia's expenditure increases.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed the relationship between Russia's defense expenditures and those of NATO member or partner states in the Black Sea and South Caucasus, as well as NATO's major non-regional members, during the period 2010–2024, in order to assess the impact of regional security dynamics on budgetary allocations. The findings indicate that Russia's defense expenditures have exerted a significant influence not only on regional states but also on NATO's major global members. This effect intensified particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when defense spending exhibited a nearly simultaneous upward trajectory across the Alliance.

The results of correlation and regression analyses demonstrate that Russia's expenditure trends have produced strong and statistically significant responses among Black Sea and South Caucasus states. Countries located in Russia's immediate neighborhood, such as Georgia, Romania, and Türkiye, displayed higher coefficients, confirming that geographical proximity and threat perception are critical determinants in defense budgetary decisions. This finding supports Hypothesis 3 and confirms that regional states exhibit greater sensitivity in their budgetary responses to perceived security risks.

At the same time, meaningful responses to Russia's defense expenditures were also observed among NATO members outside the region, such as Germany, France, and the United States. This

indicates that budgetary mobilization in response to Russia-driven risks is not confined to NATO's eastern flank, but is increasingly shaping the collective security architecture of the Alliance as a whole. This trend is consistent with NATO's "forward-looking deterrence and defense" approach, as articulated in the Strategic Concept adopted at the 2022 Madrid Summit.

Overall, the findings reveal that Russia's defense expenditures function as a "trigger variable" in the regional security environment, with their impact felt more strongly and rapidly in the Black Sea and South Caucasus. These results underscore the need for NATO to address the security concerns of its eastern flank allies, provide sustainable support for their defense budgets, and enhance collective deterrence capabilities. For policymakers, the study demonstrates that defense budgets are shaped not only by economic capacity but also by perceptions of geopolitical risk and shifts in the threat environment, highlighting the importance of more balanced and proactive resource allocation planning on NATO's eastern flank.

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GEOPOLITICAL REBALANCING: TRUMP'S NEW ADMINISTRATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE CAUCASUS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze recent changes in the U.S. Foreign Policy under Donald Trump's leadership and its Implications on the South Caucasus region. It analyzes how Washington's neo-realist and transactional approach affects NATO cohesion, regional alliances, and security dynamics in the Black Sea and South Caucasus corridor. The study focuses on the implications of the U.S.-brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan peace framework and the launch of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a proposed transit corridor linking Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia. While the initiative presents opportunities for regional cooperation and economic integration, it simultaneously threatens to diminish Georgia's strategic role as the traditional transit hub of the Middle Corridor.

This study used multiple scholars' research papers, journal articles, and official government documents to analyze recent geopolitical developments and their implications for the South Caucasus region. For scientific accuracy, this study has been conducted from a neutral research perspective, deliberately avoiding subjective or biased analysis. At the time of completing this research paper, the topic remains ongoing and continues to evolve rapidly.

In the conclusion part, the author assumes that Georgia now faces the need to adapt to this new geopolitical reality. To stay relevant, it must strengthen its diplomacy, invest in modern infrastructure, and maintain close ties with the United States, NATO, and the European Union. A proactive and balanced approach can help Georgia protect its national interests while promoting stability and cooperation across the South Caucasus. If Georgia fails to respond effectively, the shifting trade and security routes may increase the influence of Russia and China in the region, weakening Western engagement. However, with strategic planning and strong partnerships, Georgia can continue to serve as a vital bridge between Europe and Asia and remain a key player in the region's evolving geopolitical landscape. However, the coming years will test how U.S. foreign policy shapes security dynamics in the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions. As long as the war in Ukraine persists, lasting peace and stability in the area will remain uncertain.

Keywords: U.S. foreign policy; NATO; South Caucasus Region; U.S.-Brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement; Black Sea security; geopolitical rebalancing; neo-realism; regional integration; Middle Corridor.

Introduction

Recent geopolitical turbulence, caused by the ongoing wars and military confrontations, reflects the fragility of the International order. It has been ten months since President Trump's second inauguration. However, despite Trump's numerous claims for peace agreements, the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and many others, persist and continue to expand in scale.

This paper examines the current geopolitical rebalancing in the context of evolving U.S. foreign policy priorities. It focuses on how shifts in Washington's global strategy influence NATO and its partner countries, and assesses the resulting security challenges for the South Caucasus region.

Over the past decade, U.S. policy has transitioned from active engagement and democratization efforts to selective involvement and strategic restraint. The current emphasis on crises in Ukraine and the Middle East has diverted Western attention away from the Caucasus, even though the region remains a pivotal arena in the post-Cold War power competition between NATO allies and the Russia-China partnership. The Black Sea and the South Caucasus Region contain developing countries, with challenging internal and foreign policies. Unstable economic and political processes create obstacles towards the countries development and democratization process. On the other hand, recent U.S.-Brokered peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, created new opportunities for both countries cooperation. The transition process from the adversaries to the partners seems to be a long and ambiguous process. Additionally, the peace deal generated questions towards the future of Georgia's transistor role, and the existing indicators for the answers are not promising.

The signed documents, published by the U.S. department of state, proclaim that with the Republic of Armenia and mutually determined third parties will work together to prepare framework for the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) connectivity project in the territory of Armenia.¹ After the trilateral agreement the economic opportunity, created by the president Trumps administration, seems realistic. The agreement plan envisages U.S companies moving in under a 99-year deal to develop the 43 km route through Armenian territory along its border with Iran, in a corridor linking Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhichevan. As declared publicly, both nations leaders say that the Washington meeting has restored peace in the region and praise Trump's intervention as a game changer. According to the public statements, the corridor will include a railway, motorway and pipelines and the route will be managed by a private U.S. company.² Currently there is no actual actions made on the ground, but in the near future it is believed that agreement will be implemented and project will proceed towards execution.

Main Part

The collapse of the Soviet Union fundamentally reshaped the global geopolitical landscape, marking the most significant transformation in international power relations since World War II.

¹ U.S. Department of State. *Joint Declaration by the President of Republic of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington D.C.* (p.2. Aug. 29, 2025) <https://www.state.gov/releases/2025/> [last visit: Oct. 7, 2025]

² Grigor, Atanesian. BBC finds Russian guards, Iranian trucks and rusting railway on Trump's Caucasus peace route. *BBC World News.* (Oct. 6, 2025) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c78nr234v5mo.amp> [last visit: Oct. 7, 2025]

The end of the bipolar order left the United States as the sole remaining superpower, ushering in an era of unipolarity. Yet, much of the scholarly debate surrounding unipolarity has centered on its fragility. From a neorealist perspective, such a concentration of power is inherently unstable, as it provokes counterbalancing behavior from other states seeking to restore equilibrium within the international system.³ As we see in the recent decade, China's rise and Russia's imperialistic ambitions create a new geopolitical reality. The United States global military and diplomatic dominance in the 1990s and early 2000s stimulated opposing forces to team up and respond.

Trump's approach to international relations frequently prioritizes immediate power projection over the careful calibration of diplomacy, resulting in policies that can strain alliances while encouraging adversarial behavior. This tendency is reflected in his use of economic coercion, his transactional handling of strategic partnerships, and his engagement with global competitors. Although some observers consider this approach pragmatically realist, its limited strategic foresight raises significant doubts about its sustainability over the long term. The central limitation of this approach is its neglect of the long-term requirements of global leadership, which demand not only the assertion of power but also the careful maintenance of strategic balance. Trump's unilateral tactics may produce short-term gains, but they often lack the foresight necessary for enduring stability.⁴

With Trump's neo-realistic approach to policy-making and international relations, he pushes NATO members to increase their defense spending. His second presidential term would not necessarily signal the end of NATO, but it would likely test the Alliance's cohesion. The United States remains NATO's central pillar - its military power forms the foundation of collective defense. Although Trump's insistence on increased European defense spending encouraged some allies to move closer to the two-percent target, his confrontational rhetoric eroded trust within the Alliance. A renewed Trump administration would present both opportunities and challenges for transatlantic security. Continued pressure on burden-sharing could strengthen NATO's defense posture, yet persistent doubts about Washington's commitment may undermine Alliance unity. To preserve NATO's credibility while promoting equitable responsibility, Trump would need to pair firm expectations with active diplomatic engagement and a reaffirmation of shared democratic values and collective defense principles.⁵

For the South Caucasus, shifts in U.S. commitment to NATO carry direct implications. The region's stability depends partly on the credibility of Western security guarantees and on NATO's engagement with partner states such as Georgia and Armenia. If transatlantic cohesion weakens, it could create a strategic vacuum, inviting greater Russian and Chinese influence in the Black Sea and Caucasus corridors. Conversely, sustained U.S. leadership, combined with greater European responsibility, could reinforce regional deterrence, support democratic resilience, and advance energy and connectivity projects critical to the West's strategic presence in the area.

On August 8, 2025, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Ni-

³ William, C. Wohlforth. The Stability of a Unipolar World. *International Security* Vol.24, No.1 (Summer, 1999) p.5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539346> [last visit: Oct. 7, 2025]

⁴ Trump's Neanderthal realism faces its breaking point. *Policy Circle Bureau*. (March 18, 2025) <https://surl.li/zjrbvt> [last visit: Oct. 7, 2025]

⁵ Rebecca, Myshrall. Trump and NATO: Will NATO Survive Under a Second Trump Administration? *George Town University Journal of National Security Law & Policy*, Vol. 15:103. (March 22, 2025) p.130 <https://surl.li/tyjgxf> [last visit: Oct. 8, 2025]

kol Pashinyan signed a U.S.-brokered peace framework mediated by President Donald J. Trump, marking a significant step toward resolving decades of conflict in the South Caucasus. A central feature of the agreement is the establishment of a strategic transportation corridor through Armenian territory, linking Azerbaijan with its Nakhichevan exclave. This initiative, designated as the TRIPP, represents a potentially transformative driver for regional economic integration. It could serve as a complementary corridor to the existing Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which strategically links Central Asia with the South Caucasus, enhancing regional connectivity and economic integration. By providing an additional westward outlet for critical minerals, energy resources, and other goods between Eurasia and Europe, TRIPP may reduce the region's economic dependence on eastward flows toward China, while simultaneously enhancing regional connectivity and reinforcing U.S.-backed strategic influence in the Caucasus.⁶

Simultaneously, ongoing discussions between Armenia and Turkey regarding the normalization of bilateral relations could create opportunities for enhanced U.S.-Turkey cooperation in promoting regional economic integration. Since the early 1990s, Armenia's land borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan have remained closed; renewed dialogue may pave the way for reopening and modernizing key border crossing and transportation infrastructure. Should Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey reopen, the three states could collectively strengthen the South Caucasus as a strategic hub for global trade, energy transit, and digital connectivity, further embedding Western-aligned economic and security frameworks in the region.⁷

Until recently, Georgia was viewed as the cornerstone of the Middle Corridor—the Trans-Caspian route linking Europe and Asia. However, under the TRIPP framework, Armenia and Azerbaijan could replace Georgia as the primary East–West transit route in the South Caucasus. The proposed corridor, connecting Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia, signals a potential realignment of regional connectivity and influence, challenging Georgia's long-held role as the key gateway between Europe and Asia. If fully developed, this corridor could marginalize Georgia's role in regional trade, limit Tbilisi's ability to attract investment, and diminish the strategic significance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway.⁸

The shift of East-West transit routes toward Armenia and Azerbaijan poses significant strategic challenges for Georgia. Historically, Tbilisi's position along the Middle Corridor not only facilitated trade but also strengthened its geopolitical relevance as a pro-Western transit hub. With the emergence of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) as the new primary corridor, Georgia risks losing both economic leverage and political visibility in regional infrastructure networks. This marginalization could reduce foreign direct investment inflows, slow development of transport and logistics infrastructure, and weaken Georgia's negotiating position in broader regional security arrangements. Without proactive diplomatic and economic initiatives, Georgia's sidelining could unintentionally strengthen Russian and Chinese influence in the region, undermining Western strategic objectives and the stability of the South Caucasus as a whole.

6 Evan, Johnson; Leo, Ayala. Mapping the TRIPP Ahead: Prosperity in the South Caucasus and Opportunities for U.S. companies. *International Trade Administration*. (Sept. 17, 2025) <https://surl.lu/qrinav> [last visit: Oct. 8, 2025]

7 Ibid.

8 Trump's Caucasus Peace Deal Could Undermine Georgia's Geopolitical Importance. *Eurasianet*. (Aug. 25, 2025) <https://surl.li/dmagyb> [last visit: Oct. 8, 2025]

Conclusion

In the era of active Geopolitical turbulence, the South Caucasus continues to serve as a critical strategic junction between Europe and Asia, where global power dynamics intersect with regional security and economic integration. Trump's transactional and power-centric approach to international relations offers both opportunities and constraints to the region. It forcefully encourages NATO allies to increase general defense contributions and stimulate regional infrastructure initiatives.

The U.S.-brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan peace framework exemplifies how Washington can influence diplomatic engagement to promote regional connectivity and economic development. However, these initiatives also carry the potential to marginalize Georgia, reducing its role as a transit hub and unintentionally enhancing the influence of Russia and China in the South Caucasus. The Georgian government must stay proactive and continue close cooperation with the western allies, in order to balance stability and security in the country. With the flexible foreign policies, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have opportunities to establish stable environment, by keeping strategic partnership with NATO and western allies. Alternatively, increasing influence from China and Russia creates risk for the power imbalance.

For more than two decades, Georgia's strategic importance has rested on its position as a reliable and Western-oriented gateway linking Europe with Asia. Its transport infrastructure - from the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to Black Sea ports - has anchored both its economic development and its geopolitical significance. To avoid geopolitical isolation, Georgia must adapt swiftly to the new realities. This will require proactive diplomacy, renewed engagement with both Western allies and regional partners, and an ambitious strategy to modernize its infrastructure and diversify its economic partnerships. Ultimately, the country's future will depend on its ability to balance pragmatism with its long-standing Euro-Atlantic aspirations, ensuring that it remains a vital player in the redefined regional order.

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NATO BLACK SEA STRATEGY: OBSTACLES AND OPTIONS

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Abstract

The Black Sea represents a critical geostrategic region in the existing European security architecture. Located between NATO member states, partner countries and the Russian Federation, it represents both an opportunity and a challenge for future security and defence of the Alliance. Since Russia has enhanced its military presence within the Black Sea region after occupying of Crimea Peninsula in 2014, NATO has faced increasing pressure to develop a coherent and forward-looking strategy that would address existing traditional and hybrid threats in this area.

The formation of a NATO Black Sea strategy is closely tied with strategic, political, and institutional constraints. This research explores the importance of a NATO Black Sea strategy, examines potential policy options available for the Alliance, and analyzes the internal and external obstacles that hinders its formulation. To validate the criticality of the study, the research problem is analyzed through different theoretical perspectives such as Neorealism, Regional Security Complex Theory and the Alliance Security Dilemma. This diverse theoretical framework explains the roots of the challenges related to NATO's strategic interests in the Black Sea and illustrates the influence of systemic threats, regional interdependence, intra-Alliance politics, and non-existence of a unified approach among Alliance member states on shaping NATO Black Sea Strategy. To address these obstacles, the authors emphasize the necessity of developing complex approach to policy solutions, including concrete activities, such as enhancing maritime presence within legal limits, deepening partner capacity-building, protecting critical infrastructure, and managing escalation risks to avoid unintended confrontation and facilitate the stability and security of the Black Sea region.

Keywords: Black Sea, NATO, Strategy.

Introduction

The Black Sea has emerged as a critical geostrategic region in the evolving European security architecture. Nestled between NATO member states (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria), aspirant countries (Georgia and Ukraine) and a revisionist power - the Russian Federation, the Black Sea represents both an opportunity and a challenge for NATO's strategic posture. As Russia consolidates its military presence in Crimea and expands its anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities across the Black Sea region, NATO faces increasing pressure to develop a coherent and forward-looking strategy that addresses both traditional and hybrid threats in the region.¹

Although NATO formally recognized the importance of the region in its 2022 Strategic Concept, the Alliance still lacks a holistic approach to future Black Sea Strategy. Recent history has shown that NATO's response to regional instability has thus far been reactive and fragmented, characterized by rotational troop deployments, occasional naval patrols, and enhanced bilateral cooperation with non-member partners. However, the growing complexity of the threats in the region, especially in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has underlined the necessity of developing a comprehensive, long-term strategic vision for the Black Sea. The major goal of a new strategy should be the balance of deterrence and defence with engagement and resilience-building activities among regional partners.

Developing a NATO Black Sea strategy faces significant strategic, political, and institutional challenges. Internally, the Alliance should reconcile divergent national interests among its current members, address constraints imposed by the Montreux Convention² and navigate Turkey's unique geopolitical positioning. Externally, NATO should contend with Russia's aggressive posture, China's growing economic interests in Europe, and regional vulnerabilities to hybrid threats, including cyberattacks, disinformation, and energy coercion. Moreover, integrating Ukraine and Georgia more deeply into NATO's defence ecosystem remains a contentious and strategically sensitive endeavor.

This article explores the strategic rationale for a dedicated NATO Black Sea strategy, examines potential policy options available to the Alliance, and analyzes the internal and external obstacles that complicate its formulation and implementation. By critically assessing the feasibility of enhanced NATO engagement in the Black Sea region, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing policy debate and provide a new perspective for a realistic and resilient approach that upholds the security interests of NATO and its partners. Therefore, this research addresses the following question: What strategic, political, and institutional factors shape NATO's ability to formulate and implement a dedicated Black Sea Strategy?

For the above-mentioned purposes, this paper employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach grounded in Neorealism, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and the Alliance Security Dilemma, capturing NATO's approach to the Black Sea through the lens of systemic drivers, regional interdependence, and intra-alliance dynamics. The research design is based on

1 A2/AD refers to war-fighting, military strategy, set of capabilities (including long-range missile systems, advanced air defence and electronic warfare) aimed at preventing an adversary from entering (anti-access) or freely maneuvering (area denial) within a contested area.

2 The Montreux Convention (1936) grants Turkey control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, enabling it to restrict naval passage through the Turkish Straits – especially for non-Black Sea states in wartime or when threatened.

a combination of document analysis and secondary literature review. Primary sources include NATO strategic documents, summit declarations, and official statements by member states, with particular attention to the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and subsequent policy communications related to the Black Sea. Secondary sources comprise academic publications, reports and analysis from security policy institutions.

Main Part

Theoretical Framework

Over the past several decades, international relations theories have expanded considerably, providing diverse perspectives for analyzing contemporary security challenges. Selecting an appropriate theoretical framework is essential for capturing the complexity of a given strategic environment. As NATO's strategic posture in the Black Sea region primarily arises from systemic pressures, regional security interdependencies and internal alliance dynamics, this paper applies a multi-theoretical approach combining Neorealism, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and the Alliance Security Dilemma. Taken together, these insights illuminate the drivers, options, and constraints shaping the Alliance attitude, policy dilemmas, and strategic decisions in the region. Furthermore, it enables an integrated analysis of the Black Sea as both a theatre of great power competition and a complex security subsystem, influenced by divergent priorities among NATO member-state.

Neorealism: Systemic Pressures and Strategic Imperatives

Neorealism, also known as Structural Realism, is one of the dominant theoretical approaches in international relations. In "Theory of International Politics", Kenneth Waltz argues that the structure of the international system – rather than human nature, as emphasized by classical realists – is the primary determinant of state behavior. The anarchic nature of the international system, lacking a central authority, compels states to prioritize survival through accumulation of power in order to ensure security.³ From this perspective, NATO's posture in the Black Sea can be interpreted as a collective strategy to maintain a favorable balance of power in response to Russia's revisionist foreign policy. This policy is reflected in increasing military presence in the region including the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and deployment of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Black Sea. These systemic pressures make the Black Sea not merely a regional concern, but a critical area in the broader dynamics of great-power competition.

Regional Security Complex Theory: Interdependence and Regional Dynamics

Regional Security Complex Theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, provides a framework for analyzing how geographical proximity and interconnected security concerns integrate states into a shared regional security system.⁴ In the Black Sea, security of the NATO member states (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) is closely intertwined with that of partners (Georgia and Ukraine), as threats and vulnerabilities tend to spill over across borders. The theory highlights both patterns of cooperation and conflict, as well as the influence of external powers in shaping the security dynamics in the region. RSCT enables the examination of the clashes between NATO's

³ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Theory of International Politics", 1979

⁴ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers*, 2009

strategic vision and the specific national interests of regional actors, which may either reinforce or undermine collective coherence. While Romania perceives Russia as the main military threat and advocates for a stronger NATO presence, Bulgaria generally adopts a more cautious stance and prioritizes stability in bilateral relations, influenced by longstanding historical narratives and political ties with Russia. To make parallels with the mentioned states, Turkey simultaneously balances its NATO commitments and economic relations with Russia.⁵ Such asymmetries in threat perception illustrate how regional security interdependence does not inherently produce unified policy preferences, thereby presenting both opportunities and challenges for NATO's strategic engagement in the Black Sea.

The Alliance Security Dilemma: Internal Constraints and Strategic Fragmentation

The Alliance Security Dilemma, articulated by Glenn Snyder, addresses the internal dynamics of alliances, emphasizing the tension between two core risks: abandonment – being left without sufficient support in a crisis and the concern of being drawn into conflicts or commitments, which are against states' national interests. While alliances are formed to increase collective security, they also influence member states' behavior. In the Black Sea context, this dilemma is reflected in NATO member states' diverse preferences. These differences limit the alliance's ability to establish a dedicated regional strategy. As Snyder notes, such constraints are inherent to the functioning of alliances composed of sovereign actors with varying strategic priorities.⁶

By integrating Neorealism, RSCT, and Alliance Security Dilemma theories, this paper captures the systemic drivers (security challenges from Russia, global power competition), regional dynamics (geopolitical proximity, historical relations, and legal constraint such as, Montreux Convention) and intra-alliance factors (divergent threat perceptions and competing national interests) that shape NATO's strategic options and obstacles in the Black Sea Region.

Strategic Importance of the Black Sea for NATO

The Black Sea region has a unique location, linking Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia. This makes it strategically important geopolitically, militarily and economically. From a neorealist perspective, this geographic configuration places the Black Sea at the intersection of great-power competition, where control over strategic maritime and land routes translates into geopolitical leverage. As already mentioned above, it borders three NATO member states — **Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria** — and two key partners — **Ukraine and Georgia** — whose security is closely aligned with the Alliance's strategic goals.

- **Turkey**, with its large military and control over the Turkish Straits under the Montreux Convention, is a pivotal actor in regional security. As both a NATO member and a regional power with an independent foreign policy, Turkey plays a balancing role between Western interests and regional dynamics, including relations with Russia. Its geographic position makes it the gatekeeper to and from the Black Sea and making it essential to any NATO maritime or air strategy in the region.⁷

⁵ OSW, *Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey in the Black Sea Region: Increased Cooperation?* Centre for Eastern Studies, 2025
Atlantic Council, *Defense Cooperation: Turkey's Triangular Balancing in the Black Sea Region*, 2025

⁶ Snyder, G. H. *The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics*, World Politics, 1984

⁷ *Political and Diplomatic Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities for Black Sea Cooperation between Turkey and the West in the Post-2022 Environment*, in *A Sea of Opportunities: Exploring Cooperation between Turkey and the West in the Black Sea*, Atlantic Council in Turkey, 2024

• **Romania** and **Bulgaria** have emerged as anchors of NATO's southeastern flank. Romania, hosts a NATO multinational battlegroup and the Aegis Ashore missile defence site in Deveselu. Systematically, both countries participate in enhanced Air Policing missions and host rotational NATO forces under the Tailored Forward Presence initiative.⁸

• **Ukraine** and **Georgia**, while not NATO members, are strategically important partners. Their aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration are supported through a range of cooperation mechanisms. These include the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP), Annual National Programs (ANP) and country-specific instruments such as, the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), NATO-Georgia Commission and NATO-Ukraine Council – aligning them closely with NATO's defence ecosystem.⁹

The presence of these allies and partners creates a complex but crucial environment for NATO. As RSCT highlights, due to the interdependence of littoral states' security, both within NATO and beyond, instability in one state can generate cascading effects across the entire security complex. Thus, while formal collective defence obligations apply only to members, the security of Ukraine and Georgia is important to the integrity of NATO's eastern deterrence posture. Furthermore, as discussed above, beyond the littoral states, the Black Sea functions as a significant geopolitical junction that connects some of the world's most strategically sensitive regions — Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia.¹⁰ This makes the region of vital importance to NATO's security framework, as it bridges Western Europe to volatile theaters including the Levant, the Caspian basin, the South Caucasus and even the wider Indo-Pacific through energy and transport corridors. Thus, the Black Sea region provides NATO access to not only maritime, but also land routes. Concurrently, the Black Sea as part of NATO's southeastern flank is an area that has grown its strategic importance following Russia's efforts to expand its political and military presence in bordering regions.

Due to its strategic geographic location, the Black Sea has become a frontline in the ongoing geopolitical contest between NATO and Russia. The Alliance's ability to project stability in this region is critical not only for the security of its member states, but also for partner nations. Moreover, it is vital to preserve freedom of navigation, energy flows, and the broader rules-based international order in a contested security environment.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a turning point that caused significant strategic alterations within the Black Sea region. Occupation of the peninsula gave Russia nearly total control of a critical maritime platform, allowing Kremlin to expand its naval capabilities and establish an A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) umbrella that significantly limits NATO's military presence in the region.¹¹ The transformation of Crimea into a militarized zone, complete with advanced missile systems, air bases and a reinforced Black Sea Fleet, has altered the regional balance of power. The situation has further escalated with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The war has had unprecedented humanitarian and political consequences. It has also caused the militarization of the Black Sea northern coast, turned vital commercial routes into conflict zones and elevated the

8 NATO, *NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance*, 2025

9 NATO, *Partnership Interoperability Initiative*, 2025

10 Middle East Institute, *Toward a NATO Black Sea Strategy*, 2024

11 Chatham House, *Understanding Russia's Black Sea Strategy*, 2025

probability of further Russian territorial ambitions, especially toward southern Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries whom Kremlin considers within the sphere of its national interests.

As a result, the Black Sea region has become a de-facto buffer zone between NATO and Russia. The defence of NATO's Eastern Flank, particularly Romania and Bulgaria, is directly linked to prevention of Russia's further ambitions towards other Central and Western European Alliance member states. Concurrently, supporting partner countries which lie outside of NATO's security umbrella has become a test for its commitment to regional stability, deterrence, and the principle of sovereign self-determination. From the neorealist lens, the afore-mentioned developments reflect systemic pressures on NATO to maintain a favourable balance of power in the region. Simultaneously, RSCT outlines how such changes impact the security interdependence of NATO members and partners while, the Alliance Security Dilemma explains why internal divergence can complicate NATO's ability to respond coherently.

Another critical dimension is an energy and infrastructure security, as the Black Sea region is an artery that connects resource-rich areas in Central Asia and the South Caucasus to European markets. Multiple critical energy projects run through or terminate in the region, including the Southern Gas Corridor, Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and TurkStream pipeline. These routes serve to diversify European energy supplies and reduce dependence on Russia, thus aligning closely with NATO's broader security goals.¹² In addition to hydrocarbons, the Black Sea hosts key undersea digital infrastructure — particularly fiber-optic cables — that support financial transactions, government communications and civilian data flows. The security of these cables is increasingly recognized as a strategic priority amid concerns about sabotage or cyberattack.

Equally vital is the region's role in global food security. Ukraine and Russia together accounted for a significant share of the world's grain exports prior to the war. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, brokered by Turkey and the UN, temporarily enabled exports from Ukrainian ports despite the war, underscoring the region's importance to non-European stakeholders as well. Russian threats to block maritime exports from Odesa and other Ukrainian ports continue to affect global food prices, particularly in developing nations.¹³

Given the concentration of energy, communication, and trade infrastructure in the Black Sea region, any disruption — whether through kinetic conflict, maritime blockades or hybrid threats, can have cascading effects across NATO territories and beyond.

Evolution of NATO's Black Sea Approach

NATO's Black Sea approach has evolved significantly over the past two decades, shaped by shifts across the global and regional security environment, Alliance priorities and member states' politics. This evolution can be broken down into three phases: pre-2014, 2014-2022, and post-2022.

Before 2014, the Black Sea was not central to NATO's priorities. The Alliance primarily engaged through Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiatives and cooperative security programs such as, Black Sea For (2001) and Operation Black Sea Power, focused on confidence-building, maritime security and counter-terrorism.¹⁴ NATO naval activities were limited in scope and duration, partly

¹² NATO, *Reinforcing Resilience: NATO's Role in Enhanced Security Undersea Infrastructure Security*, 2024

¹³ United Nations, *Black Sea Grain Initiative*

¹⁴ NATO, *Relations with Partners across the Globe*, 2023

constrained by the Montreux Convention and partly by the perception that the region was a relatively stable backwater rather than a frontline of regional-power rivalry.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea was a significant turning point. Russia's seizure and militarization of the peninsula brought the Black Sea into the core of NATO's deterrence and defence agenda. NATO summits, Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016) prioritized the reinforcement of the Alliance's Eastern flank, following the creation of Tailored Forward Presence in the southeast, enhanced air policing missions, and rotational maritime deployments.¹⁵ NATO increased its exercises in the region, while bilateral and multilateral security assistance to Ukraine and Georgia has been intensified. From the neorealist perspective, this phase reflected the Alliance's shift toward a more threat-driven posture, seeking to maintain a favorable balance of power in the face of expanding Russian A2/AD capabilities in Crimea.¹⁶

Between 2014 and 2022, NATO gradually integrated the Black Sea more deeply into its security planning, but internal divergences and political sensitivities limited the scale of any permanent military presence in the region. The Alliance relied heavily on rotational forces, multinational exercises such as, Sea Breeze and tailored reassurance measures. Concurrently, infrastructure investment in Romania and Bulgaria, including the operationalization of the Aegis Ashore missile defence site in Deveselu, strengthened its southeastern flank's strategic resilience.

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO's approach entered a new phase. The Madrid Summit (2022) and Vilnius Summit (2023) recognized the Black Sea as an area of direct strategic priority, explicitly linking its security to that of the entire Alliance.¹⁷ The strategic approach shifted from limited cooperative engagement to sustained deterrence and crisis management. While NATO's military presence remains constrained by strategic, political, and institutional factors, the Black Sea is now firmly embedded in the Alliance's forward defence posture. This evolution sets the stage for confronting the key obstacles that continue to challenge the development of a unified and comprehensive NATO Black Sea strategy.

Major Obstacles and Policy Options to a Unified NATO Black Sea Strategy

Despite the growing recognition of the Black Sea's strategic importance, NATO has yet to formulate a coherent and long-term regional strategy.¹⁸ While individual NATO members and regional partners have engaged in bilateral and multilateral initiatives to enhance maritime security and deterrence, the Alliance continues to face a range of strategic, political, and institutional challenges that hinder the development of a unified Black Sea strategy. From a neorealist perspective, this reflects the essence of an anarchic international system, where states prioritize their own security and national interests over collective regional commitments, even when facing a common threat.¹⁹ These obstacles are both internal - related to Alliance cohesion and external - rooted in regional power dynamics and legal constraints.

15 NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 2014

NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, 2016

16 NATO, *NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance*, 2025

17 NATO, *Madrid Summit Declaration*, 2022

NATO, *Vilnius Summit Communiqué*, 2023

18 NATO, *Madrid Summit Declaration*, 2022

19 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979

The primary external obstacle to NATO's positioning in the Black Sea is the entrenched Russian military presence in Crimea, which has become the cornerstone of Moscow's Black Sea strategy. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia undertook a power-maximizing effort to gain control over critical geostrategic spaces, achieve regional dominance and constrain NATO's operational freedom. Specifically, the peninsula was militarized through the expansion of the Sevastopol naval base, deployment of advanced air defence systems and reinforcement of the Black Sea Fleet with modern warships and submarines. Moreover, A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) architecture has allowed Russia to project power across the entire Black Sea region, deter NATO activity and challenge the southern flank of the Alliance. Kremlin has also demonstrated the ability to use its naval forces for both conventional warfare (e.g., attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure) and hybrid operations such as, naval blockades and the manipulation of maritime navigation systems. Russia's dominance limits NATO's ability to operate freely in the region and increases the risks of escalation, especially in the absence of clear operational rules of engagement.

The Montreux Convention of 1936, which regulates passage through the Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles), imposes significant legal constraints on NATO's ability to project naval power in the Black Sea. Under the Convention, non-littoral states (i.e., NATO members not bordering the Black Sea) are limited in both the duration of their naval deployments (maximum 21 days) and the aggregate tonnage of warships they may have in the region at any given time. Another challenge related to the expansion of the Alliance capabilities in the Black Sea is that during wartime or when Turkey considers itself threatened, Ankara can close the straits to military vessels, as it did in February 2022. While this legal framework preserves Turkey's strategic autonomy and the stability of the region under peacetime conditions, it complicates NATO's efforts to maintain a robust and persistent naval presence in the Black Sea.

One of the most obvious internal obstacles to a unified Black Sea strategy is the variation in threat perceptions among NATO members. While Eastern European and Baltic states view Russia as an existential threat to their national security, some Alliance states are more cautious, prioritizing diplomatic engagement and economic stability over military confrontation. Even after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, part of European leaders and societies have shown reluctance to fully endorse escalatory defence postures, fearing a potential spillover into direct NATO–Russia confrontation. This divergence reflects the logic of the Alliance Security Dilemma, whereby differing assessments of threats among member states limit the scope of collective action. Thus, these internal divisions caused by the unwillingness of some Alliance member states to cross Russia's perceived "red lines" have led to a fragmentary approach to regional stability. There is insufficient political momentum to develop a coordinated, forward-looking NATO doctrine specific to the Black Sea.

Another factor hindering development of an effective Black Sea strategy is related to partner integration. Specifically, NATO's strategic partnership with Ukraine and Georgia is influenced by the unresolved question of their prospective membership. Both countries have made constitutional commitments to join the Alliance and have cooperated extensively through the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership framework. However, full membership remains elusive, due to concerns over Russian retaliation, unresolved territorial conflicts and a lack of consensus within NATO. This challenge is particularly critical as the security of Ukraine and Georgia cannot be viewed in

isolation. According to RSCT, instability in one state inevitably generate security consequences for other actors within the Black Sea region. This ambiguity creates strategic dilemma for the Alliance. Increasing military assistance for Ukraine and Georgia enhance their defence capabilities, however, concurrently, it raises the risk of a new escalation with Russia. As a result, this uncertainty significantly affects NATO's ability to develop long-term strategy in the Black Sea Region.

While these obstacles present significant constraints, several potential policy options - military, political, and/or hybrid, could be considered to enhance NATO's posture and resilience in the Black Sea region. Accordingly, within the limits of the Montreux Convention, NATO can strengthen its rotational naval deployments, joint maritime patrols, and multinational exercises.²⁰ Enhanced coordination among Black Sea littoral allies will improve readiness, situational awareness, and crisis response capabilities. Furthermore, deepening cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia through expanded training missions, interoperability programs, and defence sector reform support will improve the partners' self-defence capabilities without membership commitments. Tailored deterrence assistance must be linked to NATO's broader defence plans, ensuring partner contributions align with Alliance operational concepts.

Given the region's role as a transit hub for energy, trade and digital infrastructure, NATO should expand its cooperation with the EU, private sector stakeholders and regional organizations to protect critical assets from sabotage, cyber-attacks or hybrid threats.

Any expansion of NATO's presence in the Black Sea should be accompanied by robust risk-mitigation measures. These could include transparent exercise notifications, communication channels for deconfliction and adherence to international legal norms. Such measures would help to preserve deterrence credibility while minimizing the likelihood of unintended escalation.

Conclusion

The Black Sea has moved from a peripheral security concern to the forefront for NATO. This paper has shown that while the strategic rationale for a dedicated NATO Black Sea strategy is evident, the Alliance's ability to design and implement such a strategy still faces significant challenges. This derives from three main factors:

- Strategic - including Russia's military presence in Crimea, combined with its A2/AD capabilities and its role as a geopolitical, economic and energy hub, a transit corridor and a frontline in the balance of power with Russia;
- Political - divergent threat perceptions among member states, Turkey's unique geopolitical positioning and the complexities associated with closer integration of partners such as Ukraine and Georgia;
- Institutional - encompassing the legal restrictions of the Montreux Convention and the consensus-driven decision-making process inherent to the Alliance.

The above-mentioned interlinked factors, interpreted through the lenses of Neorealism, RSCT and the Alliance Security Dilemma explain why NATO's strategic posture in the Black Sea remains constrained; illustrate how systemic threats, regional interdependence and intra-Alliance politics shape strategic outcomes; and clarify why a unified approach has proven difficult to achieve.

²⁰ NATO, *Ballistic Missile Defence*, 2023

Nonetheless, the analysis identifies a set of policy options that could strengthen NATO's posture in the Black Sea. This includes enhancing maritime presence within legal limits, deepening partner capacity-building, protecting critical infrastructure and managing escalation risks, which together provide a complementary course of action. However, the feasibility of these measures depends on political will, alignment with Alliance priorities and pragmatic solutions to avoid unintended confrontation in the region.

By framing these measures within a balanced model that combines deterrence and defence with engagement and resilience-building, this study offers a new perspective for a realistic and resilient approach aimed at upholding the security interests of NATO and its partners while mitigating escalation risks. Moreover, it directly addresses the strategic, political, and institutional dynamics that shape NATO's decision-making and contributes to the ongoing policy debate on how to transform the Alliance's strategic ambition in the Black Sea into coherent and sustainable action.

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SOUTH CAUCASUS TOWARDS A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

For the first time in the history of the South Caucasus, it is about to enter a period of radical transformation. The geopolitical order, which has been closely linked to the conflicts, occupations and deportations that have arisen in the region over the past two centuries, is about to collapse. The actors who have controlled the region for a long time are forced to adapt to the impact of the new geopolitical reality. The new rules of the game are about to suppress classic behaviors. It is not excluded that this situation will bring new development and breath to the region, as well as new problems in content.

The “Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia”, which was laid with the 44-day Second Karabakh War and signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia under the mediation of the United States on August 8 in Washington, is capable of seriously influencing the formation of the new geopolitical architecture of the region. A strong desire is being observed among the countries of the region towards the logic of “0 problems”. This has created unique opportunities for adapting bilateral relations to the requirements of the new reality, seeking ways to jointly solve regional security problems and realizing the principle of peaceful coexistence.

However, in the new reality, it does not seem easy to easily achieve the desired future. There are many who dream of disrupting this peace and bringing the region back into the clutches of separatism. It seems that the interests of the countries of the region have never been as close as they are today. It is this tendency that is capable of seriously hindering the advancement of divisive and disruptive plans in the South Caucasus.

Although the new conditions seem attractive compared to the previous pessimistic period, they imply the projection of military-political contradictions between transregional forces to the region. The Israel-Iran and India-Pakistan conflicts are considered new problems transferred to the region after the Second Karabakh War. This problem, if not directly, then indirectly affects the regional order.

The projection of all these foreign games into the region reflects the potential of the South Caucasus to open up to the world and become a natural geographical springboard for advancing towards the "Heartland" as Russia's main focus shifts to the war with Ukraine.

A real basis has been created for replacing long-standing violence and hostility with mutually beneficial cooperation. The future development of the region can be better and more stable on the basis of a “soft power” strategy. It is not excluded that a new wave of regionalism will create the basis for a positive transformation of a “free and stable Caucasus”.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Second Karabakh war, “Heartland”, extra-state confrontations, regionalism

Conclusion

Historically deprived of geopolitical comfort, the South Caucasus cannot escape the vortex of conflict and confrontation even today. Military campaigns, expansions, and occupations are considered concepts that determine the eternal fate and history of this region. The transformation of a small region into spheres of influence between various civilizations and empires has not created anything positive for the smooth development of regionalism. On the contrary, the hatred and distrust of major powers for each other have had a serious impact on the psyche, behavior, and way of thinking of the peoples of the region and have turned this small region into an object of severe asymmetries. Since the 19th century, merciless geopolitical disputes and wars over the South Caucasus have reached their peak and have forever left their negative mark on the life of the region - the division of the region among regional powers. In addition, during the Soviet regime, by regularly shearing borders, the regime laid the foundation for a “powder keg” in the region, created the basis for ethnic conflicts, and was able to deliberately instill ethnic antagonism among local peoples.

The geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic role of the South Caucasus in Eurasia is truly unique due to its natural resources and geographical location. Its inclusion in H.Mackinder’s “Heartland” makes the region attractive for the geopolitical struggle for Eurasia¹. Undoubtedly, the aggravation of the military-political situation in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the «cold war», collisions around oil and its transportation routes have led to the formation of a conflictological architecture in the region. Military-political games continue to keep all processes, including non-military ones, dependent on it. Even if the 44-day Second Karabakh War saved the region from 30 years of destructive war and violence, it is still too early to talk about the establishment of lasting strategic stability². This can be highlighted against the background of a number of emerging trends.

Main Part

1. Intensification of geopolitical processes in the region. It is not surprising that the activities, interests and competition of international and regional powers in the South Caucasus have intensified in recent years, and that events are taking place with faster and deeper impacts. This trend is especially noticeable after 2020.

There is no doubt that the South Caucasus is in the sphere of interest of several major states. Any changes in the region affect the geopolitical balance. Russia is trying to maintain its traditional dominant role in the region. Its military bases in Armenia (Gyumri) and Georgia (Abkhaziya and Ossetiya) are a very serious means of influence. However, after the Russian-Ukrainian war, its influence in the region may weaken.

Turkey has further strengthened its relations with Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War in 2020 and increased its geopolitical weight in the region. Iran, on the other hand, is seriously

¹ Həsənov, Əli. Geosiyasət. Dərslük (Bakı, 2010), 604.

² Najafov, Zafar. Geopolitical consequences of the Second Karabakh War. “Conflict analysis: political-psychological and “conflict analysis: political-psychological and socio-economic aspects”. (Lep1 - David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia. 24 november 2021). 90-97

concerned about Azerbaijani-Armenian relations, the Zangezur corridor and Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation and is trying to protect its position in the region³.

As for the US and the European Union, their interests cannot be considered unambiguous. After the second Karabakh war, the US and the European Union tried to hinder the development of the peace process in the region under the mediation of Russia and came to the center of attention with their selective approach to the countries of the region.

The 44-day war in 2020 and the end of Armenian separatism as a result of one-day anti-terrorist measures carried out in the Karabakh economic zone of Azerbaijan in 2023 had a serious impact on the balance of power in the region. By fully restoring its sovereignty in the region, Azerbaijan changed the “status quo” and reshaped the political map of the region⁴. These changes brought to the fore sensitive issues such as the Zangezur corridor and the delimitation of the Azerbaijani-Armenian border.

After the anti-terrorist measures, another success of Azerbaijan was the closure of the Russian-Turkish monitoring center operating in the territories controlled by Russian peacekeepers last year and the departure of Russian peacekeepers from Azerbaijan. This step did not allow Russia to restore its military presence in Azerbaijan. In fact, Pashinyan’s recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory and Russia’s efforts in the Ukrainian swamp also had a positive impact on the development of events in Azerbaijan’s favor.

The region has the potential to become a transit hub between Europe and Asia: the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) increases the geopolitical importance of the region by increasing transportation in the China-Turkey-Europe direction. Azerbaijani oil and gas pipelines (BTC, TAP, TANAP) are important for Europe’s energy security, which makes Azerbaijan a strategic partner.

New threats and challenges also do not go unnoticed. Moscow’s focus on Ukraine has created new opportunities and gaps in the South Caucasus. It is also too early to talk about lasting stability in Iranian-Azerbaijani relations. In the post-war period, Iran’s military exercises along the border with Azerbaijan, harsh rhetoric, and an armed raid on the Azerbaijani military embassy in Tehran have contributed to a cooling of bilateral relations.

The Pashinyan government’s distancing from Russia and cooperation with the European Union could fuel new tensions in the region.

The Russia-Ukraine war has significantly increased Georgia’s geopolitical importance for the United States. This is due to the security of communication lines passing through Georgia and its absence from Russian influence.

2. Changing the trajectory of violence. This is a very relevant and important trend. To justify this idea, it is possible to explain that violence has increased due to the influence, interests and interference of foreign powers rather than local reasons.

Although Russia tried to maintain its position in the region after the second Karabakh war, its influence has weakened as a result of the passivity of peacekeepers, the weakness of the CSTO

³ Когут, Виктор. Нурышев, Геннадий Карабахский узел геополитических противоречий на Южном Кавказе (Москва: Евразийская интеграция: экономика, право, политика, – 2021). № 1, – s.104-111. .

⁴ Zafar Najafov, [Causes and consequences of local anti-terrorism measures in the Karabakh economic zone of Azerbaijan](#) (Social Development and Security, Ukraina. 2024), Vol 14, No 1. P 46-54

and the deterioration of relations with Armenia. Pashinyan's recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory and the gradual depletion of military and human resources in the war against Ukraine resulted in the departure of Russian peacekeepers from the region. However, it is not excluded that Russia will make plans and resort to provocations to compensate for this weakening.

The Iranian Persian regime is also unlikely to come to terms with the current state of events in the region. The Zangezur corridor, the Middle Corridor, Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation and the August 8 statement signed under the leadership of the United States give grounds for the above-mentioned concern.

Turkey has increased its military, economic and political activity in the region within the framework of its alliance with Azerbaijan. This is not well received by other powers (especially Russia and Iran). It is simply that the current military-political situation in the South Caucasus and the post-Soviet space and the Middle East does not allow the latent jealousy of those states towards Turkey to take on an obvious character.

The course of events gives reason to say that violence is no longer the work of only local actors. If earlier violence was mostly limited to the Azerbaijani-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh and other South Caucasus conflicts, now sometimes foreign intelligence services, proxy actors, and ideological influence networks are behind the violence. For example: Iran's support for some radical religious networks within Azerbaijan⁵, increasing tensions between pro-Western and pro-Russian political groups within Armenia, etc. are examples of what has been said.

Violence is also spreading through cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns, fake news, and foreign social media accounts that influence public opinion. Most of these information attacks originate from centers located abroad (for example, troll factories and anti-Azerbaijani platforms).

The strategic importance of the region also increases the violence originating from abroad. The Middle Corridor, energy projects, international transport routes make the region even more attractive. Tensions between external powers for control over these resources and routes are increasing, which negatively affects intra-regional stability.

Thus, after the Second Karabakh War, the trajectory of violence in the South Caucasus has changed from a local conflict to an external geopolitical tool, from internal actors to external influential players, from classical violence to hybrid and information violence, from border incidents to a clash of regional and international interests. These processes show that the cases of violence originating from abroad have not only increased, but also taken on a multifaceted and more dangerous form.

3. The transformation of the region into a theater of extra-state confrontations. The concept of extra-confrontation means the projection of conflicts between powers outside the region, not directly between states within the region, into the region, that is, their reflection here. These conflicts occur at the level of geopolitical, ideological, energy and transport interests, and information warfare. This can be seen in the short-term wars between India-Pakistan and Israel-Iran that took place this summer. The geopolitical and ideological confrontation between Israel and Iran, which has been going on for many years, is no longer limited to the Middle East. This

⁵ Azərbaycanca İrən xüsusi xidmət orqanlarının istəyi ilə "Kərimə" dövləti qurmaq istəyən şəxslər həbs edilib / Report.az. Bakı, 16 may 2023. URL: <https://report.az/hadise/din-dtx-ve-bas-prokurorluq-birge-melumat-yayib>

rivalry is having an impact on the system of interstate relations in the South Caucasus region, and this region is increasingly becoming an indirect area of influence of the Israeli-Iranian conflict⁶.

Israel and Azerbaijan have a strong strategic partnership in the military, security, and energy sectors. Azerbaijan provides approximately 40% of Israel's energy needs. Israel, in turn, sells modern weapons systems, including UAVs, missiles, and defense technologies to Azerbaijan. Israeli-made technologies played an important role in the Second Karabakh War of 2020. Iran perceives Azerbaijan's rapprochement with Israel as a «threat to its national security.»

Although the conflict and tense relations between India and Pakistan (especially over the Kashmir region) mainly cover the South Asian region, this confrontation has direct and indirect geopolitical, diplomatic and economic implications for Azerbaijan⁷. The logical consequence of this is India's veto on Azerbaijan's membership in the organization at the 25th meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states in Tianjin, China, on September 1.

Pakistan is one of the most resolute supporters of Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and does not officially recognize Armenia. This is in line with Azerbaijan's interests. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, exhibits a pro-Pakistani approach on the Kashmir issue, which is negatively perceived by India.

India has strengthened military cooperation with Armenia in recent years: it sells it missile systems, anti-aircraft complexes and unmanned aerial vehicles. In 2022 and 2023, India signed multi-million dollar arms deals with Armenia. This rapprochement is seen as a balance to the Azerbaijan-Pakistan partnership.

The tension between India and Pakistan indirectly affects the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan, as both sides seek to strengthen their strategic partnerships there. India is developing relations with Armenia, while Pakistan provides political and military support to Azerbaijan, creating a new “polarization line” in the South Caucasus.

4. Weakening of asymmetries between the countries of the region. The South Caucasus asymmetries are noticeable in the context of frozen conflicts between the countries of the region, geopolitical orientation, routes for the development and transportation of hydrocarbon resources, and cooperation with foreign powers. Frozen conflicts have long undermined trust in the region, laid the foundation for diversification in the foreign policy and geopolitical orientation of local countries, and have not created conditions for regional consolidation. Instead, mini-blocks have been created in the region instead of a unified security system, but it was impossible for them to act on behalf of the entire region.

At one time, the determination of the routes for the exploitation and transportation of Azerbaijani oil also created a collision between development and stability in the region and disintegration and military coups.

The prolonged existence of asymmetry met the interests of states interested in keeping the region under their control. Also, asymmetry did not allow new forces to enter the region. Armenia

⁶ Regional stakes in the Iran–Israel conflict: a view from the South Caucasus / Topchuba.ov center, Baku. 18-06-2025. <https://surl.li/cettmh>

⁷ New phase in India-Pakistan conflict and its impact on South Caucasus / JAM news. 02.05/2025. URL: <https://surl.li/dqtdn>

has been trying to cover up its weak potential in the South Caucasus for a long time with the policy of aggression carried out against Azerbaijan with the support of foreign patrons and direct military assistance, and has tried to use the biased activities of the Minsk Group for its own interests. By winning the 44-day Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan neutralized one of the asymmetries by putting an end to Armenian separatism in the South Caucasus.

In addition, this conflict resulted in the collapse of another asymmetry in the region - Armenia's farewell to its pro-Russian geopolitical orientation. As is known, in January of this year, Armenia signed a document on strategic partnership with the United States, putting an end to «99 percent strategic dependence on Russia,» in Pashinyan's words. The Armenia-Russia-Iran tandem, which has dominated the South Caucasus for the past 30 years, could not withstand the strategic alliance formed between Azerbaijan-Georgia and Turkey.

On August 8, the "Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia" was signed in Washington under the mediation of the United States. The main provisions of this agreement include the peaceful coexistence of the two countries, the resolution of state borders in accordance with the Almaty Declaration signed in 1991, the termination of the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, etc., which created the basis for the complete elimination of a number of asymmetries⁸.

The new geopolitical conditions may create the basis for strengthening Georgia's national security, further strengthening its cooperation with the United States and the European Union, further expanding its constructive cooperation with China, and resolving controversial issues with Russia.

Conclusion

1. After the Second Karabakh War, geopolitical games in the South Caucasus have accelerated significantly. The Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, signed in Washington on August 8, has given new life to these games.
2. Hopes for the de-occupation of the region have increased.
3. The region has become a theater of new geopolitical (extra) games and competitions in terms of content.
4. The transition to "0 problems" between Azerbaijan and Armenia is accompanied by.
5. The Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia has created a unique chance for regionalism with a new content in the South Caucasus.

⁸ South Caucasus at Crossroads: Washington sparks new opportunities amid hidden risks /The Caspian Post. Baku, 18 august 2025. URL: <https://caspianpost.com/interview/south-caucasus-at-crossroads-washington-sparks-new-opportunities-amid-hidden-risks-interview>

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THE DECLINE OF IRAN’S FOREIGN POLICY INFLUENCE AND NEW REALITIES WITHIN THE SO-CALLED “SHIITE CRESCENT” FOLLOWING THE ASSASSINATION OF GENERAL QASSEM SOLEIMANI

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Abstract

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran exerts an influence on the security architecture of both the South Caucasus and the Middle East. One of the main pillars of Tehran’s regional and global strategy is its Middle Eastern policy. Within this framework, Tehran’s strategic objective has been the formation and consolidation of the so-called “Shiite Crescent” (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Yemen). This strategy has placed Iran in confrontation with the United States and its Sunni Arab allies—Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—as well as in tension with the strategic interests of the Republic of Turkey.

The most favorable arena for Iran to implement its Middle Eastern policy has been Iraq and Syria, where it has sought to strengthen Shia power centers and support its allies through not only military and political means, but also humanitarian, cultural, and financial networks. Since 2003, Iran—through its affiliated “Shiite militias,” later formalized as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—has prevented Iraq from becoming a permanent sphere of influence for Washington and its allies. These efforts have also contributed to the expansion and consolidation of Iran’s presence in Syria.

Beyond Iraq and Syria, Iran has been actively represented in Lebanon through Hezbollah and in Yemen through the Shiite rebel movement Ansar Allah (the Houthis), while also providing support to Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In the aftermath of the civil wars that followed the so-called Arab Spring, scholars have increasingly focused on the role of Iran’s proxies in shaping the geopolitical conflicts across the Middle East.

Up to this point, Iran’s regional ambitions and strategic interests in the Middle East have remained largely unchanged, and the country continues to pursue them actively. The implementation of these strategies and foreign policy objectives has primarily been carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its elite branch, the Quds Force. The formation of the so-called “Shiite Crescent” is widely regarded as the principal achievement of this institutional structure. In the effective management and execution of Iran’s Middle Eastern policy, the most prominent figure was Major General Qassem Soleimani, the long-serving commander of the Quds Force and a highly influential intelligence strategist, who led the unit for approximately twenty-seven years. He is often described as the chief architect of Iran’s regional strategy, with the Quds Force functioning as Tehran’s primary instrument for projecting influence and maintaining regional networks. Under his leadership, Iran succeeded in expanding its regional presence to an unprecedented scale in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Following the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, Iran faced a series of challenges directly and indirectly linked to his death. The geopolitical and economic influence of Iran's regional rivals in Iraq increased, while Tehran's room for maneuver became progressively constrained. Simultaneously, fragmentation among Iran-backed militias and political factions intensified, and Tehran's direct leverage over the Iraqi government weakened. Moreover, the growing wave of anti-Iranian sentiment within Iraqi society further eroded Iran's social capital and soft power in the neighboring state, revealing the fragility of its influence in the post-Soleimani regional order.

Accordingly, the assassination of Qassem Soleimani exposed the fragility of Iran's security and foreign policy apparatus, highlighting its heavy dependence on key individuals. His death proved far more detrimental to Iran than the sudden and tragic losses of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in May 2024.

Keywords: Iran, "proxy forces", "Shiite Crescent", "Popular Mobilization Forces", "Hezbollah", "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps", Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, Iran's foreign influence increased significantly, reflecting an unprecedented expansion of its strategic room for maneuver over the course of centuries and somewhat reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the region.

This paper analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the security architecture and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with particular attention to the reliance of key Iranian institutions on specific individuals. It also examines the phenomenon of the so-called "Shiite Crescent" and the role of proxy forces, highlighting their significance for Iran's foreign policy, which has become a central strategy for expanding Tehran's influence across the Middle East. Within this framework, the study focuses primarily on Iraq and Syria, where Iran has concentrated its regional power.

Research Methodology:

To achieve the objectives of this research, a combination of qualitative and comparative approaches was employed, including process tracing, case study analysis, and content analysis. The research also relied on both primary and secondary sources, incorporating information from social media and digital platforms in Persian, English, and Russian to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Main Part

Iran's Foreign Policy Influence Mechanisms

To strengthen its external influence, Iran has sought to establish regional footholds through both state and non-state actors. A key instrument in achieving this goal has been the creation of paramilitary Shiite forces (so-called "proxy forces"), alongside humanitarian, cultural, and financial organizations. In addition, Iran has worked to cultivate regional allies in the form of state actors.¹

Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 Iran established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and later its Quds Force to preserve the revolutionary legacy. The founding and leading figure of the Quds Force was Qassem Soleimani, a high-ranking intelligence expert and military strategist. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Soleimani emerged as the principal architect of Iran's expansion of regional influence. Central to this strategy was the formation and consolidation of the so-called "Shiite Crescent"—comprising Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Yemen. Within this framework, Iraq and Syria, where Soleimani wielded the greatest authority in government circles and important groups, were of vital strategic importance for Tehran. Iran sought to strengthen Shiite centers and support its allied military-political, humanitarian, and cultural organizations, with proxy forces occupying a central role in these efforts.

Among Iran's main achievements in this regard, alongside Lebanese Hezbollah, was the formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi), later reorganized and integrated into the Axis of Resistance. This coalition of armed groups was established in 2014 under the pretext of combating the terrorist organization Islamic State (ISIS). It subsequently became a powerful

¹ Taher, Ihsan Hashm. "Iranian Foreign Policy Decision-Making Actors: Navigating the Complex Role of Iranian Proxies." *Journal of International Economic and Administrative Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2024).

instrument of Iranian influence, first in Iraq, then in Syria, and more broadly across the region. Soleimani's personal contacts, deep knowledge of Arabic, and strategic acumen further strengthened Iran's position and expanded its operational reach.

The rise of Iranian influence in Iraq

The Shiite forces formed by Iran in Iraq united and became particularly active against the backdrop of growing threats from the "Islamic State." This indicated that the Iranian authorities—and Qassem Soleimani himself—had used the rise of the aforementioned terrorist organization to expand their influence in Iraq. The anti-terrorism forces soon gained significant trust and authority within Iraqi society. During this period, the "Popular Mobilization Forces" possessed far greater capabilities than the Iraqi army itself. Consequently, the pro-Iranian Shiite militias evolved into a parallel military structure, rendering Iraq even more vulnerable to Iranian influence.

Moreover, through the efforts of the former head of the Quds Force, Iranian allies and affiliated political factions—such as the Al-Fatah coalition—successfully infiltrated the Iraqi government, both legislative and executive, resulting in Tehran's deep and, to a certain extent, irreversible influence over Baghdad.

One of the main objectives of Iran's presence in Iraq was to provoke the U.S. military contingent and coalition forces deployed in the country, creating a constant sense of threat. The aim of this effort was to reduce their numbers and ultimately compel a complete withdrawal from Iraq.²

The situation shifted somewhat following the arrival of the Trump administration in the White House in 2018, when the U.S. President launched a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran. Signs of escalating U.S.–Iranian competition for influence in Baghdad soon became evident, largely due to Washington's reinstatement of the sanctions regime on Iran and the imposition of strict restrictions on the export of Iranian energy resources. The United States demanded that the Iraqi government gradually reduce imports of Iranian energy, with the eventual goal of halting them completely. However, this initiative was unsuccessful, leaving Baghdad compelled to maintain a delicate balance between Tehran and Washington.

During this period, the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, held consultations with Iraqi political circles. Following these meetings, pro-Iranian forces in the Iraqi parliament became more active, discussing the possibility of nominating their own candidate for the position of prime minister—a move that triggered opposition protests in Iraq. Despite the emergence of domestic political unrest, Iran's strong influence in the country persisted, although early signs of instability in the regional order established by Qassem Soleimani began to appear.

Simultaneously, protests in Lebanon cast doubt on the resilience of the political coalitions holding power in both Iraq and Lebanon. In both Baghdad and Beirut, Tehran was embedded within the existing political systems and, consequently, an implicit participant in their policies. The situation that emerged ultimately had a detrimental effect on Tehran's regional interests.³

2 Knights, Michael. "The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq." *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 11 (November 2010): 12–16.
Hadad, Hamzeh. *Proxy Battles: Iraq, Iran, and the Turmoil in the Middle East*, European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2024.

3 Fathollah-Nejad, Ali. "Analysis: What the Killing of Qassem Soleimani Could Mean." January 3, 2020.
<https://surl.li/czgzcq>

The rise of Iranian influence in Syria

For Iran, maintaining Shiite rule in Syria was a matter of vital importance, both in terms of addressing external threats and ensuring land access to Lebanon and Israel. Iran supported the Assad regime and fought against Sunni terrorist organizations through the deployment of military and paramilitary forces, as well as various covert operations. Dozens of high-ranking Iranian military officers and hundreds of fighters, along with thousands of members of its allied proxy forces, were killed during the ongoing combat operations in Syria. This process intensified following the initiation of coordinated actions between Iran and Russia after October 2015.⁴

Iran sought to establish and preserve a favorable status quo in Syria and, through the ongoing conflict, to consolidate its regional position. It was largely through the efforts of Qassem Soleimani that Iran was able to exploit the Syrian crisis to secure a land corridor to Israel and strengthen its supply lines to Lebanon.

To implement its strategic objectives in Syria, Iran involved part of the paramilitary forces it had formed in Iraq in the Syrian conflict. These forces, together with the IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah, coordinated with Syrian government troops to form a powerful alliance in support of Bashar al-Assad.

Iranian activity in Syria began even before 2011, during which Iranian military instructors actively participated in the training of Syrian army personnel. At the same time, Iran provided weapons and financial assistance to the Assad regime. Iran's military involvement in Syria has increased significantly since 2014, following the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. The weakening of the Syrian army, combined with the return of thousands of Iraqi Shiites from Syria to fight the Islamic State, compelled Tehran to seek additional means of supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime. In response, Iran mobilized groups of thousands of Shiite fighters—including Afghans and Pakistanis—and deployed them to Syria, where they assumed combat positions under Iranian leadership.

Accordingly, whereas prior to 2014 Iran had been largely limited to providing military advice to the Syrian army, it was now compelled to engage directly in combat operations, although it did not officially acknowledge such involvement. Notably, Iran was the first country to deploy ground forces to Syria, while Russia was primarily restricted to providing air support. Given these circumstances, Iran incurred the greatest human losses in the conflict.⁵

Accordingly, Iran's involvement in the Syrian conflict was an unprecedented event in the region and indicated new, important aspects of Iran's behavior. Tehran's policies have affected both the future of the Syrian regime and the country as a whole. The Islamic Republic's participation in the Syrian civil war has also influenced the military capabilities of Iran and its proxy forces, providing them with substantial combat experience. Additionally, as one of the world's leading producers of unmanned aerial vehicles, Iran has been able to test its drones in real combat conditions.

4 Coulter, Kaitlin. *Iran's Involvement in the Syrian Civil War Before and After the JCPOA*. Undergraduate Honors Thesis, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2020.

5 Kam, Ephraim. *Iranian Military Intervention in Syria: A New Approach*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017.

The killing of Qassem Soleimani

On January 3, 2020, a U.S. drone strike on a convoy of vehicles at Baghdad International Airport in the Iraqi capital killed Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, along with several members of his entourage. Among those killed was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Forces and leader of the pro-Iranian organization Kata'ib Hezbollah, a key and influential figure in Iraq's security landscape.⁶

The assassination of General Qassem Soleimani was a critical turning point for Iran's regional strategy and its broader trajectory of power projection. As the commander of the Quds Force, Soleimani coordinated a complex network of military, political, and ideological alliances across the Middle East. His death not only created a leadership vacuum but also exposed structural weaknesses within Iran's regional proxy system, which had long relied on his personal authority, strategic vision, and charisma.⁷

In the post-Soleimani era, Iran has struggled to maintain unity among its regional allies and to adapt to changing geopolitical dynamics. The country has found it increasingly difficult to cope with heightened U.S. pressure, the normalization of relations between the Gulf Arab states and Israel, and the growing influence of Russia and Turkey in Syria. Consequently, Tehran's ability to sustain strategic coordination and ideological cohesion has diminished.

Unlike most political figures within the Iranian government, Qassem Soleimani enjoyed widespread popularity among the Iranian public, and there was no unequivocally negative attitude toward him even among critics of the Islamic regime. His authority in Iranian society rested on both his perceived achievements abroad and his image as a rare elite figure untainted by corruption.

Accordingly, the killing of Qassem Soleimani generated diverse reactions among Iranian citizens on social media. A large segment of society expressed outrage and grief over his assassination, while others welcomed his death. The reaction of Mehdi Karroubi, who has been under political house arrest by order of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was particularly notable, as he expressed condolences to the nation⁸. Similarly, the renowned Iranian writer Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, known for his critical stance toward the government, referred to Qassem Soleimani as "a worthy son of Iran" who "protected the country's borders from misfortune."⁹

Conclusion

After the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, Iran lost its main executor of foreign military-political operations. This event had a negative impact on the unity and physical/moral stability of the "proxy forces", which was reflected in Iran's influence in the region. Some of the organizations included in the "Popular Mobilization Forces" operating in Iraq passed out of Iranian control. After the destruction of the main vertical of Iran's security and foreign policy architecture, Israeli intelligence and sabotage operations against both Iran and its "proxy forces" turned

6 Duclos, Michel. "The Elimination of General Qassem Soleimani – an Act of War That Changes the Strategic Equation in the Middle East." *Institut Montaigne*, January 6, 2020. <https://surli.cc/stijcl>

7 Azizi, Hamidreza. *Challenges to Iran's Role in Iraq in the Post-Soleimani Era: Complex Rivalries, Fragmented Alliances, Declining Soft Power*. SWP Comment 2021/C 44 (July 22, 2021).

8 Radio Farda. "Soleimani's Death Triggers Sharp Debate Among Iranians." *Radio Farda*, January 4, 2020. <https://surli.li/lugxys>.

9 Dowlatabadi, Mahmoud. "Yāddāsh-t-e Mahmoud Dowlatabadi dar Vākoneš be Shahādāt-e Sardār Soleymāni." *Rooznameh-ye Iran* (Tehran), January 5, 2020.

out to be much more effective. In addition, the restoration of the US sanctions regime limited Iran's resources in terms of successfully implementing foreign military-political operations. The overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime significantly changed the picture in the "Shiite Crescent". Given the changed balance, Tehran was faced with the need for a tactical retreat, while simultaneously revising/rearranging its strategy and tactics.

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HYBRID WAR, RUSSIA – UKRAINE WAR CASE

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Abstract

War is an ancient event that traces the history of mankind throughout its development. There is not a single period or era in history that has passed without wars. However, the philosophy of war and the rules of waging have changed with the evolution of mankind. This process has become even more intense in today's fast-changing environment.

The present paper discusses the nature of hybrid warfare, its tasks, and rules of waging, as well as the conditions that facilitate the transformation of warfare from one form to another.

Keywords: Hibrid War, Information, Economy, Conventional Warfire.

Introduction

According to Clausewitz, “War is an act of violence that is intended to force an adversary to fulfill our will”¹ (Clausewitz 1984). Therefore, the purpose of the war in general is to coerce one party involved in the war. The will can reflect both political and economic, as well as military goals. In this sense, the hybrid war is no different from the conventional war. Here, too, we see one participant’s aspiration to force the adversary to fulfill his will.

So how does the hybrid war differ from the conventional war? According to Clausewitz, “War is an act of violence and its use has no scope ... The introduction of the principle of restriction and moderation in the philosophy of war is a complete absurdity”². Accordingly, in his opinion, everything is allowed in the war if it is needed to defeat the opponent. This vision of war was widely used by states. And his apogee reached the 20th century. Examples can be used as the use of chemical weapons in the first and in the Second World Wars. Massive bombings of civilians and cities (Guernica, London, Dresden, Leningrad, etc.) are also used in World War II, the use of chemicals (herbicides and defolitiants - “Agent Orange”), phosphorus and napalm bombs in Vietnam, and many more.

It can be said that, in the waging of conventional wars the parties used more or less all opportunities to defeat the adversary, regardless of the damage that happen to civilians population or civilian infrastructure. “War is written off everything” and “no winners to be judged” - in these two expressions there is the brutality of the war and the justification of uncontrolled violence. This view is particularly true of the hybrid war, while there is no obvious evidence and hybrid actors have no restrictions.

Main Part Hostage of War

Clausewitz identifies three targets of hostilities (Clausewitzean Trinity)³: the government, the armed forces and the population. Since the government can experience only mostly political damage as a result of war, and death for the armed forces goes to a professional risk, the population is the major and most distressed victim of war. They usually have neither possibility of the effective leverage of the situation nor the power and means of dealing with warfare. The only hope for the population is that the adversary will not destroy their homes, kill them, do not force, rob or commit many other violent acts.

The rules of war waging changed with the development of mankind. The International Red Cross Organization is the first organization founded in 1863 to create “war rules”. The main principle of its action is that even the war must be carried out within a certain framework. However, it imposes restrictions on war methods and means and the behavior of the parties involved in the war. This principle is set out in the Geneva Convention and is international humanitarian law. Its principles take into account the protection of combatants, civilians, medical staff and cultural monuments. Later, many other agreements were adopted, such as the Convention on Chemical

1 Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984. *On War*. Edited by Michael Eliot, Paret, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

2 Ibid.

3 Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984. *On War*. Edited by Howard Michael Eliot, Paret, Peter. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Weapons, the Convention on Infantry Mine, the Convention on Class Ammunition, and many others that had to reduce the harm from war and protect civilians. However, despite all the restrictions and agreements, the military use all the means at their disposal to fulfil the task.

The purpose of a hybrid war

The question arises - what led to the development of the theory of hybrid war? To find out, we can give two perspectives. First, the hybrid war is related to uncertainty and the complexity of the adversary. Hybrid attacks are usually characterized by great uncertainty and ambiguity. Such uncertainty is consciously created and masked by hybrid actors to complicate their identification and therefore answer them. In other words, a country that is a target, cannot detect a hybrid attack, or cannot prove to a state that may participate in the attack or may be it's supporter. With the emergence of uncertainty and the complication of the opponent, the hybrid act is complicated identification by the target state and the slow of a strategic response. For example, in 2014, Ukraine's "kind green men", who wore a military uniform without distinctive signs (bought as Russian later explained in a regular military store), would be taken as Russian volunteers on vacation in Crimea. Due to the uncertainty created by the actions of the Russian forces, Ukraine delayed identification of the opponent, determining his plans and starting proper response. By the time Ukraine realized Russia's actions, Crimea had already missed.

The second perspective is related to resources. Hybrid actions on the edge of the war or obvious open violence below, bring the result even though it is simpler, cheaper and less risky than conventional kinetic actions. Much more real and less resources are related, for example, funding and spreading misinformation using non-state organization than the insertion of tanks in another country or the action of aviation in its air. The costs and risks of hybrid action are noticeably low, but the damage is real. The question can be born here: Can the war be won without direct fighting or physical confrontation? Sun Tzu has already answered this question, claiming that obedience to the enemy is the highest art of war. The philosophy of this postulate of Sun Tzu is that the victory that is achieved without a fight saves both human resources (which is important in itself, since the training of qualified staff requires a lot of money and time, as well as further remuneration for loss of battle) and material and financial resources as well.

Having in mind all abovementioned, we can discuss and explain what a hybrid war is. Although the elements of the hybrid war have been used for centuries, it has begun to actively discussed during the local wars and conflicts in the late twentieth century. For the first time, this topic was raised by General Rupert Smith in his book "The Utility of Force"⁴, in which he presented a convincing analysis of the war in the modern era. General Smith boldly states in the first sentence: "The war no longer exists." In doing so, it does not say that international legislation and institutions made violence out of obsolete, but Smith implies that the type of military operations associated with the struggle between the main forces of formally formed troops, which brings victory and further peace, no longer makes sense in the world where the conflict is characterized by ethnic cleansing and terrorism. The war has changed, and according to Rupert Smith, most people,

⁴ Smith, Rupert, 2005, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Random House, New York.

including political and military leaders, have not noticed a new reality, and the results were deadly.

The idea of Rupert Smith was deepened by Frank Hoffman⁵, who formed the first definition of a hybrid war. He argued that “hybrid wars include different war regimes, including conventional capabilities, irregular formations and tactics, including terrorist acts, with violence, coercion and criminal disorder”. Hoffman focuses on the methods of armed battle, though the hybrid war is wider, more complex and difficult than just the action of armed groups. It is precisely this opinion that is presented in the so-called “Gerasimov’s doctrine”⁶, where Hoffman’s list has added non-military measures such as political and diplomatic pressure as well as economic actions. Gerasimov also argues that, unlike the classical conventional war, political, diplomatic, economic and other non-military instruments are used along with purely military instruments in the hybrid war. According to this concept, properly organized, coordinated and constant efforts are the prerequisite for success in the hybrid war. The viability of Gerasimov’s concept has been approved by the events in Ukraine since 2014.

Anatomy of a hybrid war

And yet, what does a hybrid war consist of? First of all, of course it is a military confrontation. Here it may be noted that the differences in the use of military force that it has experienced since the beginning of the 20th century. If World War I began with declaring of war and mobilizing reserves in advance, today formality such as the declaration of war is no longer used. But in the legislation of the countries, however, it is remained as a reminder of history. There are many laws built on it, which in the modern, rapidly changing world in many cases became obstacles and slow down the processes to be implemented. In addition, unlike the wars of the early 20th century, when adversaries were involved in positional battles, modern combat actions are very mobile and often consist of special units and informal paramilitary units. The task of such combat actions is to confuse the Government and the National Administration elements, as well as to sow fear in the population to paralyze the country and kill the will of population to resist.

Another peculiarity of the military component of the hybrid war is the use of the population in the military conflict. Here, for example, Hamas and its tactics are used. Specifically, Hamas fortified facilities, tunnels and positions are located in the densely populated areas of Gaza⁷, which meet under the reversal fire of the Israeli Army. The second example is the deployment of the artillery positions of Donetsk pro-Russian separatists in the streets of densely populated cities. This tactic has several goals. The first is a holy military, as an adversary who knows about civilians, avoids (or may be avoided) in the area to reduce the victims of civilians. The second goal is to force the adversary to affect the civilians during his actions and then to be sent to the international community’s judgment. A good example of this is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, when the

5 Hoffman, Frank G. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st century: the rise of hybrid wars*. Arlington, Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

6 Gerasimov, Valeri. 2016. “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight, New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations.” *Military review*. Accessed April 18, 2023. https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf.

7 თორაძე, სალომე. 2023. „ისრაელის პრემიერ-მინისტრის მრჩეველი - ლაზაროვი, ალ-შიფას საავადმყოფოს ქვეშ ...“, 12 May. წვდომა 2025 წლის 9 20. <https://1tv.ge/news/israelis-premier-ministris-mrcheveli-ghazashi-al-shifas-saavadmyofos-qvesh-hamass-sakontrolo-da-sametauro-centri-aqvs-mowyobili-rac-samoqalaqo-infrastrukturas-legitimur/>

overwhelming majority of mass media no longer talks about that Hamas has dispersed its combat facilities in densely populated areas, but talk about the Israeli armed forces that bury the civilians. And the last goal is that such actions are influenced by the population and recruiting new fighters.

The next element is politics and diplomacy. The target audience here can be both inside and outside the country. The action range is very broad, starting with direct threats, political pressure, influence agents and “useful idiots”, ending in the international arena, especially in international organizations, by violating the country’s image and against the country’s decisions. The main task of politics and diplomacy during the hybrid war is to give legitimacy to aggressive actions. During the annexation of Crimea, Russia used political pressure on Ukraine, launched its agent networks and conducted an illegal referendum⁸. After that, it tried to justify its actions in diplomatic ways. It has to be said that it was partially done. The agents of Russia’s influence in the world have tried to convince the international community, the politicians and population of different countries that Russia was not the initiator of this referendum and it only agreed with the will of the people. We argue that Russia has partially achieved its goals because the international community’s reaction to this event was, to put it mildly, inadequate⁹. It was this reaction that warmed Russia and prompted it to start aggression in 2022.

All this is closely linked to information operations. The purpose of such activities is to influence all, the government, the armed forces and the population to destroy their desire to resist and to the hope of victory, as well as to influence the international community to justify aggressive actions. Typically, hybrid war information campaign starts much earlier than other actions does and it is used to prepare the desired soil of hybrid war. For example, as early as 2009, Russia unjustly argued that Ukraine was “stealing” Russian gas, which was intended for Europe¹⁰. These and many similar Russian information campaigns were aimed at creating an image of an unreliable partner for Ukraine and reducing its partners and allies. After Russian-Georgian War in 2008 the messages used against Ukraine were changed, and economic black PR was added to accusations of fascism, ethnic persecution and Russians oppression (the most famous was a story that aired on Channel One of the Russian Broadcasting Corporation and was dedicated to a child nailed to a bulletin board)¹¹, which reached its culmination on February 24, 2022. However, these actions are not over as soon as the war begins. The accents just changed. If previously propaganda was focused on the Ukrainian state in general, after the outbreak of war, a large share of propaganda communities would be devoted to the Ukrainian armed forces. Propaganda seeks to sow such narratives that the Ukrainian army is unprofessional, does not know and cannot produce war, does not adhere to the rules of war and international conventions, is not worthy of assistance, etc.

On the other hand, propaganda uses the “old skeletons taken from the closet” to create a new

8 Сабурова, О. 2023. „10 вопросов о присоединении Крыма к России: как это было на самом деле.“ News.ru. 16 March. <https://news.ru/moskva/anomalnye-holoda-idut-na-moskvu-budet-li-moroz-30-kogda-konchitsya-sneg/>.

9 Emmott Robin, Solovyov Dmitry. 2016. „Reuters.“ EU urges more countries to impose sanctions on Russia over Crimea. 18 March. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-eu-crimea-idUSKCN-0WK167/>.

10 Дубина, Олег. 2009. „Воруется ли Украина российский газ?“ Вести.ру. 02 January. <https://www.vesti.ru/finance/article/2176743>.

11 Чумакова, Юлия. 2014. „Беженка из Славянска вспоминает, как при ней казнили маленького сына и жену ополченца.“ Itv.ru. 12 July. https://www.itv.ru/news/2014-07-12/37175-bezhenka_iz_slavyanska_vspominaet_kak_pri_ney_kaznili_malenkogo_syna_i_zhenу_opolchentsa.

look of the Russian nation. It is an image of fighters with fascists, nazists, banderovs and anti-semites. Propaganda seeks to revive the eighty years old dangers to attach dark and unfair labels to Ukraine. All ways and means are used for this, starting with conventional propagandists and ending with such “boomers” like Dugin and Limonov are. All of them are trying to prove the speciality of the Russian nation, which aims to maintain and manage the Eurasian space. It may also be noted that the hatred they sow in Ukraine (Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, they claim, illegally transferred from Russia to Ukraine) and Kazakhstan (North Kazakhstan for the same reason). Interestingly, their ideology and messages, such as “Один народ, Одна страна, Один президент» (One people, one country, one president) came close to Nazi German-era slogans (Ein Volk, Ein Volk, « Reich, one Führer – One people, one country, one fuhrer).

Finally, another the most important element of the hybrid war is the economy. Unlike conventional wars, where the economy has a role to support the war, the economy is one of the warfare instrument in the hybrid war and is aimed at inflicting economic damage or threatening to inflict economic damage on the adversary. Here, for example, Russian sanctions, which was implemented in 2022, import-replacement, and Russia’s threats to Europe’s energy supply can be used. All of these actions were aimed at pressure on the business circles of America and Europe and then to their own governments. In practice, the justification for using the Russian economy as a weapon of hybrid warfare is the thesis that the world, and especially Europe, is critically dependent on Russian resources (energy carriers, uranium, steel, aluminum, titanium, mineral fertilizers, etc.) and would suffer economic collapse without their supply. According to this thesis, the Russian decision makers argued that even the threat of banning these resources would be enough to force Europe to fulfil Russia’s will. However, in fact, the economy of Europe, and especially the United States, was less dependent on Russia and that Russia is experiencing serious difficulties in the war.

Transformation of Hybrid War into Conventional War During the Russo-Ukraine War (2022-2023)

All of the above is thought when we see them separately, but as a prominent Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin said: “It is extremely difficult ... foresight of war. For each war it is necessary to develop a special line of strategic action; every war is a specific case that requires the formation of its own special logic and not the use of any template.”¹² These words of Svechin are well described in the situation that was created in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

For the purposes of discussion, this war can be divided into several periods: the first period - the preparation of a hybrid war - from 2009 to February 2022, the second period - the waging of hybrid war – February – May 2022 and the third period - Transformation of Hybrid War - May – August 2022.

The first period of the Russian hybrid war in Ukraine is characterized by actions from Russia that were sometimes controversial. The reaction which the West (NATO, the EU, the United States) expressed on the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, created a false expectation in Russia that the international community reaction to any Russian action would be a futile or cause only minor damage to Russia.

¹² Svechin, Aleksandr. 2004. *Strategy*. Minneapolis: East View.

Therefore, in 2009, Russia has started preparations for a possible confrontation with Ukraine. The processes accelerated during the presidency of Viktor Yushenko. During this time, Russia was trying to create economic problems for Ukraine, used cyber attacks and launched a large-scale information campaign consisting of, on the one hand, from the spread of misinformation, and on the other hand, from cultural expansion. All of this was aimed at diminishing the Ukrainian society, culture and language and disconnecting society. But since 2010, after electing Viktor Yanukovich as president, Russia has softened its position. Moreover, he gave Ukraine credit of \$ 3 billion¹³. It can also be said that gas disputes continued during this period, the aim of which was to capture the gas distribution system in Ukraine. The situation changed dramatically after Yanukovich's dismissal in 2014, which brought a sharp change in Ukraine's foreign policy. This accelerated the development of a hybrid war. Russia involved unconventional and proxy forces (Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk), activated information campaigns, as well as the economic war. It can also be said that the annexation of Crimea was performed without much planning, practically, spontaneously and achieved the result just because neither the Ukrainian society nor the international community was ready to resist. Russia has received sanctions as a result of these actions that were not all altered and effective. Moreover, instead of restraint, such sanctions have strengthened Russia for the belief that the West is depleted, highly dependent on Russian resources and will not oppose it in the future.

Classic approaches from Russia were used during the second period of the Russian hybrid war in Ukraine. Demonstration of military force (kilometers long columns, massive use of aviation, landing and special forces operations, indiscriminated missile bombings) were primarily directed to the Ukrainian society, while disinformation and propaganda aimed to convince the world that Ukraine was responsible for the world¹⁴. To do this, Russia's propaganda revived the ghosts, terminology and cliches of World War II.

The economic part of the hybrid war is interesting here. Due to the Russian war strategy, it is not surprise that Russia started an open conflict in February. Russia has repeatedly been threatened by the threat of cessation of gas supply to Europe, leading to freezing Europe and destroying the economy. This threat was strengthened by the pro-Russian analyst's studies and conclusions, which proved the peculiarity and alternatives of Russian resources for Europe. This threat was made, but it had an unexpected and opposite effect for Russia. This effect was that Russia did not reach Ukraine's isolation, and moreover, the West began active actions to help Ukraine. In fact, in this conflict, the West uses all instruments, except for direct military confrontation, which has dramatically reduced Russia's advantage in this war.

After the failure of the second period, Russia once again changed the strategy of action and moved on to the waging of conventional wars. In fact, by this time, Russia is losing war in political, diplomatic, economic and cyber fields. The only area where, despite big problems, Russia can succeed is an armed confrontation. Virtually no other tools of action left. That is why in the Ukraine, they use massive rocket-artillery bombings and leveling to the ground Ukrainian cities

13 2014. „Российско-украинские газовые конфликты. Досье.“ ТАСС. 16 օգոստոս. Մարտի 2023 թվականի 8 մաս. <https://tass.ru/info/1128520>.

14 Обращение Президента Российской Федерации. 2022. <http://kremlin.ru/>. 24 february. Viewed 10 August 2025 թվական. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843/videos>.

and infrastructure. Such a strategy once brought success to Russia in the Second Chechnya War, but this success was achieved against the fact that Russia at that time defeated Chechnya in information war and therefore Chechnya had no support from world society, only radical Islamist organizations associated with various terrorists support Chechen's, but this fact also was used Russia in information war. However, Russia was not limited to Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war, the world has heard their threats to use nuclear weapons. The Russian propaganda machine is trying to instill a narrative in the world society that "the nuclear state cannot be defeated".

The consequences of a hybrid war

According to Clausewitz, any war ends with the destruction or exhaustion of one of the adversaries (we mean the depletion of the physical strength and will of the enemy due to the duration of action)¹⁵. These two ways are different in that destruction is faster and requires less resources, and exhaustion is a longer process and requires straining of all National resources. However, in both cases, important factors are the resources and aspiration for opponents to win. If resources can be calculated mainly by using simple math, the pursuit of victory depends on many factors and is more spiritual than material. Therefore, the result of the war depends on the Clausewitzian Trinity - the government, the military, the population, their sustainability and their spiritual strength.

Although sustainability and spiritual strength are the spiritual sphere, the question arises, what else influences on these two categories. First, let's consider a population consisting of specific people living in a particular country. From people who have their needs and most of these needs, they determine human behavior¹⁶. The primary demand of man is physiological - food, water, living conditions, medical services. It all depends on the resources in the country. It should also be noted that in the case of a long and protracted war, even large and economically powerful countries find it difficult to provide these resources. The hardship of war is a major challenge for the population, and if the government does not take additional measures (propaganda, economic, oppressive, etc.), this hardship can transform into disorders and even disobedience. The population's motivation to continue the war until victory and to endure the problems caused by the war is declining. This happens under conditions when there is an unequal and selective approach between the categories of the population.

In addition to economic factors, pure military factors are affected the population. The use of military force against the population is not new or unusual. There are many examples of this in the history of mankind. Guernica, Dresden, Leningrad, Grozny - this is an incomplete list. The action of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine is another fact today. All of these actions are characterized by one thing, it was directed against the population, and from a military point of view, they had no necessity or effect. The military forces used against the population are aimed at intimidating the population, the destruction of its willingness, and the moral breaking of it. In fact, it is aimed at prohibiting a person's physical safety requirements, a demand that is important after physiological needs. Someone may say that there are many conventions and agreements in the modern world for protection in the military conflict. This is really, but let's recall Clausewitz's words that "war is an

¹⁵ Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984. *On War*. Edited by Michael Eliot, Paret, Peter Howard. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ Maslow, Abraham. 1943. "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50(4) 370-396.

act of violence and its use is no scope ... The introduction of the principle of restriction and moderation in the philosophy of war is a complete absurdity.” Consequently, the opposing parties will go to win everything. For example, the situation in the Gaza sector is a use. Israel carries out combat actions that die more civilian than the Hamas fighter. Israel, however, is trying to reduce the sacrifice and warns the population of the expected strikes, and then acts on the principle: “I warned and those who did not go out of the area are not my fault.” Subsequently, they may regret the victims, even apologizes publicly, but can no longer help the victim. Pressure on the population is a serious factor, and every country will use it if the need and conditions come true. Or consider the situation in Ukraine. Destruction of peaceful infrastructure, civilians are one of the mechanisms of intimidation of the population and their use during war. However, Russia’s actions can lead to a reverse effect and instead of weakening the population unite the nation into one fist.

Although economic and military factors play an important role in the production of war, we must remember the importance of moral factor. It is precisely on the moral factor nation’s sustainability and spiritual strength depend. Human history is full of wars in which an economically and militarily weak country defeated a powerful one. It is enough to recall the Vietnam War. The US military won all the battles, but lost the war. The words of General Philip Davidson are significant here: “To sum it all up, the United States lost this war as all wars are lost - thanks to a brilliant strategy that took advantage of our political and psychological weaknesses and neutralized our enormous military power ... We lost because the United States government failed to understand the strategy of revolutionary war and, therefore, failed to confront it.”¹⁷

In the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia has a huge advantage in human, military, and economic resources, but the moral advantage is on the side of the Ukrainians. Before the start of the Russian special military operation, there was an expectation in Russia that Ukraine would not be able to withstand the difficulties caused by military operations and that the Ukrainian population would break morally. There was an expectation that the population would be cut off from each other and that the entire population, if not the majority, would happily meet the Russian army. But this expectation turned out to be false. The difficulties of the war did not cut off, but rather united Ukraine and its population.

Having talked about the importance of moral factors, we should consider what determines the development of these factors. Here we can recall the upbringing, education and development of faith, although these factors require a lot of time and have a little importance in the short term. Information and its correct provision, the conduct of the correct information campaign, is what determines the strengthening of moral factors in the short term. That is why information warfare, as an integral part of hybrid warfare, is of paramount importance in the modern world. It is precisely the failed information war, when negative information about the United States Armed Forces was spread around the world and nothing was said about the war crimes in Vietnam, that was one of the factors that broke the morale of American society and led to the United States’ defeat in the Vietnam War. The same thing is happening today, when thousands of marches are held around the world in support of “good” Palestine against “bad” Israel¹⁸. Hamas is either not mentioned, or is

17 Davidson, Phillip B. 1988. Vietnam at war. The history: 1946-1975. P. 811, Novato: Presidio Press.

18 Aljazeera. 2023. Tens of thousands rally around the world in solidarity with Palestine. 15 October. [წვდომას 2023 წლის 17 დეკემბერს. <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/15/palestinian-support-demonstrations-around-the-world> .](https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/10/15/palestinian-support-demonstrations-around-the-world)

mentioned as rebel fighters fighting against Israel, not terrorists. It was precisely the lost information war that was the reason that Georgia did not receive military assistance during the 2008 war. Today, Ukraine has managed to wage this war in such a way that it defeated the Russian propaganda machine, both inside and outside the country. A properly conducted information campaign led to the unification of Ukrainian society and the acquisition of the greatest international support and assistance.

The second component on which the outcome of war depends is military power. As in the case of population, military power is affected by the same factors - economic, military, moral. These factors are so intertwined that it is difficult to give preference to any one. The economic factor determines the provision of troops in the conduct of war. There are many excellent sayings that could be cited here, but we will cite one, the words of Admiral Lindy McCormick: "I am tempted to make a slightly exaggerated statement: that logistics is all of war-making, except shooting the guns, releasing the bombs, and firing the torpedoes."¹⁹ This saying clearly shows us the importance of resources and logistics in the conduct of war. In modern warfare, if an army does not have ammunition, it cannot fire, if it does not have fuel, it cannot use its equipment, if it does not have food, its soldiers cannot perform their combat missions. These are the minimum requirements, but the army needs much more. A country at war must have a strong rear support so that the soldier does not feel himself abandoned. Therefore, we can say that good provision is one of the important components of moral stability.

The second component is the result of the actions of the adversary. In the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the actions of Russian troops in Bucha, Mariupol, and countless other places can only fuel hatred and feelings of revenge. In fact, we are using the killing of civilians, the destruction of peaceful cities, and other atrocities of war, leads as to Clausewitzian ideal war where the opponents personally hate the enemies. This hatred is a very strong moral motivating factor for continuing the fight. In this sense, the Ukrainians, who have lost family members, relatives, friends and acquaintances, whose cities have been ruined, have a much higher motivation than the Russian troops.

Finally, let's consider the last element of Clausewitz's trinity - government. It is affected by economic factors as much as population and military power. The government must control the country's resources and know how much is the war cost²⁰. It was precisely this overestimation of its own resources that led to Russia's mistake in waging this war. Before the war, the world was under the impression that Russia had the second-strongest armed forces in the world and that Russia's resources were incalculable. However, subsequent hostilities, and especially the mobilization that took place in Russia, showed that the situation was radically different. It turned out that Russia did not have sufficient resources to equip reservists, the weapons and equipment in storage were out of order and required additional repairs, and the reserve units were untrained and unprepared. All this did not allow Russia to gain a rapid victory over Ukraine and turned the war from a hybrid and then from a maneuverable to a positional war. It should also be noted that Russian troops are

¹⁹ James C. Rainey, Beth f. Scott. 2004. Air Force Logistics Management Agency: year in review 2003. p.110, Alabama: Maxwell AFB.

²⁰ Svechin, Aleksandr. 2004. *Strategy*. Minneapolis: East View.

experiencing a shortage of ammunition and Russia is forced to purchase them from countries such as North Korea and Iran.

In addition, Russia did not calculate the consequences of possible international sanctions. The prevailing opinion in Russia that Europe would freeze without Russia and therefore would fulfil Russia's will and support a "special military operation" turned out to be false. Russia expected sanctions, but not as serious as the ones it received after the occupation of Crimea in 2014. Instead, it received global sanctions that will have a very significant impact on Russia for decades. Ukraine is in a better position in this regard. It receives international assistance, thanks to which its financial system is stable and its economic system, except for those on the front lines, is functioning smoothly. Ukraine has problems with the supply of military equipment and ammunition²¹, but these problems will be solved with the use of the same international assistance.

The international assistance that the parties of the conflict have is directly related to international activity and the information war that the countries are waging. As already noted, Ukraine was able to win the information war and mobilize international assistance at its expense. Russia is trying to change the situation, but neither its agents of influence nor its "useful idiots" are able to achieve this goal. Russia, through its propaganda machine, spreads narratives that Crimea has always been Russia, that the population living in the occupied territories expressed a desire to join Russia, that Ukraine is a carrier of fascist ideology and the population needs protection from it. However, all these statements are neutralized by the principle of inviolability of borders, which is recognized by the international community. It can be said that if Ukraine does not make gross and critical mistakes in its actions, it will have international support until the end of this war in its favor.

It has long been known that in order to wage war, a country must have a developed, rich and flexible economy. This is necessary because, as a rule, countries lose wars precisely because of the weakness of the economy. For example, Germany was defeated in the First World War due to the weakening of the economy. The same thing happened to it in the Second World War, when, despite its well-organized, equipped and trained armed forces, it ran out of economic resources and it became impossible for it to wage war. In this war, Germany had only one chance to win, and this was the rapid destruction of the opposing armies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the idea of "blitzkrieg" was born in Germany. While Germany pursued this strategy, it was successful. But having switched to the strategy of positional warfare, Germany switched to waging a war "to exhaustion". Here, however, other approaches and principles were at work, the economy dominated. If we compare just a few facts (such as the production of tanks, aircraft, artillery systems, fuel, and so on), we will see that Germany could not withstand economic competition and lost to the anti-Hitler coalition of countries. Astonishingly, this happened despite the fact that Germany had the most advanced military technologies of that time (the first jet fighter, the first missiles, submarines, tanks, and much more).

The same can be said about Russia today. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russia has moved from a strategy of "military destruction" to a strategy of "exhaustion", in which the economy plays

21 Khurshudyan, Isabelle. 2023. „Ukraine's top general, Valery Zaluzhny, wants shells, planes and patience.“, The Washington Post. 30 June. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/30/valery-zaluzhny-ukraine-general-interview/>.

a greater role than the conduct of military operations itself. Given that Ukraine is being assisted by most economically developed countries, it can be said that Russia is currently fighting (at least in economic terms) an economic coalition that produces 60 percent of world GDP. In addition, the Russian economy is vitally dependent on the products of its opponents in virtually every area of the economy, which also weakens the country's economy, and therefore the country itself.

Why did Russia find itself in this situation? First of all, it happened because the Russian decision-maker - Vladimir Putin - did not have objective information. This is not surprising. This is the disease of all dictators. They want to hear only that information that corresponds to their worldview, opinion, ideas or calculations. In addition, those services or individuals who possess complete information and are obliged to provide this information, as a rule, being careful about their seats, privileges or future, provide only that information that pleases the dictator. This is true in the case of both Putin and Stalin.

Conclusion

On all the abovementioned, we can conclude that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was conceived as a Russian hybrid attack on Ukraine. This attack was planned long before 2014. It can be said that the idea of this attack came to Russia after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, when they saw the reaction of the world's leading countries to the aggression against Georgia. Instead of the world's leading countries expressing a clear position towards Russia, they started talking about a "reset" in relations, did not support Georgia militarily, did not introduce serious sanctions against Russia and were limited only by the "great concern" expressed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. All this created the illusion for Russia that the same would happen in Ukraine, and it began to prepare for a hybrid war. Until 2014, Russia tried, on the one hand, to tarnish Ukraine's image on the world stage, and on the other hand, to show European countries that it was cutting off natural gas for opposing Russia. During this period, natural gas turned from a purely economic resource into one of the weapons of hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare reached its peak in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of military unrest in Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia has been constantly working on the development of the concept of hybrid warfare. Therefore, it is not surprising that in 2016 Valery Gerasimov presented the concept of hybrid warfare, which, unlike Hoffmann's concept, pays great attention not only to military operations, but also to economics and information warfare.

After Russia failed to achieve the goals set for hybrid warfare, it switched to conventional warfare. Here too, the war can be divided into two stages. The first was a war to completely destroy the Ukrainian troops, and after its failure, it underwent a transformation and became a war of "attrition". The latter depends on the strength of the economy and available resources. That is why Russia is trying to destroy Ukraine's infrastructure and destroy its economic potential. Nevertheless, it can be said that Russia is doomed to defeat in this war, since a country with 4 percent of the world economy cannot win an economic war against a coalition of countries that accounts for 60 percent of the world economy. Accordingly, Russia's defeat is only a matter of time.

However, this war will have another consequence. The sanctions imposed on Russia will be in

place for a very long time, just like the sanctions imposed under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which were imposed on the Soviet Union in 1974 and lifted from Russia only in 2012. Like the Jackson-Vanik sanctions, the new sanctions also restrict the Russian economy, the supply of technology and dual-use materials to Russia, and overall the technological development of the economy, which is disastrous for Russia.

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CURRENT ECONOMIC SECURITY ISSUES IN GEORGIA: AN EXAMINATION AND DEVELOPMENT VIEWPOINTS

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Abstract

A number of domestic and foreign variables combine to pose serious threats to Georgia's economic security. The primary vulnerabilities to the nation's economic security are examined in this essay, including the necessity for economic diversification, energy reliance, financial stability, and geopolitical hazards. Given the urgency of the issue, emphasis was placed on such issues as: Georgia's energy security, its main conjuncture; the role of the financial sector and its impact on the country's economic security; challenges in the structural economy, in particular the excessive role of the tourism sector in the country's economy and the threats arising from it; challenges in the labour market, which are closely related to the country's economic development; also discussed is such an important issue as the need for proper development of infrastructure to increase Georgia's transit role and maximize the use of existing geographical advantages. In the context of strengthening economic security, the importance of formulating or refining such strategies as economic diversification, the introduction of modern technologies and the growth of competitive production capacities; the development of agriculture, its modernization and the development of the processing industry; Promoting the financial sector, issues of capital market and securities market development, as well as the possibility of easier access to financial services through fintech. The report makes suggestions for guaranteeing sustainable development after analysing the impact of both internal and external forces on the nation's economic status.

Keywords: economic security, Georgia, geopolitical risks, energy dependence, financial stability

Introduction

One of the most important aspects of national security that affects a nation's capacity to guarantee both sustainable development and the well-being of its people is economic security. Economic security poses particularly difficult problems for Georgia, a tiny open economy situated in a geopolitically important area.

Georgia has made great strides in enacting economic changes during the last few decades. The nation stands out for its macroeconomic stability, comparatively low levels of corruption, and favorable business climate. Georgia still faces formidable economic obstacles, nevertheless, which jeopardize the nation's long-term viability and growth opportunities.

From financial system stability to economic growth, the idea of economic security covers a wide range of topics. In Georgia's situation, this idea can be characterized as the nation's capacity to uphold macroeconomic stability, guarantee economic expansion, generate employment, and raise the standard of life for its citizens while being ready for both internal and foreign shocks.

Main Part

Main Economic Security Challenges

Regional Stability and Geopolitical Risks. Georgia benefits strategically from its location between Europe and Asia, but there are also serious concerns involved. Because the nation is situated in an area where many geopolitical interests converge, economic security is always an issue.

Economic security issues are still present after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which had a catastrophic effect on the nation's economy. According to the 2023 report by the World Bank Group, the occupied territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia not only contain economic resources (20 percent of the country's total territory) that are difficult to access, but they also generate ongoing geopolitical tension that has a detrimental impact on the investment climate.

Dependency on Energy. An important factor in Georgia's economic stability is its energy security. Despite the nation's vigorous hydropower development, there is still a significant reliance on Russian gas and petroleum goods.

In recent years, the Georgian government has worked hard to diversify its energy sources. Positive moves in this regard include the delivery of gas from Azerbaijan and involvement in a number of regional energy projects. Economic security is still at jeopardy, though, because of the large percentage of energy imports.

Stability of the Financial System. Over the past few decades, Georgia's financial sector has seen substantial growth. The banking industry complies with international norms and is generally stable. But there are still a number of difficulties: One major concern for financial security is the stability of the lari, the country's currency. The everyday lives of the populace and inflationary processes are directly impacted by currency changes. As noted by Mikhelidze (2018), „the National Bank of Georgia pursues an inflation targeting policy (3% target indicator), which contributes to macroeconomic stability, but currency stability remains a difficult challenge under external shock conditions. The level of financial inclusion, despite progress, still needs improvement. Access to financial services for small and medium businesses and rural population is limited, which restricts

economic growth potential.¹

Issues with Structural Economics. The service industry, especially tourism, is the main driver of Georgia's economy. Despite some benefits, this system poses dangers to economic security: „A heavy reliance on tourism proved especially troublesome during the COVID-19 epidemic, since this industry suffered severe losses. In 2019, tourism's GDP share was 7.6%, but during the pandemic, it sharply dropped to 2.1%, according to Georgia's National Statistics Office (2023).

The manufacturing sector's slow rate of development is another major obstacle. Despite a number of government initiatives, sophisticated industrial development is progressing slowly.²

Issues with the Labor Market. „For Georgia, unemployment is still a major issue. Mamuladze (2021) points out that although official figures show a reasonably low unemployment rate (18.5% in 2022), this does not accurately reflect the truth. Serious issues include the large percentage of people who are just partially employed (32.1%) and hidden unemployment. Migration is a major impact as well. In addition to hurting the labor market, the exodus of skilled workers poses new difficulties for economic growth. At the same time, remittances contribute significantly to the economy, causing reliance on outside sources.³

Infrastructure Development Needs. Georgia's competitiveness as a transit nation is based on the growth of its logistics and transportation infrastructure. Infrastructure still has to be developed, especially in the regions, even with large investments. The development of digital infrastructure is a top issue for the contemporary economy. Although Georgia has made great strides in digital service delivery and electronic governance, the rate of change necessitates more proactive approaches.

Strategies for Strengthening Economic Security

Diversification of the Economy. One of the top goals for enhancing Georgia's economic security is economic diversification. This comprises:

Development of the Manufacturing Sector. The development of modern technology-based manufacturing is crucial for the nation. Although further extensive efforts are required, the establishment of special economic zones and the recruitment of foreign investment in this direction are already under progress.

Agricultural Modernization. Georgia's agricultural sector has a lot of promise. Increased exports, the expansion of the processing sector, and the growth of organic output can all contribute significantly to economic expansion.

Strengthening of the Financial System. Development of the financial industry comprises:

Capital Market Development. The growth of the securities market gives companies access to more funding options and lessens their reliance on bank loans.

Fintech Development. Better financial inclusion and easier access to financial services are made possible by the development of financial technology.

Assurance of Energy Security. Diversification of energy comprises.

Development of Renewable Energy. The development of wind, solar, and hydropower en-

1 N.Mikhelidze, "Energy Security Challenges in Georgia: Between Diversification and Dependency." *Caucasus Survey*, 6(2), (2018), 156-178.

2 National Statistics Office of Georgia. (2023). *Statistical Yearbook of Georgia*. Tbilisi.

3 S.Mamuladze, "Challenges of Economic Diversification in Georgia." *Economic Analysis and Policy Review*, 15(3), (2021), 45-62.

ables the reduction of energy dependence. Stable development is ensured by an effective energy policy that increases energy efficiency and plans for energy security.

Recommendations

A comprehensive strategy is required to improve Georgia's economic security:

Institutional Reforms. Maintaining the fight against corruption and boosting the efficiency of governmental institutions are critical to economic security.

Modernization of the Education System. Economic growth is facilitated by the training of skilled workers and the alignment of labor market demands.

Development of the Innovative Economy. Long-term competitiveness is ensured by fostering innovation, encouraging R&D, and assisting entrepreneurs.

Regional Cooperation - deepening regional economic integration and active participation in international economic organizations.

Conclusion

The issues facing Georgia's economic security are numerous and intricate. The nation faces several dangers at once, ranging from structural economic issues to geopolitical risks.

Georgia, however, has a great deal of potential to improve economic security. Prospects for sustainable growth are influenced by a number of elements, including a youthful, educated population, an open economy, ongoing reforms, and a strategic geographic location.

A methodical strategy that takes into account both internal and external elements is required to succeed. Coordinated efforts in the areas of energy security, financial system improvement, institutional development, and economic diversification will all help to increase Georgia's economic security.

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GEORGIA AND OSCE COOPERATION CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This article examines the historical development of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the reason of its formation, the role of OSCE in security and stability, the brief overview of the history of Georgia's involvement with the organization and the current status of their cooperation. Established during the Cold War under the policy of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1975, the organization was named as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Helsinki Final Act laid the foundation for a comprehensive security framework that integrates politico-military, economic-environmental, and human dimensions. The OSCE expended its scope to address crisis management, conflict prevention, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Following its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia joined the OSCE in 1992 considering the OSCE as a platform for conflict resolution, democracy, and regional engagement. The OSCE developed a long termed mission aimed at mediating internal conflicts and supporting democratic institution-building. The Mission monitored human rights, supported judicial and electoral reforms, and helped address regional security concerns. However, after 2008 war, the OSCE mission was terminated after Russia vetoed its continuation. Despite this, the OSCE remains engaged in Georgia through its role in the Geneva International Discussions and ongoing support for democratic processes.

Currently, Georgia participates in OSCE structures and mechanisms like, Vienna Document, the Open Skies Treaty, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Forum for Security and Cooperation, collaborates with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which has observed elections in Georgia.

The article concludes that the OSCE-Georgia partnership exemplifies a strategic and mutually beneficial relationship grounded in shared commitments to democratic values, conflict resolution, and regional security. For Georgia, the OSCE remains a vital platform for international engagement while for the OSCE Georgia represents a key partner in promoting peace and stability in the region.

Hypothesis - The cooperation between Georgia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) represents a mutually beneficial partnership that has significantly contributed to the peace, security, and democratic developments.

Methodology – This article uses a qualitative research approach focusing on historical analysis and comparative case studies. The information is gathered from secondary sources such as journal articles, research papers, official documents and reports from the OSCE, and publications from universities and policy institutes.

Theoretical Framework – The article is based on the theory of regional security cooperation. It highlights the importance of cooperative mechanisms in maintaining peace, security, and conflict prevention.

Keywords: Georgia, OSCE, Vienna Document, Treaty on Open Sky, ODIHR, Security, Cooperation

Introduction

This article analyzes the historical formation of the OSCE, the evolution of Georgia's relationship with the organization, and the current state of cooperation between them. The formation of The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) represents a significant development in the history of international diplomacy. It emerged from the Cold War tensions to become the largest regional security organization in the world. The roots of the OSCE can be traced back to the changing dynamics between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late stages of the Cold War. The United States' involvement in the Vietnam War led to significant military losses and deep domestic unrest. The war drained American resources, fractured public opinion, and triggered mass anti-war protests, creating a political imperative for change. At that time, President Richard Nixon introduced the policy of Vietnamization and a broader doctrine of détente, aimed to ease East-West tensions and shift U.S. focus from direct military engagement to diplomatic engagement with adversaries.

After two years of negotiation held in Helsinki and Geneva, the CSCE reached the consensus to sign the Helsinki Final Act on 1 August 1975. The document outlined important commitments in areas such as political – military affairs, economic and environmental cooperation, and the protection of human rights¹.

The OSCE has become an essential actor in crisis management, prevention of the conflict, and post-conflict rehabilitation across its 57 member states and beyond.

Following its independence in 1991, Georgia joined an OSCE in January 1992. The organization deployed a long-term mission in Georgia, supported mediation efforts, monitored developments in conflict regions, and helped promote dialogue between opposing sides. Beyond its conflict resolution efforts, the OSCE also played a key role in strengthening democratic institutions, supporting electoral reforms, and enhancing the rule of law.

Today, the OSCE continues to be a key mediator in the Geneva International Discussions, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has consistently monitored elections in Georgia. The country actively participates in the OSCE's politico-military formats, contributes to the implementation of the Vienna Document and the Open Skies Treaty, and engages in various reporting and verification activities that promote transparency and trust among member states. Through its participation in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and other institutional mechanisms, Georgia advocates its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and democratic development.

Main Part

Historical Background of the formation of OSCE

The establishment of the OSCE was influenced by the gradual thaw in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States during the final phase of the Cold War. During the Vietnam War, the United States suffered significant losses, with many American soldiers killed. The war also had a profound psychological and physical toll on the soldiers, many of whom struggled to maintain resilience on the battlefield. Simultaneously, mass protests erupted across the United

¹ N.D. OSCE. Accessed October 01, 2025. <https://www.osce.org/history>.

States, reflecting growing public opposition to the war in Vietnam. A withdrawal from the war had become a strategic necessity for the US. At that time Richard Nixon emerged on the political stage. He promised to achieve “peace with honor” - ending U.S. involvement in the war. He initiated the policy called “Vietnamization” which aimed at the gradual withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and the transfer of combat responsibilities to South Vietnamese forces. Nixon was elected president and played a key role in bringing the Vietnam War to an end. The last American soldier left Vietnam in March 1973.

Following this, Nixon initiated the policy of *détente*, which sought to ease the tensions and improve relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was within the framework of this policy that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was formed in 1975 as a platform for dialogue and cooperation between the Soviet Union, US and Western countries. On August 1, 1975, after 2 years of negotiation the Helsinki Final Act was signed. The goal of CSCE was to expand the *détente* policy in Europe, foster better relations among opposing parties, enhance security through cooperation, and to build mutual trust. Until 1990, the CSCE operated through a series of meetings and conferences focused on strengthening and evaluating these commitments.²

However, at the end of the Cold War the role of CSCE shifted significantly. The Paris Summit in November 1990 marked a turning point as the Charter of Paris for a New Europe assigned the CSCE a new role in addressing some changes accruing in Europe and confronting the challenges that emerged in the Cold War period. In 1994, the CSCE was renamed for Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to reflect its evolving role. Since that time, the Organization has continued to adopt to a new security threats and challenges while remaining committed to its founding principles.³

The OSCE promotes openness, transparency, and cooperation. It has developed the framework for arms control and confidence, and security-building measures. The OSCE supports the promotion of good governance, the fight against corruption, the raising of environmental awareness and the equitable management of natural resources. The OSCE assists its participating States in building democratic institutions, conducting free and transparent elections, and ensuring respect for human rights, media freedom, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and the rule of law. It also works to promote tolerance and non-discriminatory practices.⁴

In addition, the OSCE works to deal with cross-border security challenges including violent extremism, terrorism, cyber threats, drug and arms trafficking, human trafficking, migration, and climate change. These common challenges demand coordinated efforts and cooperation among states.

Georgia’s membership in OSCE and early cooperation

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia emerged as an independent nation and began its integration in international organizations. Georgia’s primary foreign policy goal be-

2 R, Guliyev. 2025. “From the History of the Formation of the OSCE.” *The scientific heritage* 16-22.

3 OCSE. 2020. What is the OSCE. OSCE.

4 OSCE. 2024. “From Commitment to Action.” <https://www.osce.org/>. December 27. Accessed September 27, 2025. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/9/584242.pdf>.

came the Euro-Atlantic Integration and enhancing the diplomatic relations with its neighbor states. As a part of this process, Georgia became the official member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on January 24, 1992. OSCE membership offered Georgia a valuable platform to engage in dialogue on regional and global security fields, strengthen its democratic institutions, and seek international support for conflict resolution efforts. Since joining, Georgia has remained an active participant in the OSCE's work across its three core dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human.⁵

In the early years of cooperation with the OSCE was outlined with a range of complex and interrelated challenges and perspectives. The most pressing issues were related to internal conflicts, state-building, and the fragile security environment following the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the most significant early challenges was unresolved Territorial Conflicts that posed a serious threat to the country's territorial integrity and political stability. The OSCE established a long-term mission in Georgia in 1992, with a mandate that included support for conflict resolution, promotion of dialogue between the parties, and observation of developments on the ground. As for the strengthening public institutions and the implementation of OSCE programs, particularly those aimed at promoting democratic reform, rule of law, and human rights protections, the OSCE's assisted Georgia in areas such as electoral reform, judicial training, and monitoring human rights issues. Another key challenge was related to border security and regional instability.

The OSCE Mission to Georgia was established in 1992, following the armed conflict in the Tskhinvali region. According to its mandate, the mission aimed to promote security, conflict resolution and human rights. In 2008, after the war in August, Russia vetoed the OSCE mission and the OSCE mission's mandate in Georgia was terminated. The OSCE Mission left Georgia at the end of May 2009.⁶

Currently, the OSCE along with the UN and the EU, co-chairs the Geneva International Discussions, which were established based on the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement (smr.gov.ge 2019)⁷.

Among the OSCE documents supporting Georgia, notable are the documents adopted at three OSCE Summits in the 1990s (Budapest 1994, Lisbon 1996, and Istanbul 1999), which emphasize support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the unconditional return of refugees, etc.

The OSCE played a key role in conflict monitoring and confidence-building measures. Through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE observed and assessed elections in Georgia, promoting transparency and democratic standards. In the field of Human rights, OSCE assisted in strengthening human rights protections, minority rights, and civil society engagement. Georgia–OSCE cooperation has historically been mutually beneficial, contributing to peace, democratic development, and regional stability. Hereby, in 2014, “the Group of Friends of Georgia was established within the OSCE, which currently unites 18 countries.”⁸

5 MOD. 2011. National Security Concept of Georgia. Tbilisi, November 17.

6 Parliament, European. 2021. “The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A Pillar of the European Security Order.” europarl.europa.eu. Accessed September 25, 2025. <https://surl.li/ddfsvp>

7 smr.gov.ge. 2019. Geneva International Discussions . Tbilisi.

8 ICCN. n.d. iccn.ge . Accessed September 27, 2025. https://iccn.ge/index.php?article_id=551&clang=1.

Brief Analysis of OSCE and Georgia's Current Cooperation

Georgia actively cooperates with OSCE with the framework of Vienna Document, Treaty on Open Sky, ODIHR, OSCE PA, etc.

The first version of the Vienna Document was adopted in 1990 as a mechanism for military transparency in the post-Cold War era. The Objective of the Vienna Document is to strengthen confidence and security (Confidence and Security Building Measures – CSBM) within the OSCE area. The Vienna Document is one of the main tools of CSBM, created to enhance military transparency among OSCE participating States. Under the framework of the Vienna Document, annual information exchanges (AEMI; GEMI), verification activities, and notifications of military activities are conducted.

The Treaty on Open Skies was signed on 24 March 1992 in Helsinki, Finland, and entered into force in 2002. The treaty allows the 34 member states to conduct unarmed observation flights over each other's territories. The purpose is to enhance trust and mutual understanding. Observation flight quotas are distributed as follows: Active quota refers to observation flights that a country conducts over the territory of other participating states. Passive quota refers to observation flights conducted by other countries over that country's territory.⁹

Since 1999, ODIHR has monitored all presidential and parliamentary elections held in the Georgia and has published interim and final reports related to those elections. In 2008, ODIHR, together with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), deployed a Human Rights Assessment Mission (HRAM), conducted monitoring, and prepared a report on the situation of the population living in areas affected by the war. In addition, ODIHR conducts thematic seminars in Georgia and, within its competence, provides legal assistance to the Parliament of Georgia and the Ministry of Justice in the process of drafting various legislative documents¹⁰

Georgia's delegation consistently participates in the sessions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. With the support of the OSCE, since 2003, several significant demilitarization projects have been carried out in Georgia. Georgia's Permanent Mission to the OSCE regularly takes part in Permanent Council meetings, where it emphasizes issues of national importance. Georgia is actively involved in the OSCE's politico-military formats. Georgian representatives regularly participate in meetings of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC). Within set deadlines, Georgia submits the relevant reports required by FSC decisions.

OSCE participating States have committed to the exchange of military information. One of the primary goals of this exchange is to promote transparency, which is crucial for building trust, ensuring stability, and fostering peace in the OSCE region. OSCE and Georgian cooperation can be defined as a strategic partnership grounded in shared commitments to security, democratic development, and peaceful conflict resolution—serving both Georgia's national interests and the OSCE's regional stability goals.

Conclusion

The article summarizes that the comprehensive approach of OSCE to security, embracing politico-military, economic-environmental, and human dimensions, has made it an essential actor

⁹ OSCE. 2021. Open Skies Consultative Commission. OSCE. Accessed September 29, 2025. <https://www.osce.org/oscc>.

¹⁰ OSCE. 2008. OSCE Chairman to participate in Geneva talks on Georgia crisis. Helsinki , October 13.

in promoting peace, stability, and resilience in an ever-changing geopolitical environment. The OSCE promotes openness, transparency, and cooperation. To this end, it has developed the world's most advanced framework for arms control and confidence- and security-building measures. Georgia OSCE cooperation is significant as it contributes to regional stability, supports democratic developments, and serves as a platform for dialogue, transparency, and collective security.

Despite the termination of the OSCE Mission to Georgia in 2009, cooperation between Georgia and OSCE is still expanded. Georgia continues to be an engaged member of the OSCE, contributing to and benefiting from various initiatives such as the Vienna Document, the Open Skies Treaty, and electoral observation missions by ODIHR. The OSCE also remains a significant actor in the Geneva International Discussions, keeping diplomatic dialogue alive in the aftermath of the 2008 war.

In closing, the article emphasizes the significance of the partnership of Georgia and OSCE reflecting shared values and a common vision for a Europe where security is built through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. For Georgia, the OSCE remains a trusted platform for advocating sovereignty, resolving conflicts peacefully, and advancing democratic reforms. For the OSCE, Georgia stands as both a beneficiary and a contributor to regional stability. The article concludes that the cooperation between Georgia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) represents a mutually beneficial partnership that has significantly contributed to the peace, security, and democratic developments.

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THE ESSENCE AND MULTISTRUCTURE OF INFORMATION WARFARE

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Abstract

Technological progress—particularly the rapid evolution of the Internet and social media—has transformed the global information space into an inseparable component of all spheres of human activity. The uncontrolled growth of information flows and the ease of dissemination have significantly altered the political, economic, and security dynamics of the modern world. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of information warfare, encompassing its structure, strategic objectives, instruments, and technological foundations. It focuses on how informational influence is used as a tool of psychological manipulation, political destabilization, and economic pressure. The study demonstrates that the information environment has become the main battlefield for states seeking to expand their influence not through military means, but via the instruments of “soft power.”

The research highlights the multidimensional structure of information warfare. It identifies four principal components—disinformation campaigns, cyber operations, social media wars, and psychological operations—which interact dynamically within states’ strategic frameworks. Particular attention is given to the evolution of propaganda from the era of traditional media to the age of artificial intelligence, where disinformation generation, algorithmic manipulation, and influence through “troll factories” have reached unprecedented scales. Technological advances have facilitated cyberattacks, including DDoS assaults and botnet-driven disruptive actions that directly endanger state infrastructure.

Information warfare is not merely a technical or engineering challenge; it also encompasses deep psychological and socio-political dimensions. Disinformation overload, fear induction, and targeted advertising are designed to polarize public opinion and undermine trust in governmental institutions. Artificial intelligence and big data analytics play a pivotal role in these processes, enabling precise modeling of audience behavior and the targeted dissemination of narratives. Consequently, informational influence has become one of the most effective tools for undermining a state’s internal stability without resorting to military intervention.

Special emphasis is placed on the information policy pursued by the Russian Federation, whose strategy toward Georgia and other post-Soviet states is rooted in a model of hybrid coercion. Analysis of historical cases—such as the August 2008 war, the annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine—demonstrates that information campaigns frequently precede military escalation and prepare the ground through the manipulation of public perception. Under such conditions, it is crucial for Georgia to strengthen its informational resilience through coordinated action between the state and civil society, and to implement preventive, education-based policies aimed at safeguarding national stability.

Keywords: Information warfare, hybrid conflict, disinformation, cyber operations, psychological manipulation, informational resilience, Georgia.

Introduction

With the advancement of technology and the rapid spread of the Internet, a global information space has emerged. Nearly every sphere, economic and financial sectors, governmental and non-governmental institutions, military and security agencies has become connected to the Internet. With the formation of social networks, the vast majority of society has become dependent on the Internet. The uncontrolled processes of information dissemination have transformed today's information environment into a chaotic space, increasing the vulnerability of public opinion.

Prior to the mass diffusion of the Internet, the principal instruments of information warfare were considered to be television, radio, the press, and cinema. All of these media continue to perform their missions today, yet the methods of propaganda and disinformation that evolved over decades now find their contemporary expression through Internet technologies.

In the modern information environment, television and media channels linked to social networks ensure the continuity of information flows. Today, any individual equipped with a smartphone has access to a stream of information previously unavailable. Regardless of a person's educational background or social status, any individual can, twenty-four hours a day, receive or transmit information to millions of recipients. Historically, conducting information campaigns and exerting psychological influence on mass audiences required active agent networks and espionage activities, processes that were both dangerous and labor-intensive. Today, however, it is possible from any point on the globe to influence specific target audiences using appropriate technologies and methods.

Events of the last decade, the annexation of Crimea in Ukraine, the identification of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the Syrian civil war and most recently, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have publicly demonstrated the significance of informational influence.¹

You are well aware of the profoundly negative role played by the Russian Federation toward Georgia, expressed through repeated unjust policies and the repeated use of brute force; this has culminated in the occupation of some 20% of our territory by its armed forces. It should be noted that Russian policy toward Georgia has not fundamentally changed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union; what has shifted is the dynamic of hostile actions, which have culminated in several escalatory episodes, including the August 2008 war. One may argue that Russia's information war began even before Georgia achieved independence, accompanying the rise of dissident movements today, however, it is pursued with far more sophisticated methods, new techniques and predominantly through demonstrations of "soft power," all of which exert considerable influence on the formation of public opinion in their favor.

Currently there is a noticeable tendency for the number of Russia's sympathizers to increase, driven in part by deeper economic ties and by "positive" narratives disseminated through various information channels. This trend stems from the fact that information-warfare methods, operating within the technological sphere, effectively provide inexhaustible possibilities to a state that possesses the necessary resources to deploy them.²

¹ შუბითიძე ე. „საინფორმაციო ომის მეთოდების ტრანსფორმაცია თანამედროვე საკომუნიკაციო შესაძლებლობების განვითარების ფონზე“, გვ. 2 , თბილისი 2021.

² ტულუში ლ. „რუსეთის ხისტი და რბილი ძალის საფრთხეები საქართველოში“, გვ.3 , თბილისი 2016.

Main Part

The structure of information warfare is highly complex and multifaceted. Before examining it directly, however, let us consider how an initiator carries out an attack on a target. When State X exerts informational pressure on State Y, it typically employs two principal methods. The authority responsible for launching the operation assigns a specific unit the task of introducing harmful information into some segment of the target society (for example, an ethnic minority). An operator prepares a “narrative” and transmits it directly to the target or to an influence agent via appropriate channels. An influence agent in this context may be an individual or a segment of the local population that is sympathetic to the adversary and capable of relaying the sponsor’s message to the target. Influence agents most often comprise elements of a “fifth column” engaged in subversive activities. Security and defense agencies must be prepared to detect their hostile activities and to implement preventative measures, because in many cases it is impossible to determine the sponsor or operator’s true origin, while informational campaigns conducted within the target state are comparatively easier to manage and counter.

Now it is appropriate to outline the multi-structured anatomy of information warfare, which will give a clearer picture of its effectiveness and threatening character:

1. Strategic Objectives of Information Warfare

- **Psychological manipulation of the target population** - This manifests through mass information campaigns in which the adversary employs disinforming techniques to influence the religious or ethnic sentiments of the local population. In propaganda terminology this method is called the “emotional resonance effect,” where the information stream targets human feelings rather than reason.³
- **Attainment of political influence** - One of the primary aims of information warfare is to shape the political thinking of the population, thereby enabling the adversary to advance its interests in the target country, discredit the incumbent government, effect a change of power, or obtain manipulative leverage over the existing authorities.
- **Achieving military advantage** - Although this factor is most evident during hostilities, it is also possible during peacetime to affect the combat potential of an adversary’s military through informational manipulation, for example by organizing campaigns that harm the prestige of the armed forces.
- **Economic advantage** - Economic sanctions form an integral part of hybrid warfare. Prior to or during the imposition of sanctions, informational campaigns are conducted to pressure the target state to return to desired conditions. It should be noted that sanctions also cause harm to the sanctioning state.

2. Core Components

a) Disinformation campaigns:

- **Fake news** - Encompasses all types of information primarily disseminated via social networks whose sources and provenance are fabricated or unknown.⁴

³ ჭიჭინაძე რ. „პროპაგანდის ფორმები სამაუწყებლო მედიაში“, გვ. 30, თბილისი 2015.

⁴ Explained: What is False Information (Fake News)? <https://surl.li/wdphmv> (ბ.5. 11.01.2025).

- **Deepfakes** - Video (and audio) materials generated with artificial intelligence that depict events that never occurred and do not correspond to reality.⁵
- **Propaganda** - A broad set of methods and techniques; broadly defined as the purposeful dissemination of information (true or false) intended to influence public opinion or particular social groups.⁶
- **Rumors** - A form of propaganda characterized by short-term deception of a target group.

b) Cyber operations:

- **Hacking** - Methods of penetrating a target computer system to steal information. Hacking may also involve sabotage of systems, such as altering website content.⁷
- **DDoS attacks** - Distributed Denial of Service attacks launched by many computers against an information system, resulting in network blockage, congestion, or functional failure.⁸ The Russian Federation executed such attacks in parallel with the August 2008 war, employing a combined and innovative method.⁹
- **Botnets** - Networks of computers infected by malware and centrally controlled from one machine or by a group of hackers. Infected computers can be commanded to perform various criminal activities.¹⁰

c) Social-media warfare:

- **Troll farms** - Organized groups of fake profiles across social platforms operating according to a prearranged plan to disseminate information intended to discredit a person, political party, or government.
- **Algorithmic manipulation** - Social networks operate by algorithms that surface content similar to what an individual already consumes. This principle is exploited to concentrate information with shared content characteristics, increasing its reach.
- **Echo chambers** - The informational isolation of a target group to strengthen an ideology; information is supplied in such volume that alternative perspectives cannot gain traction.
- **Hashtag hijacking** - Placing a false or manipulative hashtag on social platforms (e.g., #russiaisanoccupant) to find or spread information and thereby select a specific target audience.¹¹

d) Psychological operations (PsyOps):

- **Campaigns of fear** - Dissemination of threatening information, economic, military, or political that generates fear among the population or within government structures of relatively weak states.
- **Disinformation overload** - Simultaneous delivery of contradictory narratives to a target audience, creating confusion. The use of such methods by the Russian Federation in Georgia is plausible: conservative and liberal narratives can polarize society to such an extent that both may originate from the same source.

5 Explained: What Are Deepfakes? <https://surl.li/pqtlhb> (ბ.5. 11.01.2025).

6 პროპაგანდა <https://surl.li/ilycrh> (ბ.5. 08.10.2025).

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9 გოცირიძე ა. „რუსეთ-საქართველოს 2008 წლის ომის კიბერგანზომილება“ <https://surl.li/zvbfto> (ბ.5. 09.10.2025).

10 What is a Botnet? <https://shorturl.at/mG3iK> (ბ.5. 09.10.2025).

11 Hashtag hijacking: What it is, why it happens and how to avoid it <https://surl.li/gbzlhb> (ბ.5. 09.10.2025).

- **Targeted advertising** - Automated selection and delivery of informational content (ads) to specific social groups using artificial intelligence.

e) Media-control measures:

- **State-controlled media** - In the age of information warfare, some degree of state oversight of media can be warranted to prevent hostile informational narratives; however, this often results in either absolute control or total chaos.
- **Censorship** - Typically employed by authoritarian states to suppress and ban dissenting platforms. For example, during the Russia–Ukraine war the Russian government enacted laws penalizing those who spread so-called “false information” about the actions of the Russian military.¹²
- **Fake independent media** - Establishing ostensibly independent television channels is not difficult in democratic states, but it requires substantial resources. Numerous outlets in Georgia claim independence and impartiality while their narratives reveal clearly identifiable origins.

3. Instruments and Technologies of Information Warfare

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** - A rapidly advancing technology that is taking a central role in the modern information environment. AI facilitates automated classification and targeted distribution of information.
- **Big-data analytics systems** - Employed to sort large volumes of information and extract relevant data efficiently.¹³
- **Geo-fencing** - Systems that allow the selection of a specific geographic area on a map and the distribution of information only within its boundaries (e.g., a narrative targeted exclusively at the Marneuli district).
- **Blockchains** - Computer systems composed of encrypted “blocks” that leave no trace after information transmission; used to conceal and secure propaganda.¹⁴
- **Quantum computing** - An emerging technology: extremely powerful machines capable of breaking encrypted information in minimal time.

4. Phases of an Informational Campaign

- **Intelligence** - Selection of the target object (social groups or individuals) followed by the operation to identify its vulnerabilities.
- **Implementation** - Based on the intelligence, the specific method or combination of methods is applied to the target.
- **Enhancement** - If implementation is successful, informational pressure is intensified and delivered in greater volume.
- **Sustaining long-term influence** - In the event of success, plan periodic delivery of narratives to consolidate and expand achieved gains.

¹² ქვეანიშვილი ე. “როგორ აქრობენ რუსეთში დამოუკიდებელ მედიას“ <https://surl.li/eznjej> (ბ.წ. 09.10.2025).

¹³ What is big data analytics? <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/big-data-analytics> (ბ.წ. 10.10.2025).

¹⁴ რა არის ბლოკჩეინი? <https://digitalbus.ge/blog/ra-aris-blokcheini/> (ბ.წ. 10.10.2025).

Conclusion

The integration of information technologies, networks, Internet architectures and artificial intelligence has assumed a central role on the arena of interstate competition, consequently, information security has become an indispensable component of hybrid-warfare prevention. Thanks to social networks and media platforms hosted on the Internet, a large proportion of the world's population today receives an unprecedented volume of information through small handheld "smart-phones." A few decades ago, the most sophisticated means of disseminating propaganda television, radio, and cinema were accessible only to relatively limited audiences. Today, however, the lightning speed and vast volume of information flows have made it substantially easier for one state to activate and manage a propaganda apparatus directed at another state from within its own borders.

The role of intelligence and human networks has changed, tasks that previously demanded operators' physical presence can now be executed without leaving a room. Technological progress continues and has become an irreversible process with serious adverse implications for the global information environment. This reality requires improvement of counter-hybrid mechanisms and their implementation at the national (statewide) level.

The multi-structured anatomy of information warfare presented above demonstrates both its complexity and the difficulty of governing such a multidimensional phenomenon, as well as of preventing the damaging effects it produces. The contemporary world faces major challenges because the tentacles of information warfare have all but erased the boundary between war and peace, thrusting states onto an entirely new stage of confrontation and rivalry. Technology is still developing inexorably: the rise of artificial intelligence appears irreversible, and future revolutionary shifts are likely as these technologies are implemented across virtually all spheres of society. In an era of quantum computing and AI dominance, information warfare will assume entirely new contours novel approaches and strategies will emerge, and methods of countering them will have to change accordingly.

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THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

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Abstract

My research included studying and analyzing the history, ideology, and structure of the Arab Socialist Party-Ba'ath. The role of Saddam Hussein in the formation of the so-called Baathist regime; Politics of de-Baasification.

The paper is based on available sources and literature about the party (official documents and materials of the Ba'ath party, monographs, analytical articles, internet materials).

The Baath Party was founded on April 7, 1947 by the Syrian philosopher, sociologist and Arab nationalist Michel Aflaq (1910-1989) and the Syrian politician Salah al-Din al-Bitar (1912–1980).

Michel Aflaq played a decisive role in coordinating the party's political direction. Paradoxically, Michel Aflaq, one of the main ideologists of the party, which formed in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, came from a Christian, Orthodox family. Michel Aflaq's political views were greatly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and others.

The Baathist ideologist considered the merit of Baathism to be a “new reading of Islam,” the essence of which was that “Islam is the history, language, philosophy, system of values, and worldview of the Arab nation.” But in Arab countries, nationalist ideology could not always solve complex ethnic and interfaith problems. Therefore, the ruling circles actively appealed to religious values.

In 1979, Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq. The Baath Party became the main pillar of his power.

How did a party that aimed to promote the idea of a united Arab nation become the foundation of one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world? This paper will attempt to answer this question.

Keywords: Ba'ath Party, Saddam Hussein, Politics of de-Ba'asification, Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, Iraq

Introduction

The Ba'ath Party was founded on April 7, 1947 by the Syrian philosopher, sociologist and Arab nationalist Michel Aflaq (1910-1989)¹ and the Syrian politician Salah al-Din al-Bitar (1912–1980).

Michel Aflaq's father, Joseph, was a grain merchant and took an active part in the creation of the National Bloc in 1928. The goal of the bloc was liberation from French rule. Michel became an active member of Arab circles in Paris. Aflaq received his primary education at a Western-style school during the French mandate in Syria. In 1929, he left Syria and moved to Paris, where he studied history and literature at the Sorbonne. During his studies, the works of Henri Bergson had a great influence on Aflak. He founded the Union of Arab Students in the Sorbonne and got acquainted with the works of Karl Marx. He returned to Syria in 1932.

The ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism formed the basis of the Ba'athist political concept.

Michel Aflaq played a decisive role in coordinating the party's political direction. Paradoxically, Michel Aflaq, one of the main ideologists of the party, which formed in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, came from a Christian, Orthodox family. Michel Aflaq's political views were greatly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and others.

The Ba'athist ideologist considered the merit of Baathism to be a "new reading of Islam," the essence of which was that "Islam is the history, language, philosophy, system of values, and worldview of the Arab nation." But in Arab countries, nationalist ideology could not always solve complex ethnic and interfaith problems. Therefore, the ruling circles actively appealed to religious values.

The Christian Aflaq said that Islam is not so much a faith as a culture. The Quran is not so much a divine revelation as a creation of Arab genius, equally valuable for Muslims and Arab-Christians. At the same time, Aflaq and the Baath Party entered into confrontation with another pan-Arab organization - the Muslim Brotherhood, which demanded the establishment of a pure Islamic state and considered all civil parties to be their enemies.

The general character of the ideology of the Arab revival and at the same time declared traditionalism, on the one hand, was understandable to a significant part of the population (especially educated people), and on the other hand, it was very flexible, which is why various groups of Arab society, mainly ethnic and confessional minorities, were involved in the political activities of the party. Michel Aflaqi declared the Arab nation as his base, thus avoiding accusations of imitating the West, which in the conditions of the fight against colonialism could have turned many potential supporters away from the party. Michel Aflaqi especially emphasizes that the concept of his party, despite its similarities with various non-Arab movements, is based on Arabism.

In 1952, the Arab Renaissance Party merged with the Arab Socialist Party and took the name Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, or Ba'ath.

The Baath Party was in power in Iraq from 1963 to 1968-2003 and was the ruling party in Syria.

Both regimes are characterized by authoritarianism, persecution of political opposition and

¹ John F. Devlin, *The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis*. - *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 5 (Dec., 1991)

prohibition of criticism of their ideology. Both regimes are also usually characterized as neo-Baathist, since the ideology that they implemented in practice was significantly different from the original doctrine of “Al-Aflaq” and “Al-Bitar” (for example, none of the ruling Ba’athist parties set and does not set as its goal the unification of the Arab world).

On July 7, 1979, Saddam Hussein, who was simultaneously Prime Minister, Chairman of the Revolutionary Leadership Council, and Secretary General of the Party, became President of Iraq. Thus, Saddam Hussein seized absolute power in the country. One of his first tasks was to establish his complete ideological, political, and administrative control over the state. (liveps.ru)

Saddam Hussein turned the Ba’ath Party into a well-organized force capable not only of seizing power but also of maintaining it.

Main Part

Party ideology and social structure

Ba’ath means Arab renaissance and revival. The party’s foundation was Arab unity, socialism, and the modernization of the Arab world. Modernization meant helping Arab countries overcome poverty and backwardness. The party was to address problems throughout the Arab region and not be limited to one specific country. The party’s slogan was: «A united Arab nation with an eternal mission.» The Baathists were to fight for the freedom and socialism of the Arab people. They believed that Arab national revival and the building of socialism were impossible without revolution and struggle.

The main goal of the party’s political concept was to consolidate the disparate political elite and prevent it from being united by blood, ethnicity, or religion.

The party’s founder, Michel Aflaq, sought, above all, to integrate different political groups in order to achieve independence from Western colonialism.

In the early years of the party’s founding, the Christian Michel Aflaq viewed Islam as a reflection of the Arab historical heritage, and considered nationalism to be the defining characteristic of Ba’athist ideology. In his collection of speeches, «The Ba’ath and the Heritage», published in 1976, he notes that the Ba’athist movement has always been characterized by a positive attitude towards Islam, and that Islam is considered the axis of the Arab historical heritage and that its development is seen as the mission of the ‘Arab nation.’²

The party’s political concept has been revised several times, and to this day the party retains some influence in Algeria, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and other Arab countries. However, there is a tendency to weaken the party’s leading role. In 2012, a new Syrian constitution was adopted by referendum, which equated the Ba’ath Party with other parties operating in the country, granting them equal opportunities. At the same time, the party lost the fundamental basis that was given to it by the previous version of the constitution - the Ba’ath Party had a leading role in the country, and the President of Syria was its Secretary General at the same time.

In addition, since 2003, various measures have been taken in Iraq to eliminate the political influence of the Ba’ath Party in Iraqi politics. Such policies are being implemented by the official

2 Aflaq M. Fī sabīl al-Ba’th. Al-Juz’ al-awwal, p.14 - <http://albaath.online.fr> (16.08.2008).

Iraqi government with the help of the National Committee for De-Ba'athification, established in 2005. The influence of the Ba'ath Party in Egypt is also weakening.

Ba'ath Party under Saddam Hussein

The party's original ideology sounded very humane. The party's goal was to unify the Arab nation. It was the Ba'ath Party that became Saddam Hussein's main stronghold when he came to power. How did the ideas of Ba'athism become the foundation of one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world?

In 1968, the Ba'ath Party underwent significant changes. From an elite group, it transformed into a mass political organization with a rigid structure and hierarchy. There was also a tendency for Sunnis to displace Shiites (by 1970, Sunnis constituted over 80% of the leadership). Another characteristic of the new Baathists was the preponderance of army officers, especially those from Tikrit. The party's leadership passed to Ahmad Hassan al-Baqr in 1964, and the Tikritization of the officer corps followed the Tikritization of the party. Under Abd al-Salem Aref and Abd al-Rahman Aref, Shiite Ba'athists were persecuted.³

The new president of Iraq, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr (1968-1979), was not only the country's major political leader, but also a political mentor who had enormous authority among the Baathists and in the army and state apparatus. As soon as the Baathists came to power, serious transformations began - they formed a new party leadership consisting of 5 people, among whom at that time an army officer and party activist - Saddam Hussein - played an active role. (liveps.ru)

Saddam Hussein (Saddam Hussein Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti) was born on April 28, 1937, to a shepherd family in the small village of Alawiyya, near the city of Tikrit. His name translates from Arabic as «he who opposes». His father died six months before his birth. Saddam was raised by his mother's brother. His mother remarried, from which Saddam had three half-siblings. His stepfather, Ibrahim al-Hassan, treated him badly. At the age of 10, Saddam left his family and returned to Baghdad. Later, his relatives from Tikrit became his closest advisors. With the help of his uncle, he finished school in Baghdad. After school, he studied for three years at the Iraqi Law School, which he left in 1957, at the age of 20, to join the revolutionary movement. During this time, he worked as a school teacher. Saddam actively participated in the coups of 1963 and 1968. He was a political prisoner from 1964 to 1967. He had all the qualities of a leader, being hardworking, pragmatic, intelligent and at the same time

After July 1968, the Iraqi ruling regime lost its purely military characteristics: the Ba'athist leadership set out to establish complete ideological, political, and administrative control over the armed forces through «Ba'athization». The Ba'athist aimed to create an ideological army that would protect the Ba'athist government. Officers who were disloyal to the regime were dismissed or sent to work in Kurdistan.

In the late 1970s, when the Ba'ath Party cracked down on the Kurds and Shiites, there was no longer any need to cooperate with the Communist Party, which was the only obstacle to the

³ ნ. გელოვანი, თანამედროვე არაბული ქვეყნები - ერაყი/ავტორიტარიზმიდან საპარლამენტო რესპუბლიკამდე/. - გიორგი სანიკიძე, გიული ალასანია, ნანი გელოვანი. ახლო აღმოსავლეთის ისტორია და მისი ურთიერთობები სამხრეთ კავკასიასთან (XIX ს.-XXI ს.-ის დასაწყისი). თბ., ილიას უნივერსიტეტი, 2011.

establishment of complete Ba'athist hegemony in the country. The communists began to be expelled from all spheres of public life. Their activities in mass organizations, where the communists still retained some influence, were banned.

Only Ba'athist members were admitted to military educational institutions, who signed an obligation to work in the interests of the party, in case of violation of which military personnel were threatened with repression. Discrimination on religious and ethnic grounds in the selection and promotion of the armed forces was tightened. Only generals and officers who were connected to Saddam Hussein and the Tikrit clan were promoted to responsible positions. In 1978, a decree was issued according to which only the Ba'ath Party could conduct political activities in the armed forces. By this time, the so-called military group (77 members), who were supporters of President Bakr, had been expelled from the Ba'ath leadership. Approximately 22 were executed, 55 were found guilty and imprisoned or dismissed from military service.

Saddam Hussein dreamed of transforming the Ba'ath into a well-organized force capable not only of seizing power but also of maintaining it. In this regard, the models of Bolshevik Russia and fascist Germany, which were based on a single-party system, "became increasingly attractive to him." Saddam meticulously studied the experience of the communist movement, paying special attention to the issues of the organizational structure of the party, and introducing Stalinist methods of establishing control over the party and state apparatus. Saddam Hussein established a strict party structure, selecting the necessary and loyal cadres. The education system also became ideologized, starting from the preschool level.⁴

Severe punishments were imposed on members of the Ba'ath Party: the Criminal Code, drafted under the personal supervision of Saddam Hussein, provided for the death penalty for Baath Party members who concealed their former party affiliation, maintained ties with another political party, left the party, and joined another party. A series of anti-democratic laws were passed between 1975 and 1978. For example, Law #35 of 1977 revoked Iraqi citizenship for «anyone who supported political, economic, or intellectual opposition hostile to the revolution and its program.»

In 1977, the leadership of provincial party organizations, security agencies, army commanders, and ministers reported not to President Bakr, but directly to Hussein.

On July 7, 1979, A. Hassan al-Bakr was removed from all posts in the state and army. He was placed under house arrest, and according to the official version, he resigned due to illness. The country's president was Saddam Hussein, who was simultaneously Prime Minister, Chairman of the Revolutionary Leadership Council and Secretary General of the party. (liveps.ru) Thus, Saddam Hussein seized absolute power in the country.

One of its first tasks was to establish its complete ideological, political and administrative control over the state. The Ba'ath Party and the people's political apparatus were filled with the Ba'ath Party and the people's movement led by Hussein. Particular attention was paid to the Ba'athization of the mass media, and large sums of money were allocated to improving the methods and forms of propaganda and social demagoguery. (liveps.ru) The sphere of culture and education, which was oriented towards educating young people in the spirit of Ba'athism, acquired an ideological character.

⁴ იქვე. ნ. გელოვანი 2011.

Alex Edwards, Iraq under the Ba'ath. How Saddam Hussein used the Ba'ath Party to remain in power. – The Majalla, The Leading Arab Magazine, 26 June, 2012

Ba'athist ideas were established in mass professional and public organizations and strict control was exercised over them.

In May 1979, Saddam Hussein accused more than 30 communists and their supporters of betraying the Iraqi revolution and creating their own branches in the army and imprisoned them. The new Iraqi leadership broke off relations with the USSR. In April 1979, communist ministers left the government, the Communist Party ceased its participation in the National Front, and its leaders left the country. The destruction of the Iraqi Communist Party established a one-party system with the Ba'ath Party's monopoly on power and the total ideologisation of the country's society.

In 1980, Saddam Hussein went to war with Iran. The territorial problem was a parallel reality for the leaders of the two countries, who were trying to gain hegemony in the Persian Gulf region. Saddam Hussein used this war to overthrow his dictatorial regime.

In August 1990, Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait, which it annexed as the Gulf Province ("Province 19"). At the instigation of the United States, the Iraqi government was plunged into diplomatic and economic isolation from most of the world's major powers. An allied army led by the United States took over the country under a UN mandate. In February 1991, the United States launched a military operation in the Arabian Desert regions under the name of Operation Desert Storm, which lasted for six months. American aircraft quickly disabled Iraqi military bases. Although the Americans refused to launch military operations on Iraqi territory, they believed that they would help overthrow the weakened regime of Saddam Hussein. At the same time, Western politicians feared the possible collapse of Iraq's power and did not want to change the balance of political power in the Persian Gulf.⁵

In 1994, Iraq recognized the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. In 1995 and 1998, the United States and Great Britain launched missile strikes on Iraq in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.. This resulted in a large number of casualties in the civil war and an extremely negative reaction in the world. There was also unrest within the country. The Kurds rose up again, calling for the creation of a new government. The early leaders of the Ba'ath Party called for the democratization of the country and the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime. (liveps.ru)

Saddam Hussein was able to control the socio-political situation in the country only through increasingly repressive measures, partly in line with the political principles of the dictatorial regime. Saddam Hussein, through the Revolutionary Leadership Council, issued several decrees that provided for severe punishments (amputation of organs, cutting off ears, etc.) for criminal offenses. In 2000, the Revolutionary Leadership Council established cutting out the tongue as a punishment for insulting Saddam Hussein and his family members.

Saddam Hussein supported one social or religious group against another, which, of course, was contrary to any peace. The Baath Party in Iraq was already majority by Shiites by this time. Saddam allowed Shiites to hold some positions, although the majority of high-ranking positions were held by Sunnis.

Saddam had a relationship with the party's founder, Michel Aflaq. This was useful for his policies. However, for Aflaq, it was not very fruitful. Aflaq hoped that the governments of Syria and Iraq would have a positive relationship. However, the long-standing relationship between the

⁵ იქვე. ნ. გელოვანი. 2011.

Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athists was further strained in the 1980s, when Syria supported Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. Also, during the Gulf War in 1990, Hafez al-Assad sided with the United States and its allies.

Saddam Hussein was not a soldier. At one time, he refused to enter the Iraqi Military Academy. During his rule, he was afraid of a military coup. Saddam was aware of the mistakes that the first Ba'athist government had made. That is why the Baath Party controlled the army. Saddam correctly assessed the threat coming from it. After all, a military coup was actually a tradition of changing power in Iraq. The Ba'ath Party created a cult of Saddam Hussein. People blindly trusted the president, and most of them did not even understand the party's principles and political ideas.

After he became president in 1979, Saddam often stated in his speeches that he wanted to build a modern state, but ultimately he became more of a dictator with unbridled power than a progressive ruler of the Iraqi people. High positions were held by close relatives and associates of Hussein.

On the eve of the 2003 US military invasion of Iraq, the Ba'athist regime was one of the most rigid, totalitarian regimes in the world, ruled by a privileged elite.⁶ The Ba'ath Party at this time had over 2 million members. However, party membership did not protect them from the terror of Saddam Hussein, who was the party's secretary-general until 2003. This strict control over party members was intended to prevent the formation of new opposition groups within the party. Saddam did not shy away from openly criticizing or dismissing its members. This is why the ouster of Saddam Hussein from Iraq in 2003 was welcomed by some Ba'athists. The Iraqi population was confused, and it was unclear what the Ba'athists could expect after the defeat of Hussein's regime. General Tom Frank dissolved the Ba'ath Party in 2003.

The head of the American interim administration in Iraq, Paul Bremer, issued an order to liquidate the Ba'ath Party and ban its ideology on May 16, 2003.

On October 15, 2005, a referendum approved a new Iraqi constitution, which confirmed the abolition of the Ba'ath Party.⁷

Conclusion

In the early 1960s, the most massive pan-Arab party was formed by people - namely Michel Aflaq and al-Bitari - who had no foothold in either the class or religious establishment and had returned from France in the late 1930s.

The Ba'ath Party used anti-colonialism, anti-Westernism, and anti-capitalism - terms that were popular among Arabs, especially after the emergence of the state of Israel and the mass expulsion of Arabs from territories occupied by Israel.

The policy of the Iraqi Ba'ath in terms of Arab unity was contradictory - on the one hand, it strove for it as one of the fundamental party principles, and on the other, it prevented its implementation due to its narrow party interests. This fact to some extent confirmed the discrepancy between the

⁶ Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, An Interview With Prof. Joseph Sassoon. - *Iraq News, Politics, Economics, Society*, Monday, April 29, 2013. <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2013/04/saddam-husseins-baath-party-interview.html>

⁷ Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi. A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq. International Center for Transitional Justice. - *ICTJ-Report-Iraq-De-Baathification-2013-ENG.pdf*

declared slogans and their practical realization in life. Later, the founder and ideologist of the Ba'ath Party, Michel Aflaq, wrote: «Reality is different from theoretical projects. Our goal is to make the best use of any situation.»

The Ba'ath Party ruled Iraq for 35 years (1968-2003). Its enemies during this period included communists, Kurds, members of the Da'wah Party, leading Shiite religious leaders, former Ba'athists, and members who at some point plotted to overthrow the government. Accordingly, the Baathist regime «sought not only to destroy actual enemies, but also to destroy the potential for resistance and dissent.» Instilling fear within the party and among the Iraqi population was a prerequisite for the Baathist regime's success. The families of «traitors» were severely punished, either directly or indirectly, by being denied access to military colleges, universities, jobs, and travel abroad. For Saddam Hussein, Baathism was merely an ideological justification for the regime.

In 2003, as a result of US military actions, the Ba'ath Party was banned in Iraq and a policy of de-Ba'athification was initiated.

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GEORGIA'S ANAKLIA PORT: A GEOPOLITICAL CROSSROADS IN NATO'S BLACK SEA SECURITY

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Abstract

This article analyzes how the Anaklia Deep Sea Port will strengthen Georgia's strategic role both within the regional framework and in advancing broader Western geopolitical interests. The paper examines the Anaklia Port project as a cornerstone of Georgia's long-term integration into Euro-Atlantic security and economic systems, arguing that its successful completion is indispensable for the enduring strategic viability, connectivity, and resilience of the Black Sea region. Situated at a critical geopolitical crossroads on the eastern flank of Europe, Anaklia's importance extends far beyond its immediate economic and commercial functions. It represents a transformational infrastructure project whose strategic relevance encompasses defense, trade, and energy security dimensions. The port's deep-water capacity positions it to become a regional logistics hub capable of accommodating large container vessels and facilitating the flow of goods, resources, and military assets across the Eurasian transport network. Moreover, Anaklia is integral to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR)—the so-called Middle Corridor—which provides a vital, Russia-bypassing conduit linking Europe with Central Asia and China. This route not only diversifies global supply chains but also enhances Europe's strategic autonomy by reducing dependency on northern transport corridors vulnerable to geopolitical coercion. For NATO, the strategic utility of the Anaklia Port lies in its potential to serve as a logistical nexus within the Alliance's Black Sea security architecture. The port's modern infrastructure would substantially enhance NATO's capacity for rapid deployment, force mobility, and sustainment operations across the region, thereby reinforcing deterrence and readiness in one of the most contested maritime theaters. The project thus embodies a synthesis of economic modernization and security integration, aligning Georgia's development trajectory with the strategic interests of its Western partners. In essence, the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project is not merely a commercial investment but a geostrategic enabler that consolidates Georgia's role as a bridge between Europe and Asia, strengthens its partnership with NATO and the EU, and contributes to the long-term stability, resilience, and security of the Black Sea region.

Keywords: Black Sea Security, Anaklia Port, Georgia, NATO, Geopolitics, Regional Stability, Middle Corridor, Strategic Connectivity.

Introduction

History of Anaklia Port

Anaklia Port and its surrounding territory possess a rich and ancient history. Anaklia was one of the colonies of Heraclea, a city of the Kingdom of Pontus. Furthermore, during the 15th through 17th centuries, Anaklia functioned as a pivotal seaport for the Principality of Odishi, maintaining active trade relations with Trebizond and Constantinople.¹

The concept of constructing a deep-sea port in Georgia, driven by considerations of geographical expediency in the territory of Anaklia village, situated at the confluence of the Enguri River, dates back to the 1960s. The initial endeavor to realize the port's construction was planned during the Soviet era in 1986; however, its implementation proved impossible due to a lack of necessary resources and the prevailing situation on the brink of the Soviet Union's collapse.² Following the restoration of Georgia's independence, several subsequent attempts to construct a port in Anaklia during the 1990s and early 2000s proved unsuccessful. Given the prevailing geopolitical and economic challenges, the idea of building the port remained merely a concept.³ As Georgia pursued closer integration with the European Union and the North Atlantic Organization, the concept of establishing a port city and deep-sea port was reprioritized and officially announced in 2011.⁴ The construction of the Anaklia Port was precisely considered a strategic component of Euro-Atlantic integration. The Anaklia Deep Sea Port is not merely an economic project; it constitutes a pivotal element of security and geopolitical orientation for Georgia and the entire Black Sea region. It is a critical linkage for reinforcing the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), known as the Middle Corridor, which provides a secure alternative for the shipment of goods between the West and Asia, bypassing Russian territory.

Main Part

The Anaklia Port encompasses four principal functions: economic and connective, military, and logistical.

The issue of the Anaklia Port construction was reactivated by the Government of Georgia in 2013-2014, when a corresponding tender was announced to select interested parties for the port's development. Following the tender, the Georgian-American company, Anaklia Development Consortium (LLC TBC Holdings and LLC Conti Group), was declared the winner in 2016. European and a leading US-based port operator were also expected to be involved in the port's construction alongside the consortium.

In Phase One of development, the Anaklia Deep Sea Port is required to reach an operational capacity capable of handling no less than 600,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) per year. This figure corresponds to an estimated 7.8 million tons of cargo annually, based on the industry standard average of 13 tons per TEU. Such capacity will establish Anaklia as a significant regional logistics hub, facilitating large-scale containerized trade flows between Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

1 Tugushi, Abesalom. *Anakliis Istoria* [History of Anaklia]. Zugdidi: Ornati, 1991.

2 Avdaliani, Emil. "Geopolitics Doomed Georgia's Anaklia Project, but Can Also Resurrect It." CACI Analyst, March 9, 2020.

3 Tekla Aslanishvili and Orit Halpern. 2020. "Scenes from a Reclamation." *E-flux Architecture: New Silk Roads*, February 2020.

4 Netgazeti. 2011. "With the Initiative of the President of Georgia, a New City Will Be Built in Samegrelo." December 4, 2011

Upon full completion and transition to its ultimate operational phase, the port's annual cargo turnover is projected to increase dramatically, reaching up to 100 million tons per year. This scale of throughput positions the Anaklia Port not only as Georgia's largest maritime infrastructure project but also as a strategic component in enhancing the country's transit potential, supporting the Middle Corridor initiative, and strengthening connectivity between the Black Sea and global trade networks.⁵ The port is designed to be capable of processing Panamax and post-Panamax cargo ships.

Georgia's Strategic Role in the South Caucasus

Georgia's strategic importance in the South Caucasus is derived from its pivotal geographical location, robust infrastructure, and high potential for international partnership.⁶ Situated on the eastern Black Sea coast, the country serves as a critical transit axis connecting Europe and the South Caucasus and is a principal link between the Black Sea and Caspian basins.^{7 8} Functioning as an energy and logistical corridor—anchored by infrastructure like the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor—Georgia has accrued significant “transit capital,” a diplomatic asset used for foreign-policy leverage.⁹ This geostrategic position places the country squarely within NATO's strategic purview and regional policy.^{10,11}

Georgia's geostrategic role will be further strengthened by the Anaklia Port, considering that the eastern part of the Black Sea lacks deep-sea ports, a factor that has constrained the development of economic relations in the region. Consequently, strategically located, Anaklia is poised to become the exclusive deep-sea port in Georgia, capable of handling large Panamax vessels that currently bypass the country for ports in Türkiye or Russia. More importantly, the deep-sea port will enhance the goods handling capacity of the Trans-Caspian International Transportation Route (TITR), a strategic land trade route linking Europe with Central Asia and China via Georgia, known as the Middle Corridor.¹²

In alignment with Georgia's European integration, the Port is poised to foster Georgia's economic sustainability, mitigate regional dependencies, and reinforce the country's function as a regional hub. All of the aforementioned developments will subsequently strengthen Georgia's role in the region, providing it with the capacity to become a cornerstone for Euro-Atlantic structures in the region, as well as a deserving member of the EU family.

The Role of the Anaklia Port in Euro-Atlantic Security

Anaklia's location on the western flank of Georgia places it at a geographic crossroads between Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The Anaklia Port is the sole deep-sea port on the eastern

5 Ministry of Economy of Georgia. 2023. “Anaklia New Deep Sea Port Public and Private Partnership Project: Statement of Intent for Selection Process of the Private Partner.” February 20, 2008.

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11 Malek, Martin. 2008. “NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks.” *Connections* 7 (3): 30–51.

12 Popkhadze, Guro. “Anaklia's Strategic Gamble: Will Washington's New Maritime Strategy Matter?” *Geopolitics*, June 8, 2025.

Black Sea coast, which could become a vital link in NATO's eastern security architecture. It will enable NATO to strengthen its presence in the Black Sea region, both in terms of logistical and military support. The Port will create new strategic access for NATO towards the South Caucasus, thereby reinforcing its overall eastern flank. Most importantly, the Port has the potential to function as a strategic nexus, thereby ensuring the rapid deployment and sustainment of Alliance forces in the South Caucasus and across the eastern flank, both during crisis or training operations and for humanitarian assistance missions. Furthermore, it should be noted that Anaklia's inherent capability to host or support NATO exercises and naval contingents will further extend the Alliance's presence into one of its most contested maritime theaters.¹³

Nowadays, large vessels can enter the Black Sea from the Mediterranean Sea only through the Bosphorus Strait. However, the eastern littoral of the Black Sea currently lacks a port infrastructure capable of accommodating large vessels carrying eastward-bound cargo. A comparable logistical challenge exists for freight originating in Asia, where the majority of shipments are routed by rail first through Turkey before proceeding to the European Union.¹⁴ The existence of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port will facilitate greater flexibility in cargo transportation between Europe and Asia. The most significant aspect of this route is that the Port will connect Europe and Asia while bypassing Russia. In alignment with the strategic interests of NATO and the European Union, the Port will provide the West with the capacity to reduce Russia's influence over regional transport and energy routes. Above all, the Anaklia Port is poised to play a decisive role in European energy security by enabling the diversification of Caspian resource transit. This shift is strategically vital for mitigating the European Union's dependence on Russian supplies, which impacts its broader geopolitical stance.¹⁵

For the United States, the Anaklia project represents a key strategic instrument for reinforcing Euro-Atlantic security and influence within the Black Sea region. It is critically important for the U.S. that a sovereign, Western-oriented logistical nexus exists in the region, one that is free from Russian influence. Furthermore, the Port will facilitate the movement of U.S. forces across the eastern Black Sea.

Initially, in 2016, a Georgian-American consortium was selected for the execution of the port project. This selection affirms U.S. interest in the Georgian port and, in turn, implies an increase in U.S. economic and political influence within the region.

Alongside the Georgian-American consortium, several international organizations, specifically SSA Marine, Wondernet Express, and G-Star Ltd., were to be involved in the implementation of the project. Furthermore, the project's financing was being planned by international financial institutions, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC).¹⁶ Furthermore, the EU publicly declared its commitment to co-fund the second phase of the Anaklia

13 NATO. 2021. "NATO Ships Exercise in the Black Sea." July 19, 2021.

14 Khutsiberidze, Lika 2025. "The Unrealized Anaklia Port Project – Strategic Importance and Challenges." *Research Institute Gnomon Wise*.

15 Akhmedova, Aksana and Gelashvili Ketevan, 2024. "Impact of Chinese Investment in Anaklia: Strategic Implications for Georgia and Europe." *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*

16 Khutsiberidze, Lika 2025. "The Unrealized Anaklia Port Project – Strategic Importance and Challenges." *Research Institute Gnomon Wise*.

Port construction with a contribution of €233 million, supplementing this with €100 million for the port's critical access railway. This allocation was designated under the framework of the joint EU-World Bank initiative, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).^{17 18} This declaration substantiates the European Union's support for Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and its definitive interest in the Anaklia Port project. According to the plan, the Anaklia Port, constructed with Western investments, was slated to receive its first vessels in 2021.

The substantial significance attributed by the U.S. government to the completion of the Anaklia Port and its subsequent operation under Western auspices is evidenced by the statement delivered by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019: "The project and others will enhance Georgia's relationship with free economies and prevent Georgia from falling prey to Russian or Chinese economic influence. Those pretended friends do not have Georgia's best interests at heart".¹⁹

Unfortunately, owing to a failure to reach consensus between the financial investors and the Government of Georgia concerning the provision of commercial risk guarantees, the contract with the "Anaklia Development Consortium" was terminated on January 9, 2020, based on a decision by the Government of Georgia.²⁰

The significance of the port acquired a distinctive role following 2022., when the geopolitical landscape changed dramatically after Russia invaded Ukraine. Western sanctions severely restricted Russia's ability to utilize its ports for international trade, particularly those that depended on European markets. Novorossiysk, a key port for Russian exports, consequently became less viable under the pressure of these sanctions. Following the selection of the Chinese-Singaporean consortium in the repeated tender for the execution of the Anaklia Port project in 2024, U.S. interest in this endeavor intensified further. The U.S. is concerned that the control of this critical infrastructure by a Chinese state-owned company could potentially compromise U.S. and NATO interests within the framework of the Black Sea security architecture.²¹

Other Interested Actors: Russia and China

The relationship between China (PRC) and Georgia was formalized and strengthened in 2023 when the two nations signed an official strategic partnership, entailing a bilateral "commitment to expanding cooperation in the political, economic, and cultural fields, strengthening collaboration in international affairs, deepening bilateral relations, and safeguarding regional and world peace, stability, and development together".²²

The involvement in the Anaklia Deep Sea Port represents a "turning point" for cooperation between China and Georgia. Crucially, the project will significantly advance China's strategic interests, specifically the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Middle Corridor,

17 Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan. World Bank.

18 Forbes Georgia. 2019. "EU Committed to Finance the Construction of Anaklia Port." January 17, 2019.

19 Civil.ge. 2019. "Secretary Mike Pompeo Reaffirms Strategic Partnership in Meeting PM Bakhtadze." June 12, 2019.

20 Ministry of Infrastructure of Georgia. 2020. "With the Initiative of the President of Georgia, a New City Will Be Built in Samegrelo." January 9, 2020.

21 U.S. Helsinki Commission. 2025. "Bipartisan Helsinki Commission Members Express Concern about Georgian Dream Awarding Anaklia Port Development Rights to Chinese Conglomerate." April 2, 2025.

22 Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Georgia. 2023. "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and Georgia on Establishing a Strategic Partnership." August 7, 2023.

which connects East China to Europe via the Eurasian hinterland. China had expressed interest in the Anaklia Port on previous occasions; however, its operational position was solidified in 2024 following the success of the Chinese-Singaporean consortium in the re-tender for the Anaklia Port project's implementation. The Chinese partner in the consortium, China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), is a state-owned enterprise of the People's Republic of China, sanctioned by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) since June 2021.^{23 24} Despite winning the tender technically, the contractual agreement with the Chinese consortium has not yet been formalized by the Georgian government. It may be perceived that the Georgian party is refraining from cooperation with the Chinese company.

The Anaklia Port is poised to become a "geopolitical instrument" for China, allowing it to leverage critical infrastructure to strengthen its influence in the Caucasus region.

China's involvement in the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project is a highly complex and geopolitically justified step, which unites important elements such as transport provision, geoeconomic influence, geostrategic positioning, and a policy of spatial reinforcement in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, The Chinese-operated Anaklia Port provides Beijing with a critical platform for intelligence gathering on NATO's naval movements and maritime operations in the Black Sea, thereby presenting a security risk to the Euro-Atlantic area.²⁵

With respect to the interests of Russia, as one of the main actors in global politics, regarding the Anaklia Port, it is critically important for Russia to prevent the consolidation of Western influence near its borders, specifically in the Black Sea and the wider Black Sea region. Consequently, the Anaklia Port constitutes a "red flag" for Russia, as it threatens not only its economic interests but also poses a direct threat to its geopolitical power base, along with its established military and defensive posture. From an economic point of view, the Anaklia Port presents a significant competitive challenge to Russia's key maritime facilities, namely the ports of Novorossiysk and St. Petersburg, whose operational viability has been subject to considerable risk since the initiation of the Russia-Ukraine War.²⁶

In light of the strategic Russia-China partnership, the implementation of the Anaklia port under the auspices of Chinese operational control would potentially increase the geopolitical influence of China in the Black Sea region, and consequently that of Russia. This development could be definitively interpreted as an advantageous outcome for Moscow.

Conclusion:

The construction of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port currently remains the only viable project for tangibly enhancing Georgia's economic and geopolitical position. Anaklia possesses the potential to evolve into a vital hub for regional security operations, commercial trade routes, and humanitarian assistance. The port's construction is of inherent strategic interest to Georgia, as Anaklia Port is poised to be a game-changer by significantly enhancing Georgia's transit corridor function,

23 Pompeo, Michael R. 2020. "U.S. Imposes Restrictions on Certain PRC State-Owned Enterprises and Executives for Malign Activities in the South China Sea." *U.S. Department of State Press Statement*, August 26, 2020.

24 Office of Foreign Assets Control. 2021. "Sanctions List Search".

25 Popkhadze, Guro. "Anaklia's Strategic Gamble: Will Washington's New Maritime Strategy Matter?" *Geopolitics*, June 8, 2025.

26 Kapandze, Sergi. 2024. "Georgia's Anti-Western Drift, Anaklia Port, and Lessons for the West." *Geopolitics*, August 4, 2024.

effectively linking Central Asia and the European market across the Caspian and Black Seas. Anaklia will provide a significant boost to the Middle Corridor, also known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

The construction of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port is anticipated to confer multifaceted and substantial benefits for the Georgia, given that it will substantially enhance country's capacity for freight transit and concurrently render the country significantly more attractive to global transport entities. Furthermore, the Port is positioned to catalyze the economic development of the wider region by establishing itself as a crucial transportation nexus for Georgia and its neighboring states, thereby fortifying commercial linkages and advancing regional integration. Beyond the economic advantages, the Anaklia Port will significantly enhance Georgia's geopolitical importance. The country is positioned to become a crucial linkage in the transport corridor connecting Europe and Asia, which will subsequently revitalize its role in international trade and strengthen its position on the global stage. The Anaklia Deep Sea Port, serving as an alternative line for energy transmission routes, is set to enhance energy security for the country internally, as well as for its Western allies.

Considering that global power dynamics are increasingly defined by supervision over maritime chokepoints and critical trade infrastructure, the Anaklia Port constitutes more than a Georgian infrastructure project—it is a strategic asset for the country. As an invaluable asset, the Port, corresponding to its geopolitical location and role, is positioned at the nexus of interest for the main actors in global politics: on one side, the U.S. and NATO, and on the other, China. Anaklia offers the U.S. a rare opportunity to anchor a long-term maritime and strategic presence on the Eastern edge of Europe. Conversely, the Port would afford China the opportunity to reinforce its influence in the Caucasus region, which is deemed unacceptable by the United States.

The U.S.-China competition over Eurasian ports and other critical infrastructure, coupled with the Chinese company's interest in the construction of the Anaklia Port, significantly raises Anaklia's importance within the U.S. sphere of observation and its direct strategic interests.

Inasmuch as the foreign policy of the United States aims to enhance the sovereign capacity of Georgia and maintain support for its Euro-Atlantic integration, the development of strategic infrastructure through the Western partnership is essential for reinforcing Georgia's sovereignty and its political resilience. Furthermore, such infrastructure serves to realize the nation's strategic objective, as stipulated by its constitution: the securing of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Anaklia's completion is indispensable for long-term Black Sea region security. Consequently, the U.S., the European Union, and NATO ought to increase their support for Georgia concerning the linkage and reinforcement of the Port with Western strategic interests. Consequently, sustained support of Georgia's maritime security and port defense capabilities must be strengthened. Reciprocally, Georgia on its end should prioritize partners adhering to high Western standards and formally institutionalize dual-use agreements (civilian/military) with the NATO Alliance.

The Anaklia Deep-Sea Port is a strategic necessity that reinforces NATO's deterrence, strengthens Georgia's resilience, and provides a secure, non-Russian transportation route for the Euro-Atlantic community.

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A MICROMODEL OF GLOBAL DISORDER: FRAGILE SECURITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of fragile security in the Middle East and analyzes its multifaceted consequences. Its central thesis posits that the regional security crisis is not a mere aggregate of isolated conflicts, but rather a systemic condition driven by the convergence of two fundamental dynamics: the erosion of the unipolar global order and the concurrent intensification of regional rivalries. The paper contends that the Middle East has become a primary manifestation of the emergent, more fragmented, and conflict-prone international system taking shape in the post-American era. Adopting a holistic security concept that transcends the traditional state-centric paradigm, this study focuses on the structural causes of fragility, its specific manifestations, and its transnational repercussions.

The analysis reveals that the diminishing role of the United States as the principal security guarantor in the region has created a power vacuum. This void has, in turn, intensified the struggle for regional hegemony, primarily between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This "new Cold War" manifests in the fragmentation of sovereignty and the collapse of state institutions in countries such as Syria and Yemen. The research demonstrates that the decay of statehood provides fertile ground for the rise of powerful transnational non-state actors (e.g., Hezbollah, the Houthis), which in turn further deepen state weakness and emerge as principal drivers of regional instability.

The concluding section of the paper analyzes the mechanisms through which the consequences of this fragility are exported globally. The research identifies three primary vectors of this spillover: geo-economic (destabilization of global trade routes and energy markets), humanitarian (an unprecedented forced migration crisis impacting neighboring countries and Europe alike), and normative (the erosion of international law principles and global governance institutions, including the UN Security Council). Ultimately, the paper concludes that the Middle East functions as a micromodel of global disorder, and studying its crisis is critically important for comprehending the challenges confronting the international system in the 21st century.

Keywords: Fragile Security, Middle East, Global Order, Regional Rivalry, Failed States, Non-State Actors.

Introduction

Among the foremost challenges confronting the contemporary international system is the fundamental transformation of the security architecture in the Middle East. The urgency of this issue is driven not only by the acute conflicts unfolding within the region but also by the profound structural shifts that are altering both regional and global balances of power. The fragile security of the Middle East is no longer a localized phenomenon; it has evolved into a catalyst on a global scale, testing the resilience of the existing international order and accelerating its erosion. The value of this paper lies precisely in its in-depth analysis of this complex and multidimensional problem, an analysis that moves beyond traditional geopolitical assessments to investigate both the causes of fragility and its far-reaching consequences.

The significance of this issue is amplified by the fact that the regional order, which for decades was structured by an external hegemon, is ceding ground to a far more complex and less predictable competitive multipolarity.¹ In this environment, regional states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are attempting to expand their spheres of influence, a process accompanied by new forms of confrontation and proxy wars. Concurrently, the heightened engagement of global actors, particularly Russia and China, further complicates the security equation and forges a new geo-strategic reality.² Consequently, the study of processes unfolding in the Middle East is no longer merely a subject of regional studies; it has evolved into an inquiry into a pivotal arena for the global struggle for power.

The most conspicuous manifestation of these processes is the decay of state institutions in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Such a collapse creates ungoverned spaces where non-state armed actors gain strength. These groups, often receiving support from external patrons, are capable not only of escalating local conflicts but also of threatening international stability. A stark illustration of this is the threat posed to global trade in the Red Sea, which is directly linked to the dynamics of the conflict in Yemen.³ Accordingly, the issue's relevance is also defined by how localized instability can trigger a global economic and security crisis. Against this backdrop, researching the fragile security of the Middle East is paramount to understanding the challenges facing the modern world and the potential strategic responses to them.

To build a solid analytical foundation for this paper, it is vital to precisely conceptualize the fundamental terms that form the logical core of the research. First and foremost, the concept of security in this study radically transcends its traditional, realist-paradigm definition, which equates it with the military protection and territorial integrity of the state. Such a perspective is insufficient for comprehending the complex reality of the Middle East, where the primary threats are often domestic or transnational in nature, rather than classic interstate aggression. Consequently, the research employs a critical and holistic understanding of security, viewing it as a multi-level and multi-sectoral phenomenon. From this perspective, the ultimate referent object of security is

1 Kristina Kausch, *Competitive Multipolarity in the Middle East* (IAI Working Papers 14 | 10, Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2014)

2 Tore T. Petersen, "The United States, the Middle East and Grand Strategy," in *Grand Strategy in the Contemporary Middle East: The Concepts and Debates*, ed. Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2022).

3 Karim Sadjadpour and Frederic Wehrey, *The Houthi Challenge: From Yemen's Civil War to Global Shipping Lanes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

not the state, but rather the individual and society. The analysis focuses on human security, which entails both “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want,” as it is this condition that creates the foundation for sustainable peace.⁴

It is precisely this systemic deficit of comprehensive, holistic security that gives rise to the condition termed “fragility” in this paper. This term denotes not merely instability, which may be temporary, but a chronic, structural pathology of the security system. Fragility is the system’s inherent inability to withstand internal or external shocks without undergoing collapse. It is a state in which the system loses not only its stability but also its capacity for self-renewal and positive adaptation. Thus, fragility is a latent, ever-present vulnerability that can escalate into an open crisis at any moment.

The primary source of regional security fragility is to be found in the fundamental transformation of the global order. In this study, “order” is understood as the combination of power balances, hierarchies, and shared institutions and norms that renders the behavior of international actors more or less predictable. The post-Cold War unipolar moment, which, despite its flaws, provided a degree of predictability in the region, has been replaced by unstructured confrontation. This is not a classic, balance-based multipolarity but rather a chaotic competition where the “rules of the game” have themselves become the main object of contention. In these conditions, the Middle East has become a manifestation of global disorder.

Finally, emanating from this fragile and competitive order are the multi-layered consequences that this paper is dedicated to investigating. This concept is not limited to the direct manifestations of conflict. It encompasses four primary categories of outcomes: humanitarian (the global crisis of forced displacement, suffering of populations), geopolitical (the erosion of sovereignty and the emergence of proxy zones), geo-economic (the destabilization of global supply chains and energy markets), and normative (the delegitimization of the principles of international law and multilateralism). These consequences are interconnected and transnational in nature, transforming the problems of the Middle East into an existential challenge for the entire international system.

Literature Review

Contemporary research on security in the Middle East is increasingly situated within the broader context of global order transformation. A consensus is solidifying in academic discourse that the end of the American unipolar moment has produced a power vacuum and a state of structural ambiguity in the region.⁵ This shift, as a significant number of scholars note, does not simply entail the establishment of a new balance but gives rise to a far more fragmented and conflict-ridden environment. G. John Ikenberry describes this new reality as a competition among three “worlds”—the West, the East, and the Global South—for the future shape of world order, with the Middle East serving as a primary epicenter of this struggle.⁶ At the same time, researchers such as Evans and Spohr point to the rise of global revisionism, where not only traditional adversaries but even

4 Yazdani, Ehsan, Jinghan Zeng, and Mohammad Bagheri. “A Critical Approach to Security in the Middle East: Towards Sustainable Security.” *Asian Review of Political Economy*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2025.

5 Hal Brands, “The American Century Is Over. What’s Next?” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2024.

6 G. John Ikenberry, “The Three Worlds: The West, East and South and the Competition to Shape Global Order,” *International Affairs* 100, no. 1 (2024): 121–138.

actors within the Western world seek to alter the existing status quo, further intensifying the chaos in the region.⁷

Some scholars consider the new “Cold War” in the Middle East to be a regional manifestation of these global-level changes. Gregory Gause employs this term to describe the systemic rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which he argues is the main driver of regional instability.⁸ Such an analysis transcends traditional geopolitics to include ideological and sectarian dimensions that spread through a network of proxy conflicts across the entire region, from Lebanon to Yemen. Anahita Motazed-Rad directly links the strategies of global actors to regional dynamics, demonstrating how the United States, Russia, and China all leverage regional tensions to strengthen their own positions.⁹ This approach underscores that understanding local crises is impossible without connecting them to their global context.

In parallel, a reconceptualization of the notion of security is actively underway in the scholarly literature. A growing number of researchers critique traditional, state-centric approaches and propose alternative frameworks. Enayatollah Yazdani and his co-authors argue that to comprehend the crisis in the Middle East, it is necessary to apply the concept of “sustainable security,” which focuses on the humanitarian dimension and regards the individual as the primary beneficiary of security.¹⁰ This critical perspective allows for a focus on the fundamental causes of fragility, such as failed states, crises of governance, and unresolved ethno-political conflicts like the Kurdish issue.¹¹

Ultimately, contemporary studies are devoting increasing attention to the specific, transnational consequences of fragile security. Lina Khatib, using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case study, shows how the escalation of a single local crisis can call the entire regional security architecture into question.¹² Furthermore, Karim Sadjadpour and Frederic Wehrey analyze the case of the Houthis to illustrate how a non-state actor operating within the territory of a failed state can inflict critical damage on the global economic system.¹³ Thus, the modern scholarly discourse unanimously acknowledges that fragility in the Middle East is a multi-causal phenomenon, rooted in global shifts, whose consequences have long transcended the region’s borders and directly impact international peace and stability.

Methodology and Structure

The main body of this paper is designed to provide a multi-level and systemic analysis of the phenomenon of fragile security. The research will systematically examine the structural causes

7 Alex Evans, “Are We All Revisionists Now?” in *International Order Strategies Past and Present*, ed. Alex McKeil, *LSE IDEAS Research Report* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2024).

8 F. Gregory Gause III, “The New Middle East Cold War: Regional Rivalry and the Search for Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023.

9 Amir Motazed-Rad, “Middle East in Light of International Order Strategies, Past and Present,” in *International Order Strategies Past and Present*, ed. Alex McKeil, *LSE IDEAS Research Report* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2024).

10 Ehsan Yazdani, Jinghan Zeng, and Mohammad Bagheri, “A Critical Approach to Security in the Middle East: Towards Sustainable Security,” *Asian Review of Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (2025).

11 Amir Vali, “The Kurdish Question and the Future of the Middle East,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 59, no. 4 (2023): 605–620.

12 Laura Khatib, “Beyond the Two-State Solution: A Regional Security Framework for Israel-Palestine,” *Chatham House Research Paper*, November 2023.

13 Karim Sadjadpour and Frederic Wehrey, *The Houthi Challenge: From Yemen’s Civil War to Global Shipping Lanes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

that condition the crisis in the region. First, the shift in the global balance of power will be analyzed, specifically the erosion of the unipolar system and the process of forming a competitive multipolarity. Subsequently, attention will focus on the manifestation of this global transformation at the regional level, particularly the intensified geopolitical competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which constitutes the main axis of regional instability. The research then transitions to an examination of the specific manifestations of fragility. The phenomenon of state collapse will be discussed in detail using the examples of Syria and Yemen, and the role of powerful non-state actors, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, and their influence on the dynamics and internationalization of conflicts will also be analyzed. The concluding section of the main body will be devoted to an analysis of the multidimensional consequences of fragile security. The study will investigate both geo-economic consequences, including the destabilization of global trade routes and energy markets, and humanitarian catastrophes, such as the forced migration crisis. Finally, the normative consequences will be assessed, which entail the erosion of the principles of international law and the concept of sovereignty. This structure allows for a demonstration of the complex network of causal links that connect local conflicts, regional rivalries, and global shifts.

Main Part

A fundamental analysis of the contemporary fragility of security in the Middle East necessitates an examination of the structural foundations upon which the regional order rested for decades following the end of the Cold War. This foundation was primarily based on the dominant role of the United States as an extra-regional hegemon. Washington performed the function of the principal security guarantor, which entailed maintaining a network of strategic alliances, protecting maritime communications, and intervening in regional conflicts to preserve the balance of power. This system, despite its internal contradictions, offered the region a degree of predictability and a structural framework. It is precisely the erosion of this role that has become one of the primary catalysts for regional destabilization, creating the conditions for the chronic fragility we observe today.¹⁴

The weakening of the U.S. strategic posture was conditioned by a multi-faceted process. The protracted and costly military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan led to so-called “strategic fatigue” and eroded Washington’s political will to undertake further large-scale interventions. This was compounded by the strategic “pivot to Asia” declared by the Barack Obama administration, which was perceived by regional actors not as a simple political maneuver, but as a sign of a fundamental reassessment of American global priorities. A consensus is increasingly solidifying in academic discourse that the end of the American unipolar moment, which emerged after the Cold War, produced a power vacuum in the region.¹⁵ This vacuum was not filled by a new, stable order; instead, it became an arena for various actors to contest for influence.

The most direct consequence of weakening American hegemony was the emergence of a crisis of confidence among Washington’s traditional partners, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These nations began to question the credibility of American security guarantees,

¹⁴ Amir Motazed-Rad, “Middle East in Light of International Order Strategies, Past and Present,” in *International Order Strategies Past and Present*, ed. Alex McKeil, *LSE IDEAS Research Report* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2024).

¹⁵ Hal Brands, “The American Century Is Over. What’s Next?” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2024.

which prompted them to seek strategic autonomy and to pursue their own, more assertive foreign policies. This process involved both increasing their military capabilities and engaging in diplomatic diversification, including the normalization of relations with Israel while simultaneously opening dialogue with adversaries such as Iran. In parallel, the diminished U.S. position created unique opportunities for regional revisionist powers, foremost among them Iran. Tehran capitalized on the resulting vacuum to fortify its positions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen through its network of proxies, without having to fear decisive American opposition.

Ultimately, the transformation of the U.S. role transitioned the region from a relatively hierarchical and predictable system to a state of chaotic, competitive multipolarity (Kausch, 2014). The absence of a single dominant actor that could serve as the final arbiter of disputes generated uncertainty and exacerbated all existing conflicts. Consequently, the decline of American influence should be viewed not as merely one factor among many, but as the fundamental structural cause that created fertile ground for all other destabilizing factors to intensify.

The power vacuum left by the United States was perceived by regional actors not as an opportunity to establish peace, but as a historic chance to expand their own influence. This process triggered an unprecedented escalation of regional rivalry, which contemporary scholarly literature increasingly refers to as the Middle East's "new Cold War".¹⁶ Unlike the classic Cold War, this is not a bipolar confrontation between two global superpowers, but a struggle for regional hegemony between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This conflict has become the defining axis of the regional security architecture and the primary structural source of fragility, feeding and exacerbating nearly every local crisis.

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. At the geopolitical level, this competition manifests as a zero-sum struggle for spheres of influence, transforming the entire region—from Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and Yemen—into a single conflict arena. Tehran, through its "Axis of Resistance" strategy, seeks to create a corridor of Shi'a political and military influence that would grant it direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. Riyadh, along with its Sunni partners, perceives this strategy as an existential threat and attempts to contain Iranian influence on all fronts by supporting proxy groups. At the sectarian level, the conflict utilizes the historical narrative of the Shia-Sunni schism. Although the foundation of the rivalry is political rather than theological, both sides actively instrumentalize religious identity to legitimize their actions, mobilize populations, and demonize the adversary. At the ideological level, two antagonistic models of governance are pitted against each other: Iran's revolutionary, theocratic, and anti-Western regime, and Saudi Arabia's conservative, monarchical, and (historically) pro-Western system.

Against the backdrop of this central rivalry, the situation is further complicated by the independent strategies of other powerful regional actors, namely Turkey and Israel. Turkey seeks to establish itself as a third, independent power belonging to neither the Iranian nor the Saudi bloc. Ankara acts on its own neo-Ottoman or pan-Turkic ambitions and often pursues policies that cut across the lines of the Iran-Saudi confrontation, making it an unpredictable and situational actor, particularly in Syria and Iraq. In turn, the primary objective of Israel's strategy is to contain Iran's

¹⁶ F. Gregory Gause III, "The New Middle East Cold War: Regional Rivalry and the Search for Order," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023.

nuclear program and neutralize its proxy network, especially Hezbollah. This existential threat has pushed Israel toward a tactical and, subsequently, a formal alliance with the Sunni monarchies of the Persian Gulf in the form of the “Abraham Accords.” This has fundamentally altered the region’s traditional conflict map, where the Arab-Israeli confrontation has been partially supplanted by an Arab-Persian rivalry.¹⁷ Ultimately, the regional security system is characterized not by stable bipolarity, but by a dynamic and fragmented competition where alliances are often situational, creating an environment of permanent fragility and high risk of escalation.

The strategic confrontation between regional and global actors finds its most destructive and tragic expression in the region’s most vulnerable states, where this competition facilitates the fragmentation of sovereignty and the total collapse of state institutions. Fragility, in this context, ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes a concrete reality in which the state loses its fundamental attribute: the legitimate monopoly on violence and the ability to effectively govern its own territory. This process gives rise to multiple competing authorities within the same geographical space and turns the country into a permanent theater of conflict. The cases of Syria and Yemen represent classic and harrowing illustrations of this phenomenon.

Syria has become the archetype of a failed state, where an internal civil confrontation, instrumentalized by regional actors, has morphed into a complete fragmentation of sovereignty. The country’s territory is now de facto partitioned into enclaves controlled by external patrons, where the authority of the central government is nominal. The Assad regime, reliant on Russian and Iranian military and economic support, controls a portion of the country. However, Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in the north, while the northeast is governed by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) under U.S. patronage. Thus, Syria as a unified sovereign state has practically ceased to exist, transforming into a frozen conflict zone where the interests of various actors intersect and block any prospect of a political resolution (International Crisis Group, 2023).

A similar, though distinctly dynamic, process has unfolded in Yemen, where the collapse of statehood is the result of a synthesis of internal political schism and the Saudi-Iranian proxy war. The conflict between the internationally recognized government and the Iran-backed Houthi movement has led to the complete paralysis of state institutions and the division of the country into two parts. The outcome of this collapse is not only one of the world’s most severe humanitarian catastrophes but also the empowerment of a non-state actor, the Houthis, to the extent that they control the capital, possess strategic military capabilities, and pose a direct threat to global maritime trade.¹⁸ The case of Yemen demonstrates how a state’s internal collapse can give rise to an actor that becomes a global-level challenge.

The cases of Lebanon and Libya must be considered within this same context. Lebanon exemplifies the functional paralysis of a state where, against a backdrop of economic collapse and a dysfunctional political system, the non-state actor Hezbollah possesses military power exceeding that of the national army and influences the state’s foreign and domestic policy. Libya, since 2011, remains a symbol of fragmentation, with rival eastern and western governments backed by various

17 Tore T. Petersen, “The United States, the Middle East and Grand Strategy,” in *Grand Strategy in the Contemporary Middle East: The Concepts and Debates*, ed. Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2022).

18 Karim Sadjadpour and Frederic Wehrey, *The Houthi Challenge: From Yemen’s Civil War to Global Shipping Lanes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

external powers (Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia). Ultimately, the examples of these countries confirm that the fragmentation of sovereignty in the Middle East is not an exception, but a systemic and regular manifestation of regional fragility.

The Rise of Non-State Actors: From Symptom to Cause of Fragility

The fragmentation of statehood and the erosion of sovereignty create an ideal environment for the rise of powerful, armed non-state actors. These groups are not merely symptoms of state weakness; they represent both a consequence and an active cause of fragility. A symbiotic relationship exists between them: the collapse of state institutions creates a power vacuum that these actors fill, while their empowerment, in turn, further weakens and fragments the state, creating a vicious cycle of fragility. These actors, often fueled by transnational ideologies and the support of external patrons, bring about a diffusion of power and a fundamental transformation of the regional security landscape. The phenomena of Hezbollah, the Houthis, and the Islamic State represent different, yet equally destructive, models of this process.

Hezbollah is the most successful and developed example of the institutionalization of a non-state actor, functioning as a *de facto* “state within a state” in Lebanon. Amidst the Lebanese state’s chronic weakness and sectarian political system, Hezbollah has managed to develop state-like capabilities: it possesses a military force far stronger and more experienced than the national army, manages a broad network of social services, and holds significant political leverage within the country. Its uniqueness lies in its hybrid nature: it simultaneously operates as a legitimate part of Lebanon’s political system and as a transnational instrument of Iran’s revolutionary strategy in Syria, Iraq, and the confrontation with Israel. This dual status allows it to benefit from both state-level legitimacy and the flexibility of a non-state actor, making it one of the most influential and difficult-to-manage forces in the region.

The Houthi movement (Ansar Allah) in Yemen demonstrates how a local, domestic group can acquire global strategic importance. Initially, the Houthis were a movement focused on the revival of Zaydi identity in northern Yemen, fighting against the central government. However, the collapse of the Yemeni state, Saudi Arabia’s intervention, and growing support from Iran transformed them into the country’s *de facto* ruling power. The culmination of their strategic transformation was the campaign of attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea, through which they proved their ability to directly harm the global economy and provoke a military response from world powers. The Houthi case is a clear illustration of how fragility transforms a local actor into a global security problem.

The phenomenon of the Islamic State (ISIS), in contrast, underscores the resilience of ideology even after territorial defeat. Although the “caliphate” controlled by ISIS in Iraq and Syria was destroyed, the organization did not disappear. It transformed into a decentralized, global network and, most importantly, retained its ideological appeal. Salafi-jihadist ideology continues to find fertile ground in the ungoverned spaces and marginalized communities that emerge from state collapse. The threat of ISIS today is more virtual and ideological than physical and territorial, which

makes combating it even more complex. Ultimately, the analysis of these three actors reveals that power in the Middle East is no longer the exclusive prerogative of states. These transnational groups, with their own ideologies, resources, and strategic goals, have become defining players in the regional order.

The Global Export of Crisis: Geo-economic and Humanitarian Consequences

The consequences of the fracturing of the security architecture in the Middle East do not remain within the borders of failed states. On the contrary, regional fragility generates systemic shocks that propagate through the international system along two primary, interconnected vectors: geo-economic destabilization and humanitarian catastrophes. These two phenomena feed and reinforce each other, transforming the region's internal problems into matters of global security and stability. An analysis of these processes clearly shows how the crisis in the Middle East is "exported" to the rest of the world.

From a geo-economic perspective, the fragility of the Middle East poses a direct threat to the arteries vital for the functioning of the global economy. The most salient example of this is the vulnerability of strategic maritime routes. The Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the shortest sea route connecting Asia and Europe, have become targets for the Houthis, a non-state actor empowered by the collapse of the Yemeni state. Their attacks on international shipping have forced global shipping companies to reroute, causing supply chain disruptions, a sharp increase in transportation costs, and heightened global inflationary pressure. This case is a unique precedent, demonstrating how a local actor operating from an ungoverned territory can paralyze the global economic system.¹⁹ The Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important energy chokepoint, is under a similar, ever-present threat, with Iran using the possibility of its blockade as strategic leverage. Furthermore, regional instability creates a persistent risk premium in global energy markets. Conflicts in oil-producing countries like Iraq and Libya, and the constant threat of a large-scale war, lead to price volatility and deter the long-term investment necessary for ensuring energy security.

In parallel with the geo-economic impacts, the most tragic and direct outcome of regional fragility is the humanitarian catastrophe, at the center of which lies an unprecedented crisis of forced displacement. The Syrian conflict has become the primary source of the twenty-first century's refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) crisis, with more than half of the pre-war population forced to flee their homes. Millions have become refugees from Yemen, Iraq, and other conflict zones, representing a total collapse of human security, as defined by critical security theory.²⁰ This crisis is not confined to its humanitarian dimension; it has a profoundly destructive impact on neighboring states. Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, which have hosted millions of refugees, have experienced immense strain on their economies, social welfare systems (healthcare, education), and political stability. In Lebanon, the Syrian refugee crisis further exacerbated the existing economic collapse and the delicate sectarian balance. Moreover, the 2015 migration wave to Europe, driven by the Syrian war, triggered a serious political crisis, strengthened populist and anti-immigrant sentiments, and created deep rifts among European Union member states. This clearly demon-

19 Karim Sajjadpour and Frederic Wehrey, *The Houthi Challenge: From Yemen's Civil War to Global Shipping Lanes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

20 Ehsan Yazdani, Jinghan Zeng, and Mohammad Bagheri, "A Critical Approach to Security in the Middle East: Towards Sustainable Security," *Asian Review of Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (2025).

strates that the internal conflicts of the Middle East have a direct and immediate impact on the political processes of Western democracies. Ultimately, geo-economic disruptions and humanitarian catastrophes are two sides of the same coin, together creating the mechanism through which the fragility of the Middle East becomes a global problem.

The Normative Fallout: The Erosion of International Law and Institutions

Beyond the geo-economic and humanitarian consequences of the Middle East's fragile security lies an even more profound and long-term outcome: the systemic erosion of the normative foundations upon which the post-World War II international order was built. The region has become a laboratory of sorts, where the fundamental principles of international law are not merely violated but are deliberately deconstructed by both state and non-state actors. This process is unfolding in two interconnected directions: first, the practical devaluation of foundational norms of international law, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity; and second, the functional paralysis of the institutions, primarily the UN Security Council, tasked with upholding these norms.

The crisis of international law is most vividly manifested in the systematic disregard for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The conflicts in the Middle East are no longer just internal civil wars; they are proxy wars waged by external powers that directly violate the borders of sovereign states. Iran's strategy, based on supporting non-state armed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, constitutes a policy of deliberately undermining the sovereignty of neighboring countries. Similarly, Turkey's military operations in northern Syria and Iraq, even if justified by national security arguments, directly violate the territorial integrity of these nations. Russia's military intervention in Syria, which saved a regime that had lost its international and domestic legitimacy, also represents an instrumentalization of the principle of sovereignty. The combination of these actions is creating a kind of post-Westphalian reality in the region, where state borders are permeable and sovereignty is conditional, dependent on the interests of more powerful regional or global patrons.

Concurrently, the rules governing the conduct of war (*jus in bello*) are in deep crisis. Conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and especially the Gaza Strip are characterized by the indiscriminate and disproportionate targeting of civilian populations and critical infrastructure. The systematic violation of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, including distinction and proportionality, not only causes immense human suffering but also normalizes brutality, threatening the universality of the rules of war.²¹

Such large-scale violations of norms are made possible by the functional paralysis of the primary international institution charged with maintaining international peace and security. In the process of resolving Middle Eastern crises, the UN Security Council has become not an effective mechanism, but an arena for the geopolitical confrontation of global powers. The main instrument for this is the use of the veto power, not to uphold principles, but to protect client states and strategic interests. The Syrian conflict is a classic example, where Russia, often with China's support,

²¹ Laura Khatib, "Beyond the Two-State Solution: A Regional Security Framework for Israel-Palestine," *Chatham House Research Paper*, November 2023.

repeatedly blocked resolutions that would have established the accountability of the Assad regime. Similarly, the historical use of the veto by the United States in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict creates a perception of double standards and undermines the Council's neutrality and legitimacy.

The inaction of the Security Council leads not only to the protraction of specific crises but also to a profound crisis of the entire UN-centric system of global governance. When the Council is perceived not as the guarantor of international law but as a political tool of great powers, its authority diminishes to zero. This institutional vacuum is filled by alternative, often less transparent and inclusive diplomatic formats, such as the Astana process for Syria. Ultimately, the systemic violation of international norms in the Middle East, reinforced by the paralysis of the UN Security Council, represents not just a regional tragedy but an active process of dismantling the global order, pushing the international system toward a more dangerous, anarchic reality where the final arbiter of disputes is not law, but force.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this paper has demonstrated that the fragile security prevailing in the Middle East does not represent a simple collection of isolated crises. It is a complex, systemic condition that has arisen from the convergence of a fundamental transformation in the global balance of power and an intensified regional rivalry against this backdrop. The central thesis of this research is that the destructive processes unfolding in the region are not merely a local problem, but a manifestation of the new, more fragmented, and conflict-prone international order that is taking shape following the end of the unipolar moment. The paper has systematically illustrated the cause-and-effect chain that conditions this fragility: the erosion of the role of the United States as the region's principal security guarantor created a power vacuum. This vacuum, in turn, served as a catalyst for a new phase in the struggle for regional hegemony, known in scholarly discourse as the Middle East's "new Cold War". This rivalry, primarily between Iran and Saudi Arabia, finds its most brutal expression in the region's weak states, where it triggers the collapse of sovereignty and creates fertile ground for the rise of powerful non-state actors.

The research has established that the consequences of this structural fragility are profoundly transnational and exert a systemic impact on the entire international community. At the geo-economic level, regional instability poses a direct threat to the stability of the global economy. The control of strategic maritime routes by non-state actors, as witnessed in the case of the Houthis, exposes the vulnerability of global supply chains and proves that local conflicts can trigger global economic shocks. Simultaneously, the humanitarian catastrophe spawned by the wars in Syria and Yemen has become the source of an unprecedented crisis of forced migration. This crisis has not only burdened the socio-economic conditions of neighboring countries but has also directly influenced European political processes by strengthening populist forces and creating rifts within the European Union. These two consequences, the geo-economic and the humanitarian, are accompanied by an even more dangerous normative crisis. The systematic violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the institutional impotence of the UN Security Council

in resolving Middle Eastern conflicts are leading to the delegitimization of the entire rules-based international order and its replacement by a reality where power prevails over law.

Ultimately, the analysis of the Middle East's fragile security offers a significant, albeit alarming, conclusion about what the future world order might look like. The region serves as a micromodel of sorts for global anarchy, where the absence of hegemonic stability, the rise of revisionist actors, and the paralysis of global institutions create conditions of perpetual conflict. In this reality, traditional, state-centric security models lose all relevance. The research makes it clear that achieving sustainable peace is impossible without resolving the fundamental problems that create a deficit in human security, such as crises of governance, economic inequality, and the absence of social justice. Consequently, any policy limited to military or superficial diplomatic management of crises is doomed to fail.

From a forward-looking perspective, the only path to regional stability remains the creation of a new, inclusive security architecture based not on zero-sum principles, but on a shared understanding of common threats and on cooperation. However, in the current geopolitical climate, the creation of such an architecture appears highly unrealistic. Against this backdrop, future research should focus not only on geopolitical processes but also on the resilience of the societies that inhabit these fragile states. It is possible that precisely at the local, societal level exists the potential for peacebuilding that could create an alternative to the destructive, top-down geopolitics.

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RUSSIA'S AGGRESSIVE POLICY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO PARTNER STATES

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Abstract

The Black Sea region has become one of the central geopolitical arenas where Russia's aggressive policy directly shapes security dynamics and poses a threat to NATO partner states -particularly Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. The study aims to provide a structural analysis of Russia's regional behavior, encompassing military, energy, informational, and diplomatic instruments. Since the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the Kremlin has systematically employed hybrid warfare tools to restore its sphere of influence, a strategy that advanced to a new phase with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale aggression launched in 2022.

The research is based on the theoretical frameworks of neorealism and revisionism, which make it possible to interpret Russia's behavior as a challenge to the existing international order. The analysis reveals that the militarization of the Black Sea, the policy of energy control, and coordinated disinformation campaigns significantly weaken the sovereignty and security stability of NATO partner states.

The paper also assesses NATO's response mechanisms, including cooperation within the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP) and the strategic potential of the Black Sea Security Initiative (BSSI).

In the concluding section, the study presents recommendations for strengthening regional security: reinforcing NATO's forward posture in the Black Sea area, enhancing the defense capabilities of partner states, and developing joint mechanisms for information and cyber security.

The long-term consequences of Russia's aggressive policy demonstrate that the security of the Black Sea is no longer merely a regional concern -it has become a European and Euro-Atlantic strategic challenge, one that requires a unified, coordinated, and preventive political response

Keywords: Policy, Region, Security, Aggression, Conflict, War, Partnership.

Introduction

The Black Sea region has emerged as one of the most dynamic and strategically significant areas in contemporary international politics. Geographically, it connects Europe and Asia -bordered to the north by Russia and to the south by NATO member and partner states -thus serving as a strategic bridge between the Western and Eurasian spheres. The region's geopolitical importance has significantly increased since the end of the Cold War, particularly following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022. These developments have transformed the Black Sea from a regional issue into a global security challenge that directly affects the strategic environment of NATO partner states.

Over the past two decades, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation has clearly followed a revisionist trajectory, aiming to restore influence across the post-Soviet space and to halt the eastward expansion of Euro-Atlantic structures. In this context, the Black Sea region serves as a strategic platform from which the Kremlin projects military, energy, informational, and diplomatic pressure on neighboring countries. This policy extends beyond territorial expansion and encompasses a wide range of hybrid warfare instruments -including disinformation campaigns, energy coercion, cyberattacks, and economic manipulation.

NATO partner states -Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova -experience this policy as direct pressure. Russia's strategic objective is to obstruct their Euro-Atlantic integration and maintain an "arc of frozen conflicts" around them, thereby undermining their security and development processes.

The August 2008 war demonstrated Russia's willingness to use military force to maintain influence in the South Caucasus. Since 2014, the Kremlin has expanded this approach through the strengthening of the Black Sea Fleet, the annexation of Ukrainian territory, and its military operations in Syria, all of which have further consolidated Moscow's strategic posture in the Black Sea basin.

Against this background, NATO and its partners face a new set of security challenges. Although the Alliance has launched several strategic initiatives in the Black Sea region -including the "Enhanced Opportunities Partnership" (EOP) and the "Black Sea Security Initiative" (BSSI) -Russia's aggressive behavior continues to represent a fundamental threat to regional stability. Analyzing Moscow's actions in this area is therefore essential for identifying the contours of a new security architecture and designing effective response mechanisms.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the forms of Russia's aggressive policy in the Black Sea region and to determine its strategic implications for NATO partner states. The research applies the theoretical frameworks of neorealism and revisionism, which enable the interpretation of Russia's behavior as an attempt to restore power and to challenge the existing international order. Additionally, the concept of hybrid warfare is employed to identify both conventional and non-traditional instruments of coercion.

The methodological approach of this research includes documentary analysis, case study, comparative examination among partner states, and expert interpretation of regional security dynamics.

This study seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. How has Russia's strategy in the Black Sea region transformed since 2008?
2. What instruments does the Kremlin employ to preserve regional influence?
3. What are the strategic consequences of this policy for NATO partner states?
4. How effectively does NATO implement regional responses to Russian aggression?

Ultimately, the study argues that Russia's aggressive policy in the Black Sea region does not represent a temporary crisis but a long-term strategic process aimed at undermining the Euro-Atlantic security system and destabilizing the sovereignty of partner countries. Therefore, the strengthening of regional security requires not only individual, but also collective and coordinated political responses.

Main Part

I. The Geopolitical Significance of the Black Sea Region

The Black Sea region has historically served as an arena where the interests of the continental Eurasian powers and the Atlantic world intersect. Its geostrategic location -positioned between Europe and Asia -determines its importance both from a military-political and economic perspective. The Black Sea functions not only as a transportation and energy corridor but also as one of the key elements of the security architecture across the entire Eurasian space.¹

The region's strategic importance intensified after the end of the Cold War, when former Soviet republics -Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova -embarked on a foreign policy course oriented toward the West. During the same period, NATO began its eastward enlargement, which Moscow perceived as a direct weakening of its sphere of influence. Consequently, the Black Sea evolved into a "geopolitical front line" where the principles of the open Western system clash with Russia's imperial ambitions.²

From an economic perspective, the Black Sea represents a major trade and transport corridor connecting Central Asia and the Caucasus with Europe.³ Energy projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Southern Gas Corridor, the Middle Corridor initiative, and other geo-economic undertakings further reinforce the region's economic importance.⁴ The security of these infrastructures constitutes one of the primary challenges for Western partners, as Russia frequently seeks to control or destabilize energy routes in order to preserve its leverage over regional economies and political processes.⁵

From a geopolitical standpoint, the Black Sea basin functions as a buffer zone between NATO and Russia's military systems. The Russian Black Sea Fleet, whose main base is located in Sevastopol, serves as a vital instrument for Moscow's power projection into the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Following the annexation of Crimea, the modernization of Russia's military infrastructure on the peninsula has further expanded its regional dominance and enhanced its capacity for long-range operations beyond the Black Sea itself.

1 Trenin, Dmitri. *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011. 136-138

2 Wolff, Andrew T., "The Future of NATO Enlargement after the Ukraine Crisis," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (2015): 1103-1121 -<https://shorturl.at/i0waL>

3 RAND Corporation, "*The Middle Corridor: A Renaissance in Global Commerce*," March 2024, -<https://shorturl.at/Fulrj>

4 Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, *Expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor: Pipelines and Future Supplies to Europe*, OIES Paper NG 180 (Oxford: OIES, January 2024), -<https://shorturl.at/nO4cA>

5 Chatham House, "*Russia's Black Sea Strategy*," July 2025, pp.2 -<https://shorturl.at/whxbL>

The security significance of the Black Sea is further underscored by its connection to the Montreux Convention (1936), which regulates the regime of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. Turkey's control over these straits remains one of NATO's most critical levers in limiting Russia's maritime access. However, Ankara's increasingly multi-vector foreign policy in recent years has introduced a degree of imbalance within the Alliance, affecting the overall coherence of the regional security architecture.

The main factors shaping stability in the region include:

- NATO and EU policies within the Eastern Partnership framework;
- Russia's expansionist approach under the "Near Abroad" concept;
- The security of energy and transportation corridors;
- Hybrid and informational warfare aimed at manipulating public opinion.

It can thus be argued that the geopolitical significance of the Black Sea transcends its regional dimension and directly impacts the dynamics of global security. Decisions made within this space influence not only the stability of Eastern Europe, but also that of the broader Euro-Atlantic area. Therefore, any act of Russian aggression in the region is perceived as a direct challenge to Western security.

II. Russia's Geostrategic Interests in the Black Sea Region

The Black Sea region has always been regarded as one of the fundamental geostrategic priorities of the Russian Federation's foreign and defense policy. As historical experience shows, Russia's interests in this region extend far beyond its immediate security boundaries, encompassing political, economic, energy, and cultural dimensions. For Russia, the Black Sea serves not only as a natural border and a military platform, but also as a vital communication channel with Europe -a corridor for energy transit and a means of expanding influence throughout the South Caucasus and the Balkans.

2.1 Historical and Geopolitical Foundations

Russia's interests in the Black Sea trace back to the eighteenth century, when, following the reforms of Peter the Great, the Russian Empire sought direct access to warm-water seas. It was during this period that the strategic doctrine of Russian geopolitics emerged, portraying the Black Sea as the "key to Eurasia" a territory indispensable for competing with Europe and maintaining regional hegemony.⁶

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea region lost its imperial status for Russia:

Ukraine, Georgia, and other former republics gained independence, while NATO and EU enlargement to the south created what Moscow perceived as a growing threat. From this period onward, Russia's modern revisionist policy began to take shape -aimed at restoring lost influence and constraining Western military and political structures.

As Alexander Dugin notes in *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, "the absolute imperative of Russian geopolitics along the Black Sea coast is Moscow's full and unrestricted control over its entire length -from Ukraine to the territories of Abkhazia."⁷ It is therefore evident that the Black Sea has become a vital platform for Moscow to increase pressure and maintain leverage over

⁶ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 76; 106.

⁷ Дугин, Александр, *Основы геополитики* (Москва: Арктогея-центр, 2000), 126.

littoral states, while simultaneously limiting or even deterring NATO's presence in the region. Accordingly, Russia's strategic objective has been to frame this area as part of the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir) and to preserve a network of pro-Russian forces around it.

2.2 Evolution of Russia's Military and Security Doctrine

Since the early 2000s, Russia's military doctrine has increasingly emphasized the restoration of regional influence. During Vladimir Putin's first two presidential terms (2000–2008), a core principle was articulated: the post-Soviet space must remain a zone of Russia's "privileged interests."

Following the 2008 Russia–Georgia war, this principle was openly articulated by President Dmitry Medvedev, who referred to specific regions of "privileged interest" – a statement that formalized the doctrine within Russian foreign policy discourse.⁸ The 2008 war thus gave this idea a practical manifestation, demonstrating the Kremlin's readiness to use military force to achieve its political goals.

Subsequent updates to Russia's Defense Doctrine (2010, 2014, and 2022) reflect the growing priority of the Black Sea direction. These documents place special emphasis on NATO's expanding infrastructure and activities near Russia's borders, explicitly identifying them as direct military threats.⁹ After the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia acquired a major strategic advantage: the full control of the Sevastopol naval base, the modernization of the Black Sea Fleet, and the expansion of military maneuvers stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean. These developments enhanced Moscow's ability to influence the regional balance of power.

The Maritime Doctrine approved in 2022 further reinforced this direction by explicitly designating the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean as strategic theaters of operation essential to Russia's long-term naval policy.¹⁰ Within Russia's broader military strategy, the Black Sea Fleet functions as a central operational hub, enabling both offensive strikes against Ukraine and sustained pressure along NATO's eastern flank.

2.3 Energy and Economic Interests

For Russia, the Black Sea constitutes one of its most critical energy gateways to the markets of Southern and Southeastern Europe. The seabed hosts major gas pipelines –including TurkStream and Blue Stream –which link Russian gas supplies to Turkey's energy network and subsequently to European distribution systems. This arrangement allows Moscow to maintain both economic revenue and political influence across NATO's Eastern flank.

The port of Novorossiysk and the "Caspian Pipeline Consortium" (CPC) terminal serve as critical infrastructure for oil exports, including those from Kazakhstan. The geographical position of these facilities and their transit routes through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles highlight the Black Sea's role as a key node in the global energy supply chain.¹¹

Russia's economic interests in the Black Sea extend beyond energy. Approximately "70% of

8 Dmitry Medvedev, interview on foreign policy, August 31, 2008, Reuters, "Russia has regions where it has privileged interests..." <https://shorturl.at/UpnJJ>

9 *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2010)* –<https://shorturl.at/08HB3> ; *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2014)* – <https://shorturl.at/dlqRI> ; Keir Giles, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010," NATO Defense College, Feb 2010, –<https://shorturl.at/9jzYE>

10 *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation (31 July 2022)*, <https://shorturl.at/Ovplm>

11 U.S. Energy Information Administration. *Caspian Sea Regional Analysis Brief*. February 6, 2025. <https://shorturl.at/Ult9o>

Russian grain exports are shipped through Black Sea ports”, making the region a cornerstone of national economic stability.¹² As of 2023, ports such as Novorossiysk, Taman, and Kavkaz play a pivotal role in exporting Russian grain, oil, and coal, underscoring the Black Sea’s strategic importance for Russia’s global trade network.¹³ Accordingly, the security of maritime routes and the uninterrupted functioning of the straits are critical for both commercial and strategic purposes.

At the same time, Moscow closely monitors alternative energy initiatives -such as “the Southern Gas Corridor” and the Trans-Caspian “Middle Corridor” -viewing them as competitive routes that reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. This dynamic drives Russia to further strengthen its economic, infrastructural, and military presence in the Black Sea region in order to safeguard its influence.

III. Instruments and Dynamics of Russia’s Aggressive Policy

Russia’s aggressive policy in the Black Sea region extends far beyond traditional military action. It represents a multilayered strategy that integrates military, energy, informational, cyber, and diplomatic tools. This approach is grounded in the concept of hybrid warfare, which combines military and non-military methods to destabilize partner states and reassert political influence.

Modern Russian strategy aims to undermine adversaries from within before open conflict begins. As General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, has stated, “the role of non-military means in achieving strategic objectives has grown significantly and, in many cases, surpasses the effectiveness of weapons.”¹⁴ This observation perfectly reflects the dynamics currently unfolding in the Black Sea region.

3.1 Military Aggression and Militarization

Russia’s military aggression in the Black Sea region constitutes the most visible and direct mechanism for restoring its influence. The August 2008 war in Georgia marked the first instance in which Russia openly used armed force against an independent state in the post-Soviet space. As a result, the Kremlin occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region, establishing permanent military bases that significantly altered the balance of power in the South Caucasus.¹⁵

The 2014 aggression against Ukraine -including the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas -inaugurated a new phase of Russian expansion. In gross violation of international law, the Kremlin annexed the Crimean Peninsula, thereby gaining control over the northern Black Sea and substantially extending the operational reach of the Black Sea Fleet. Sevastopol became one of Russia’s principal military hubs, serving as a base for operations in southern Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, in the Mediterranean.¹⁶

12 Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. *Expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor: Pipelines and Future Supplies to Europe*. OIES Paper NG 180. Oxford: OIES, January 2024. <https://shorturl.at/AWOjE>

13 Polina Devitt and Vladimir Soldatkin, “Significance of Black Sea Ports for Russian Commodities Exports,” Reuters, July 20, 2023, -<https://kntn.ly/0ebb4209>

14 Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight,” *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (January–February 2016), p. 25. – <https://shorturl.at/ojhn1>

15 Chatham House, *Understanding Russia’s Black Sea Strategy* (London: Chatham House, July 2025), pp. 10–11. <https://shorturl.at/oFEKS>

16 RAND Corporation, *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), pp. 48-55. <https://shorturl.at/H3dKU>

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 represents the ultimate manifestation of Russia's aggressive policy. The Black Sea Fleet played a decisive role both in amphibious operations and in the naval blockade, which sought to destroy Ukraine's economic potential and paralyze maritime trade.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Russia continues to expand its military infrastructure throughout the region. New S-400 air defense systems, Kalibr cruise missiles, drones, and cyberwarfare units have been deployed in occupied Crimea and the Southern Military District. Since the 2014 occupation of Crimea, Russia has consistently strengthened its military and technical infrastructure, transforming the peninsula into a platform for offensive operations across and beyond the Black Sea region.¹⁸

3.2 Energy Pressure and Economic Leverage

Energy resources serve as Russia's principal non-military weapon for exerting political pressure on neighboring states. The use of energy leverage is particularly evident in the Black Sea region, which hosts multibillion-dollar transit infrastructure linking Russia and Europe.

Projects such as Blue Stream, TurkStream, and the aborted South Stream aim to counterbalance alternative energy corridors and obstruct Europe's diversification efforts. As the European Commission has explicitly stated: "Europe is still too dependent on a supplier who is willing to use energy as a weapon."¹⁹ Through this approach, the Kremlin maintains significant economic pressure on Turkey and the Balkans while simultaneously seeking to diminish the transit relevance of Georgia and Azerbaijan.²⁰

According to a 2024 report by the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), dependence on Russian energy frequently transforms into a form of political coercion: "The EU's dependence on fossil fuel imports allowed Russia to use energy as a weapon, reducing pipeline gas flows to Europe by 80% over the course of 2022 and fueling an energy price crisis, as gas and electricity costs rose up to tenfold compared to historical averages."²¹ For the Kremlin, therefore, energy policy is not an economic tool but a strategic weapon.

Furthermore, Russia seeks to maintain economic influence through state-controlled investments in transport, logistics, and communications sectors. The expansion of Novorossiysk, Sevastopol, and Anapa ports serves both military and commercial purposes. As *The Maritime Executive* reports, "Russia looks to redevelop Sevastopol into a major commercial port, investing approximately \$25.6 million to create container and cargo facilities for both military and civilian use."²² Consolidation of the port and transport sector under state control further strengthens Moscow's regional dominance.²³

17 Anika Binnendijk, *Understanding Russian Black Sea Power Dynamics Through National Security Gaming* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), pp. 9–10. <https://shorturl.at/6hAUo>

18 Iulian Romanyshyn, *Ukraine, NATO and the Black Sea*, NDC Policy Brief No. 01 (Rome: NATO Defence College, January 2023), pp. 1. -<https://shorturl.at/yTw8W>

19 European Commission & High Representative, *EU external energy engagement in a changing world* (Brussels: 18 May 2022), pp.1. <https://shorturl.at/EUuih>

20 Anika Binnendijk, *Understanding Russian Black Sea Power Dynamics Through National Security Gaming* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), pp. xiii -xiii.

21 SIEPS (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies), *EU Energy Market Regulation after the Energy Crisis* (January 2024), p. 2. - <https://shorturl.at/mSlfS>

22 *Maritime Executive*, "Russia Plans Commercial Container and Cargo Port for Crimea Near Sevastopol" (August 2023). <https://shorturl.at/FowdK>

23 *PortsEurope*, "Russia Consolidates Under State Control Largest Transport and Logistics Businesses" (July 2023). <https://shorturl.at/YToAt>

3.3 Disinformation Campaigns and Cyberattacks

One of the most effective components of hybrid warfare is information manipulation. Russian media and propaganda networks actively deploy disinformation, narrative distortion, and soft power instruments to shape public opinion within partner states.

The core objective of Russia's information policy is to undermine trust in Western institutions and weaken public support for NATO and the EU. To this end, the Kremlin utilizes both state-controlled outlets (*RT*, *Sputnik*) and social media networks or local proxy platforms. Information campaigns in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are designed to amplify anti-Western sentiments and mobilize support for pro-Russian political forces.²⁴

Russian disinformation in the Black Sea region systematically merges historical myths ("Russia as defender of Orthodoxy"), anti-Western narratives ("NATO provokes war"),²⁵ and fear-based rhetoric ("Euro-Atlantic integration will bring conflict"). In this way, Moscow seeks not only to influence foreign policy orientations but also to polarize domestic political systems and erode social cohesion.

Cyberattacks have become a defining element of Russia's hybrid warfare. Over the past decade, numerous large-scale cyber operations have targeted NATO members and partner states -notably Georgia and Ukraine.

Russia-sponsored hacker groups such as APT28 (Fancy Bear) and Sandworm play a critical role in exerting pressure on state institutions, targeting government networks and energy systems.²⁶ These operations often coincide with disinformation campaigns, creating a composite model of influence that simultaneously damages technical infrastructure and public morale.

According to the CyberPeace Institute (2023), "since the beginning of the 2022 invasion, over 650 cyberattacks and operations have been attributed to pro-Russian threat actors targeting Ukrainian entities, including government agencies, energy systems, and humanitarian organizations."²⁷ Similar patterns were observed in Georgia, where the State Security Service reported that cybersecurity remains a "key national challenge, with its Technical Operations Agency responding to 33 separate incidents targeting critical infrastructure in 2022."²⁸

Cybersecurity in the Black Sea region is thus inseparable from the protection of critical infrastructure -including transport, energy, and maritime assets. NATO emphasizes the necessity of strengthening collective cyber resilience.²⁹ As such, cybersecurity has become an integral component of strategic stability in the Black Sea, with Russian operations illustrating that technological and informational influence will remain a core geopolitical weapon in the Kremlin's arsenal.

3.4 Diplomatic Manipulation and "Frozen Conflicts"

Another key instrument of Russian strategy is diplomatic manipulation through the creation and management of "frozen conflicts." Regions such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and

24 Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2023) - <https://shorturl.at/XPZit>

25 EUvsDisinfo, News and Analysis: Key Narratives in Pro-Kremlin, 20.09. 2022. -<https://shorturl.at/H4zan>

26 NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), *Addressing State-Linked Cyber Threats to Critical Maritime Infrastructure* (Tallinn: CCDCOE, 2025). -<https://shorturl.at/6ZFnf>

27 CyberPeace Institute, *Cyber Dimensions of a Hybrid Warfare* (2023). -<https://shorturl.at/t94pb>

28 State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG), *Annual Report 2022* (Tbilisi: SSSG, 2023). -<https://shorturl.at/2fvuQ>

29 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), *Cyber Defence Pledge: Implementation and Progress Overview* (Brussels: NATO, 2023) -<https://shorturl.at/qgfWS>

Donbas serve as mechanisms of sustained pressure that secure Moscow's leverage over neighboring states. This approach allows Russia to act simultaneously as a mediator and a participant, thereby legitimizing its ongoing presence in disputed territories.

The essence of this policy lies in the establishment of de facto regimes, their subsequent "recognition," and their use as tools to justify permanent military deployments. Such conflicts effectively obstruct the Euro-Atlantic integration of affected states, since under NATO's founding principles, candidate countries must have no unresolved territorial disputes. As Agnia Grigas aptly observes, "by manufacturing frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe, President Putin and Russia gain undue leverage in the national policies of affected sovereign states and disrupt the post-Cold War order."³⁰

Together, these instruments -military pressure, energy dependence, information warfare, and diplomatic interference -create a complex web of security challenges for NATO partner states. Their interaction generates a "spiral of destabilization", weakening institutional resilience and eroding sovereignty. As a result, the Black Sea region has entered a state of permanent insecurity, marked by economic uncertainty and the constant risk of military escalation. This environment enables Russia to maintain control through a strategy of "managed instability", ensuring its regional dominance despite growing international isolation.

IV. Strategic Implications

Russia's aggressive policy in the Black Sea region has fundamentally altered the security architecture of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Its military, energy, and informational pressure on NATO partner states -Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova -has produced complex effects that include violations of territorial integrity, the erosion of political stability, deepening economic dependence, and the weakening of democratic institutions.

4.1 Georgia: A Persistent Security Dilemma and the Path toward NATO

Georgia represents a classic case of Russia's aggressive policy in the Black Sea region. Following the August 2008 war, Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region created a long-term security crisis and effectively institutionalized a "frozen conflict" mechanism that the Kremlin has turned into a tool of political coercion.

The continued Russian military presence on Georgia's occupied territories constitutes a constant threat to the country's sovereignty and generates a "security dilemma".³¹ Georgia is forced to simultaneously strengthen its defense capabilities and prevent an escalation provoked by Russia.

Economically, Russian pressure manifests through leverage over trade, energy, and tourism. As Chatham House analysis notes, Moscow employs economic instruments for political influence, including: "civilian ports; energy infrastructure; grain exports and energy flows; inherited economic/business ties; and control of critical infrastructure."³²

In parallel, information and disinformation campaigns in Georgia seek to incite skepticism

30 Atlantic Council. *Frozen Conflicts: A Tool Kit for U.S. Policymakers*. By Agnia Grigas. Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, June 2016. -<https://shorturl.at/CoZqv>

31 Nicoleta MIRZA, *The Security Issues in the 2008 Russian-Georgian War*, Eastern European Journal of Regional Studies, Volume 6/ Issue 1/June 2020, -<https://shorturl.at/H9o2t>

32 Natalie Sabanadze and Galip Dalay, *Understanding Russia's Black Sea Strategy: How to Strengthen Europe and NATO's Approach to the Region* (London: Chatham House, 2025), 44–45, <https://shorturl.at/o0kE8>

toward NATO. Widely circulated anti-Western narratives -e.g., “NATO membership will trigger war with Russia,” or “the US and EU are pushing Georgia to start a war with Russia” -form part of the Kremlin’s information strategy to deepen social polarization.³³

Despite these challenges, Georgia’s partnership with the West has deepened. The country participates in the NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partnership, conducts joint military exercises (*Noble Partner; Agile Spirit*), and has advanced significant defense reforms and combat readiness -all indicators of strategic resilience. Georgia’s policy toward NATO rests on the principle of “More NATO in Georgia, and More Georgia in NATO,” reflected in former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s remark that “there is more NATO in Georgia, but also more Georgia in NATO than we have seen before,”³⁴ underscoring the need to further deepen bilateral cooperation amid growing Russian threats.

4.2 Ukraine: A Struggle for State Survival and European Identity

In Ukraine’s case, Russia’s aggressive policy has taken the form of direct, full-scale war. What began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas escalated in 2022 into a massive military invasion aimed at destroying Ukraine’s statehood and reversing its Western orientation.

As a result of Russian aggression, Ukraine faces severe security challenges: territorial dismemberment, mass displacement, destruction of energy infrastructure, and economic collapse. According to Reuters, “Ukraine’s GDP contracted by approximately 29.1% in 2022,” while World Bank assessments at the outset of the war suggested “the decline could approach 45%.”³⁵ United Nations data indicate “5,752,670 Ukrainians have been forcibly displaced abroad.”³⁶

At the same time, the war catalyzed national consolidation and strengthened European identity. Russia’s aggression has clarified Ukraine’s strategic choice: the country is unequivocally striving for NATO and EU membership. Public support for Western integration has risen markedly -according to EU4Ukraine polling, support for NATO/EU membership increased from 69% to 80% in 2023-2024.³⁷

Militarily, Ukraine has mounted an effective defense against Russian forces thanks to Western military assistance and the growth of its own capabilities. This has altered the regional balance: Moscow’s envisioned “short war” failed, and in the Black Sea theater, Ukraine regained partial control over critical segments of the maritime domain.

The long-term consequence for Ukraine is the transformation of its security and defense institutions toward Western standards, the modernization of the security sector, and deepened regional partnerships with Poland, the Baltic states, and Black Sea countries. Nonetheless, daunting challenges persist -wartime infrastructure damage, dependence on external assistance, and the safeguarding of democratic institutions under constant missile/air and cyber-attacks -pushing Kyiv toward a state-survival strategy anchored in external alliances and asymmetric defense.

33 EU vs Disinfo, “*The US and EU are pushing Georgia to start a war with Russia,*” European External Action Service (EEAS), -<https://shorturl.at/HHCgR>

34 Jens Stoltenberg, “Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to student audience, National Parliamentary Library Tbilisi, Georgia,” 08 Sep. 2016, -<https://shorturl.at/8hdfW>

35 “Ukraine’s GDP fell 29.1% in 2022 during Russia’s invasion,” *Reuters*, April 13, 2023, - <https://shorturl.at/wAYq6> ; “War to slash Ukraine’s GDP output by over 45%,” *Reuters*, April 10, 2022, - <https://shorturl.at/o3dZ1>

36 UNHCR, *Situation Ukraine – Operational Data Portal*, accessed October 18, 2025, - <https://shorturl.at/POH4e>

37 EU4Ukraine, *Introduction to EU and NATO Survey Results*, October 25, 2024, - <https://shorturl.at/7MyjM>

4.3 Moldova: At the Epicenter of Hybrid Threats

Moldova's case differs in that, despite the territorial conflict in Transnistria, the country has adopted constitutional neutrality, which formally precludes military alliance with NATO. Neutrality, however, has not guaranteed security. Russian influence in Moldova is exercised not through overt military intervention but via hybrid pressure -energy coercion, financing of pro-Russian parties, and information manipulation.³⁸

Since 2022, Moscow's pressure on Moldova has intensified. Gas supply cuts, disinformation campaigns, and the orchestration of protests have aimed at discrediting the "pro-European government."³⁹ The Kremlin views Moldova as a "bulwark against NATO expansion," seeking to impede Western influence along the western Black Sea littoral.

The Transnistrian conflict remains Russia's long-term lever for manipulating Moldova's political process. The region's de facto regime, sustained by Russian military support, continues to threaten Moldova's territorial integrity and security.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Moldova obtained EU candidate status in 2022 and cooperates actively with NATO

through IPAP and PfP programs.⁴¹ Energy security remains critical: following gas supply disruptions in the Transnistrian region in early 2025, the EU immediately allocated a "€30 million energy-support package" - the most significant to stabilize gas imports and distribution.⁴² This highlights Moldova's efforts to strengthen security mechanisms despite Russian pressure.

4.4 NATO's Responses and the Changing Regional Security Architecture

Russia's aggressive policy compelled NATO to reassess its strategic approach to the Black Sea. The 2022 Madrid Summit Strategic Concept explicitly defined Russia as "the most significant and direct threat to Allied security," reaffirming that deterrence and collective defense remain central to NATO strategy, with the Black Sea designated a critical zone within Allied security policy.⁴³

In the Black Sea direction, the Alliance has strengthened its posture in Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Alongside Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP), the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Southeast entails reinforced land, air, and maritime components and heightened readiness.⁴⁴ NATO and partners have increased intelligence-sharing, maritime patrolling, and joint exercises in cooperation with Black

Sea littoral allies and partners.⁴⁵

NATO is also expanding cooperation with Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova in security-sector support, notably cyber defense and strategic communications. Black Sea security is now treated as an integral part of European security, not a merely regional issue.

38 SCEEUS, *Russia's Hybrid War Against Moldova*. -<https://shorturl.at/AgQtG>

39 International Crisis Group, *Moldova Divided: Easing Tensions as Russia Meddles and Energy Prices Soar* (21 August 2024). -<https://shorturl.at/DUj3T>

40 Chatham House, *Is Moldova a new battleground in Russia's war?* (26 March 2024). -<https://shorturl.at/Dofao> ; The Guardian, *Transnistria appeals to Russia for 'protection'* (29 February 2024). -<https://shorturl.at/rNxsA>

41 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, *Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)*. -<https://shorturl.at/mXmEd> : NATO, *Individual Partnership Action Plans (overview)* (18 June 2025). -<https://shorturl.at/qFyEX>

42 European Commission, *EU offers emergency support to tackle the energy crisis in Moldova* (27 January 2025). - <https://shorturl.at/71qHQ>

43 NATO, *Strategic Concept 2022* (adopted 29 June 2022, Madrid). -<https://shorturl.at/WKRCO>

44 NATO, *Deterrence and defence* (mentions tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea region). -<https://kntn.ly/4e612d15>

45 NATO, *Washington Summit Declaration* (15 July 2024) -Black Sea strategic importance & regional measures. - <https://kntn.ly/c39e42c5>

Challenges remain, however, due to incomplete integration of partner countries into the Alliance, creating “zones of geopolitical vacuum” in which Russia can sustain influence.

Russia’s behavior in the Black Sea has produced the following strategic outcomes: -Shift in the geopolitical balance -having lost “soft influence” tools, Moscow resorted to direct military and hybrid methods, which, paradoxically, further consolidated the Western bloc; Strengthening of NATO’s eastern flank -heightened readiness and greater emphasis on partner frameworks; Transformation of partner identities -Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova have aligned their political vectors with a Western identity, shrinking Russia’s room for influence; Regional economic destabilization -energy coercion and infrastructure risks have reduced economic resilience; Information-security crisis -Russian disinformation has generated new threats to domestic democratic processes.

In sum, Russia’s aggressive policy in the Black Sea generates not only immediate military threats but also deep strategic transformations in Europe’s security system. For partner states, this entails a long-term strategic struggle to preserve an independent foreign policy and reinforce state resilience.

Conclusion

The Black Sea region has emerged as one of the most critical geostrategic arenas in contemporary international politics. It represents the intersection between Russia’s revisionist ambitions and NATO’s eastern flank interests, generating a persistent climate of insecurity and structural competition. The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that Russia’s aggressive conduct in the Black Sea is not an isolated military campaign but a systemic and multidimensional strategy aimed at undermining the Euro-Atlantic security order, destabilizing partner states, and restraining Western influence.

At its core, Russia’s policy seeks a restoration of power -the re-establishment of spheres of influence across the post-Soviet space and the use of the Black Sea as a strategic platform for controlling Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. To achieve this, the Kremlin deploys an array of hybrid warfare instruments: military aggression, energy coercion, disinformation, cyberattacks, and diplomatic manipulation.

The consequences of this strategy have been particularly acute for NATO’s three principal partner states -Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova:

Georgia faces a permanent security dilemma arising from its occupied territories, forced to balance between resisting Russian provocation and pursuing Western integration.

Ukraine stands as the direct victim of Russian aggression, illustrating Moscow’s readiness to use military force to block Euro-Atlantic expansion.

Moldova, despite its constitutional neutrality, endures intense hybrid pressure -from energy blackmail to disinformation campaigns.

These cases reveal a single strategic objective -Russia’s determination to preserve an independent sphere of influence in the Black Sea region and obstruct NATO’s eastward enlargement. This pursuit has created a new structural reality: Increasing militarization of the region; Growing dependence of state security on external alliances; Recognition of hybrid threats as equally destructive as conventional aggression.

In this context, the strategic response of NATO partner states must rest on the principles of resilience, integration, and collective deterrence: Strategic resilience as the foundation of security; Enhanced NATO engagement in Black Sea security; Prioritization of energy and information security; Deepened regional cooperation.

Security for partner states cannot rely solely on military assistance. It requires structural resilience -the strengthening of political institutions, economic systems, media independence, and societal unity. Russia's hybrid approach exploits internal vulnerabilities -social polarization, corruption, economic dependency, and information fragility -as leverage points for influence.

Accordingly, modern security must combine military and non-military dimensions: reinforcing democratic institutions, fostering media literacy, diversifying energy sources, and fortifying cybersecurity. In countries such as Georgia and Moldova, counter-disinformation mechanisms, support for independent media, and expanded civic participation are essential components of this effort.

NATO's responsibility in the Black Sea exceeds traditional defense. The region serves as the "missing link" in the Alliance's eastern flank -a zone where Europe's stability is both tested and defined.

Given the Black Sea's strategic importance, NATO and its partners must: Strengthen maritime security through joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and early-warning mechanisms (particularly involving Georgia and Ukraine); Deepen military integration via expanded joint exercises and standardized operational frameworks; Increase institutional inclusion of partner countries in NATO decision-making, especially on crisis-related issues.

NATO's policy must also transcend deterrence and include political and economic support, enhancing the long-term resilience of partner states.

Energy remains one of Russia's most effective coercive levers. Partner countries must implement energy diversification -developing alternative gas and oil sources, investing in renewables, and reinforcing regional energy interconnections. Coordinated EU-NATO energy policy would diminish Russia's capacity to wield energy as a political weapon.

Equally vital is the prioritization of information security. Disinformation has become one of the Kremlin's most potent tools, undermining social cohesion and trust in NATO. Countering this requires: Media literacy and public education initiatives; Monitoring of social networks; Coordinated government-civil society responses.

No single state can counter Russia's coercion alone. Enhanced regional cooperation, built on shared security interests, is essential. Key frameworks include: -GUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) -a political platform for security and transit coordination; Black Sea Security Initiative -NATO-supported projects on maritime safety; Trilateral Cooperation (Georgia-Turkey-Azerbaijan) -promoting stability in defense and energy domains. Regional unity remains the most effective means of balancing Russian influence, particularly when NATO's direct military engagement is limited.

To conclude, the Black Sea region will remain a core challenge to European and global stability in the coming decades. Russia's aggressive policy seeks not merely territorial control but also the discrediting of Western values and the revision of the international order.

For NATO's partner states, security strategy must not be reactive but predictive, resilient, and integrative. In the long term, success depends on: Strengthening internal resilience of partner countries; Maintaining unity within Western alliances and a consolidated Russia-containment policy; Establishing joint mechanisms to counter hybrid threats.

Ultimately, the future of Black Sea security depends not only on military balance but on the capacity of NATO partner states to sustain political will, democratic stability, and social cohesion under the pressure of Russian aggression.

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THE DIPLOMACY OF NEUTRALITY: THE TURKEY–AZERBAIJAN STRATEGIC ALLIANCE IN A CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL ORDER

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Abstract

This article focuses on the concept of “diplomatic neutrality” within the framework of the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic alliance, which gained particular prominence following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022. The strategy of neutrality is examined as a multi-layered foreign policy practice, encompassing both economic cooperation with the West and pragmatic balancing vis-à-vis Russia. The study demonstrates that Turkey, as a NATO member and a regional power, seeks to maintain a mediating role between Moscow and Kyiv, thereby enhancing its geopolitical weight both in the Black Sea region and on the global stage. Its mediatory initiatives—including the Istanbul negotiations and the “grain deal” framework—portray Ankara, on the one hand, as a constructive intermediary, but on the other hand, reveal structural constraints, given Turkey’s simultaneous dependence on Russian energy resources and its NATO-related military and political commitments. Azerbaijan, through the use of energy diplomacy, has rapidly emerged as one of the European Union’s key strategic partners, particularly through the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), TANAP, and TAP projects, which substantially reduce Europe’s reliance on Russian gas. However, Baku’s growing energy role creates a paradox: while the EU regards Azerbaijan as a reliable partner, for Russia it constitutes a “red line,” as the expansion of Western influence in the South Caucasus threatens the Kremlin’s geopolitical positions.¹ The article also highlights the dilemma of the intersection between economic interests and security challenges. The Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic partnership generates new opportunities in terms of military industry, energy infrastructure, and transit corridors, while simultaneously introducing political risks stemming from global crises, energy transitions, and the dynamics of regional conflicts. The main conclusion of the study is that “diplomatic neutrality” should be interpreted for both countries not as a long-term and sustainable foreign policy doctrine, but rather as a tactical, temporary, and flexible strategy. The Turkey–Azerbaijan case thus represents a form of “laboratory” for small and medium-sized states conducting foreign policy under conditions of global power competition, where economic and security interests are in constant intersection.

Keywords: Turkey; Azerbaijan; diplomatic neutrality; Russia-Ukraine war; energy security; Southern Gas Corridor; NATO; South Caucasus; mediation; foreign policy strategy

¹ S. J. Flanagan, A. Binnendijk, I. A. Chindea, K. Costello, G. Kirkwood, Massicot, D. C. Reach, (2020). *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea security (Research Report No. RR-A357-1)*. RAND Corporation.

Introduction

The outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022 fundamentally transformed the international security system and generated new strategic dilemmas at both the global and regional levels. The war not only undermined the international order based on the principles of international law but also radically altered the balance of power in Eastern Europe, the Black Sea basin, and the South Caucasus. This conflict has demonstrated that energy security, control over logistical corridors, and the foreign policy maneuvers of regional actors have become decisive factors in shaping the global security architecture. Against this new reality, the strategic partnership between Turkey and Azerbaijan has attracted particular attention, as it combines historical, cultural, and economic dimensions. The ties grounded in the doctrine of “one nation – two states” have evolved into a complex partnership, wherein economic initiatives (such as energy infrastructure, transit routes, and cooperation in the defense industry) are closely interlinked with security concerns and the broader balancing of global politics.²

Turkey, as both a NATO member and a regional power, found itself in a particularly delicate position immediately after the war broke out. On the one hand, as part of the collective defense system, it was expected to align with Western sanctions and security policies; on the other hand, Ankara’s deep economic and energy dependence on Russia necessitated cautious and balanced action. Under these circumstances, Turkey sought to assume the role of mediator between Moscow and Kyiv, thereby enhancing its political weight both regionally and globally.³ The Istanbul negotiations and the “Black Sea Grain Deal” are prominent examples of such mediatory efforts.

For Azerbaijan, the Russia–Ukraine war opened up new opportunities to emerge as a strategic energy partner for the European Union. Through the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), TANAP, and TAP projects, Baku has played a significant role in diversifying European energy markets and reducing dependence on Russian gas. At the same time, however, this process has introduced new security challenges, as Moscow perceives Azerbaijan’s growing importance as a “red line” and seeks to constrain Baku’s geopolitical maneuverability, particularly in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Accordingly, the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic alliance can be interpreted as a practical example of “diplomatic neutrality,” whereby both countries simultaneously aim to secure economic benefits while maintaining security stability. The essence of this policy lies in the constant necessity of balancing between the West and Russia, which positions the alliance as a kind of “geopolitical bridge.” Yet, just as a bridge can symbolize both connection and confrontation, Turkey–Azerbaijan cooperation embodies both opportunities and significant risks. Thus, the present study seeks to analyze how Turkey and Azerbaijan have pursued a policy of “diplomatic neutrality” in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war and the ongoing energy crisis, and to assess how this strategy may evolve—either as an instrument of global relevance or as a source of political vulnerability.

2 K. Kakachia, S. Malerius, & S. Meister, (2024). *Security Dynamics in the Black Sea Region: Geopolitical Shifts and Regional Orders*. Springer.

3 S. J. Flanagan, A. Binnendijk, I. A. Chindea, K. Costello, G. Kirkwood, Massicot, D., C. Reach, (2020). *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea security (Research Report No. RR-A357-1)*. RAND Corporation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and comparative research design aimed at examining the policy of “diplomatic neutrality” within the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic alliance since the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022. The methodology rests on several interrelated components:

Literature Review: A comprehensive review of scholarly works on international relations, energy security, and regional geopolitics was conducted, with particular attention to studies addressing Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia, and the European Union. The review emphasized theoretical debates on NATO’s strategic dynamics, energy diplomacy, and the foreign policy choices of small and medium-sized states.

Document Analysis: The research draws on official documents and reports from the European Union, NATO, the United Nations, and major energy institutions, including policy papers on the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), TANAP, and TAP projects. These materials provide insight into the political and economic foundations of energy cooperation and its implications for regional security.

Case Study Approach - The analysis is structured around two core case studies: **Turkey as mediator:** exemplified by the Istanbul negotiations and the Black Sea Grain Deal; **Azerbaijan as an energy diplomacy actor:** illustrated through the development and operation of the Southern Gas Corridor and its branches (TANAP and TAP).

Comparative Analysis - Turkey’s and Azerbaijan’s foreign policies are examined comparatively within the framework of “multi-vector policy” and “diplomatic neutrality.” This approach enables the identification of both similarities and divergences in the two countries’ strategic behavior.

Theoretical Framework - The study applies a mixed theoretical lens: **Realism** - to explain power balancing and security dilemmas; **Neoliberalism** - to account for the role of economic cooperation and interdependence; **Small States Theory**- to interpret Azerbaijan’s foreign policy behavior as a smaller yet energy-significant actor.

Temporal Scope - The analysis covers the period from February 2022, marking the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine war, through the end of 2024, in order to capture both the initial shock of the conflict and the subsequent geopolitical dynamics.

Main Part

The defining feature of the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic alliance lies in its pursuit of diplomatic neutrality, which cannot be explained by the classical notion of passive neutrality. Rather, it constitutes a flexible and pragmatic balancing strategy that enables both countries to extract benefits from simultaneous engagement with multiple, often competing, powers. Turkey, as a NATO member, is formally bound to Western security standards, yet it sustains deep economic ties with Russia through projects such as the TurkStream pipeline, the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, and its dependence on Russian tourism. Azerbaijan, in parallel, has become one of the European Union’s primary energy suppliers, yet it avoids direct confrontation with Moscow—a choice that endows

its foreign policy with both caution and dynamism. In this sense, diplomatic neutrality may be regarded as a tactical survival mechanism: a tool that provides short-term stability, but in the longer term generates heightened uncertainty and strategic vulnerability.

The Russia–Ukraine war offered Azerbaijan unprecedented strategic opportunities. By means of energy diplomacy, Baku assumed a central position in the European Union’s energy security agenda. Through the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and its key branches, TANAP and TAP, Azerbaijan has significantly contributed to reducing Europe’s dependence on Russian gas. This development has had a dual effect: for the EU, Azerbaijan emerged as a reliable partner, crucial not only for energy diversification but also for wider geopolitical stability; for Russia, however, Azerbaijan’s expanding role constitutes a “red line,” since Moscow perceives the gradual incorporation of the South Caucasus into the EU’s energy architecture as a direct threat to its traditional sphere of influence.⁴ Consequently, energy diplomacy operates simultaneously as a lever of political empowerment and as a security dilemma, since growing strategic importance inevitably amplifies the risk of Russian countermeasures.

Turkey, on its part, has attempted to consolidate its geopolitical position through a mediatory role in the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The Istanbul negotiations demonstrated Ankara’s ambition to act as a neutral intermediary, while the Black Sea Grain Deal highlighted its effort to address global food security concerns and, at the same time, enhance its own political relevance. Yet Turkey’s mediatory role is structurally constrained: extensive economic relations with Russia coexist with NATO obligations, placing Ankara in a continuous balancing act. Thus, Turkey’s mediation can be conceptualized not merely as a peace-building endeavor, but as a form of strategic mediation aimed at reinforcing its claim to regional leadership. This dynamic unfolds within the broader framework of Turkey’s multi-vector foreign policy. Over the past decade, Ankara has pursued a course characterized by formal loyalty to NATO while simultaneously maintaining strategic openness toward Moscow and other regional actors. The purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems, the deterioration of U.S.–Turkey relations, and Ankara’s independent involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Libya all demonstrate Turkey’s determination to pursue an autonomous agenda. NATO membership continues to provide Ankara with critical security guarantees, but its autonomous moves increasingly project the image of an independent regional power. This dual approach broadens Turkey’s strategic choices while simultaneously intensifying the risk of confrontation with both Western allies and Russia.

Within this complex framework, the intersection of economic and security interests reveals a profound paradox. For Turkey, defense industry exports—such as the supply of Bayraktar drones to Ukraine—enhance its global standing, while its role as an energy hub and transit corridor strengthens its economic foundations. For Azerbaijan, rising European demand for energy resources brings tangible economic and political dividends. Yet these very gains expose both Ankara and Baku to greater geopolitical risks, particularly in the form of Russian pressure and the heightened volatility of regional security. The result is a strategic dilemma: how to maintain economic benefits and political leverage without provoking excessive confrontation with either Russia or the Western

⁴ K.Kakachia, S.Malerius, & S. Meister, (2024). *Security Dynamics in the Black Sea Region: Geopolitical Shifts and Regional Orders*. Springer.

bloc. Taken together, the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic partnership illustrates the inherent tensions of diplomatic neutrality. The alliance creates space for economic advancement and geopolitical maneuvering, but the very flexibility that ensures survival in the short term also introduces vulnerability in the longer term. The paradox lies in the fact that greater strength and visibility in the international arena simultaneously magnify exposure to geopolitical risks, thereby placing the alliance in a constant state of balancing between opportunity and insecurity.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic partnership demonstrates that diplomatic neutrality has emerged as the core mechanism guiding their foreign policy choices in the aftermath of the Russia–Ukraine war. For Turkey, neutrality is simultaneously a constraint and an opportunity: as a NATO member it is expected to align with Western security policies, yet its deep economic and energy interdependence with Russia requires constant caution and pragmatic balancing. Ankara’s mediatory efforts, exemplified by the Istanbul negotiations and the Black Sea Grain Deal, illustrate the dual function of neutrality—as both a tool of constructive engagement and an instrument for reinforcing its regional influence. The analysis of the Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic alliance demonstrates that **“Diplomatic Neutrality”** has evolved into a central instrument of both countries’ foreign policy—a defining feature that gained even greater prominence following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022. This policy orientation reflects a deliberate effort by Ankara and Baku to preserve strategic flexibility amid intensifying geopolitical polarization.

For Turkey, as a long-standing NATO member and a regional power bridging Europe, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, maintaining a mediating posture has become an essential component of its international identity. By positioning itself as a credible intermediary between Russia and the West, Turkey seeks to elevate its diplomatic authority, expand its sphere of influence, and present itself as an active contributor to the evolving global security architecture. Through this strategy, Ankara has managed to preserve dialogue with Moscow while simultaneously upholding its commitments to NATO and supporting Ukraine’s territorial integrity—an equilibrium that reinforces its image as an indispensable regional actor. However, Turkey’s role as mediator is constrained by the realities of economic and energy interdependence with Russia. The flow of natural gas, tourism revenue, and joint energy projects—such as the TurkStream pipeline—create structural dependencies that limit Ankara’s freedom to align fully with Western policy positions or sanctions regimes. This duality compels Turkey to navigate a narrow corridor between strategic autonomy and alliance solidarity, balancing short-term national interests with long-term geopolitical commitments. Ultimately, Turkey’s approach illustrates a broader pattern of pragmatic multi-vector diplomacy, characterized by selective engagement, transactional partnerships, and adaptive neutrality. This balancing act allows Turkey to maintain open channels with multiple power centers while avoiding entanglement in binary confrontations. By leveraging its geographic position and political versatility, Ankara continues to pursue a foreign policy that safeguards national interests, enhances its mediatory credentials, and sustains influence across an increasingly fragmented international system.⁵

⁵ Asian Bank of Development. 2022. *Lukoil Overseas Shah Deniz Stage II Gas Field Expansion Project (Azerbaijan)*. Extended Annual Review Report, ADB.

For Azerbaijan, energy diplomacy has evolved into the principal vehicle of strategic positioning within the complex geopolitical environment of the post–Russia–Ukraine war order. Through its active engagement in the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and complementary infrastructure projects, ⁶Baku has positioned itself as a critical contributor to the European Union’s energy diversification strategy, reducing Europe’s dependence on Russian gas and strengthening its own status as a reliable and pragmatic Western partner. This alignment with European energy priorities not only enhances Azerbaijan’s international credibility but also secures tangible economic benefits, allowing it to leverage energy exports as a form of political capital in bilateral and multilateral negotiations. However, Azerbaijan’s growing relevance in the Eurasian energy architecture simultaneously exposes it to heightened geopolitical sensitivities. As the flow of Caspian gas westward alters the regional balance of influence, Russia views Baku’s expanding cooperation with the EU as both an economic challenge and a potential shift in strategic alignment. This dynamic places Azerbaijan in a delicate position—its energy diplomacy becomes a double-edged instrument: a source of empowerment through increased autonomy, revenue, and geopolitical visibility, yet also a source of vulnerability, given its proximity to competing regional powers and the volatility of global energy markets. In this context, Azerbaijan’s approach reflects a broader balancing strategy—one that seeks to preserve constructive relations with Russia while deepening cooperation with Western institutions. By maintaining a policy of measured pragmatism, Baku effectively uses its energy sector as a platform for geopolitical negotiation, translating economic resources into diplomatic leverage. ⁷Thus, energy diplomacy serves not merely as an export mechanism but as a strategic instrument of statecraft, anchoring Azerbaijan’s foreign policy in a framework that combines economic pragmatism, political flexibility, and regional influence.

The Turkey–Azerbaijan alliance thus exemplifies the paradoxical intersection between economic interests and security imperatives in contemporary regional politics. On the one hand, economic expansion—particularly in energy, infrastructure, and defense cooperation—has opened new pathways for both states to consolidate influence, enhance interconnectivity, and project stability across the broader Black Sea–Caspian region. The development of joint energy corridors, transnational transportation networks, and defense-industrial partnerships illustrates how Ankara and Baku are transforming economic collaboration into a strategic instrument of geopolitical agency. These initiatives not only strengthen their bilateral alliance but also position both countries as indispensable partners within larger regional integration frameworks linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Yet, these same processes inevitably intensify geopolitical exposure. The deepening of economic interdependence and strategic infrastructure projects amplifies vulnerability to external pressures, particularly from Russia, which perceives the Turkish–Azerbaijani partnership as a challenge to its traditional sphere of influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. ⁸The volatility of ongoing regional conflicts—most notably in Nagorno-Karabakh and the broader post-Soviet security space—further compounds the risks associated with economic expansion, transforming

6 S. E. Cornell, (2021). *Azerbaijan’s foreign policy and challenges of neutrality*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

7 B. Thorhallsson, (2023). *Small states and the politics of vulnerability in the globalized era*. Routledge.

8 M. Malek, (2008). *NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan on Different Tracks*. *Connections*, 7(3), 30-51.

commercial ventures into potential flashpoints of political contestation. As a result, their policy of diplomatic neutrality should be interpreted not as a sustainable long-term doctrine, but rather as a tactical and adaptive strategy—a pragmatic mechanism for managing uncertainty, ensuring short-term survival, and preserving maneuverability within an increasingly polarized international system. For both Ankara and Baku, neutrality serves as a buffer zone between confrontation and alignment, allowing them to pursue strategic autonomy while avoiding direct entanglement in great-power rivalries. In this sense, the Turkey–Azerbaijan partnership encapsulates the logic of pragmatic *realpolitik*, where economic cooperation, energy diplomacy, and flexible neutrality operate as mutually reinforcing instruments of resilience and influence in a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment.

Ultimately, the case of Turkey and Azerbaijan serves as a revealing “laboratory” for analyzing how small and medium-sized states navigate the rivalries of competing global powers in an increasingly fragmented international system.⁹ Their experience demonstrates that strategic neutrality and pragmatic balancing, while effective in the short term, are inherently transitional instruments rather than permanent solutions to structural dependency and geopolitical vulnerability. Through adaptive diplomacy, Ankara and Baku have managed to sustain relations with both Western and non-Western actors—leveraging their geostrategic locations, energy resources, and transport corridors to extract concessions, attract investment, and enhance regional influence. However, this equilibrium remains precarious and situational, conditioned by external variables that neither state can fully control. The persistence of great-power competition between the West and Russia, coupled with shifting global energy dynamics and security realignments, exposes the limits of neutrality as a sustainable doctrine. While it may temporarily shield them from direct confrontation, neutrality cannot erase the underlying structural uncertainties and strategic dilemmas that define their geopolitical environment. The continual need to balance partnership with the Euro-Atlantic community against cooperation with Russia and regional powers imposes a delicate diplomatic choreography—one that demands constant recalibration, policy innovation, and strategic foresight. In this sense, Turkey and Azerbaijan exemplify the broader condition of middle-tier states operating in a multipolar order: compelled to mediate between competing centers of power, they must transform flexibility and pragmatism into tools of survival. Their trajectory underscores a fundamental truth of contemporary geopolitics—that in an era of unstable alliances and fluid hierarchies, neutrality functions less as a position of detachment and more as an active strategy of navigation within the shifting currents of global rivalry.

⁹ Asian Bank of Development. 2022. *Lukoil Overseas Shah Deniz Shah Deniz Stage II Gas Field Expansion Project (Azerbaijan)*. Extended Annual Review Report, ADB.

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GEO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF SECURITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH NATO STANDARDS

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Abstract

This paper examines the geo-economic dimensions of security in the South Caucasus—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—by exploring how economic competitiveness, business governance, and infrastructure connectivity shape strategic resilience and integration with NATO standards. The study argues that in the 21st-century security environment, where hybrid threats and economic coercion increasingly replace conventional warfare, economic modernization and governance reform are fundamental components of national and regional security.

Using a geo-economic framework, the analysis demonstrates that economic power—manifested through trade, investment, energy, and infrastructure—serves as a strategic instrument of statecraft. The paper investigates how the three South Caucasus economies, despite shared post-Soviet legacies, have pursued divergent development and security trajectories. Georgia's liberal reforms and alignment with NATO's integrity standards have enhanced both investor confidence and defense resilience; Armenia's dependence on Russia underscores the costs of limited economic sovereignty; and Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon wealth, while generating fiscal autonomy, highlights vulnerabilities linked to resource dependence.

The study further argues that NATO's governance and transparency frameworks—particularly through initiatives such as the Building Integrity and Defence Education Enhancement Programmes—extend beyond military reform to strengthen public administration, anti-corruption mechanisms, and business competitiveness. Infrastructure and connectivity projects, including the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline and the Trans-Caspian “Middle Corridor,” are conceptualized as tools of “connectivity security” that simultaneously deter conflict, attract foreign investment, and embed the region within Euro-Atlantic supply chains.

Policy recommendations emphasize institutionalizing transparency, expanding NATO–EU cooperation in economic resilience, and fostering inclusive infrastructure governance to transform geo-economic interdependence into political trust. The paper concludes that aligning economic governance with NATO standards offers the South Caucasus a sustainable path toward sovereignty, stability, and Euro-Atlantic integration—redefining the region from a zone of contestation into a hub of cooperative security and economic opportunity.

Keywords: South Caucasus; geo-economics; strategic resilience; hybrid threats; economic coercion; governance/anti-corruption; infrastructure connectivity; connectivity security; energy security; BTC pipeline; Middle Corridor; NATO standards.

Introduction

The South Caucasus—comprising Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—represents one of the world’s most complex geopolitical intersections. It is both a bridge and a barrier between Europe and Asia, located at the crossroads of major civilizational, political, and economic currents. Historically, the region has been shaped by imperial rivalry, external domination, and internal fragmentation. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the three South Caucasus states embarked on divergent political and economic trajectories, defined by different external alignments and security dependencies ¹.

The region’s strategic significance lies in its geography and resources. It functions as a crucial transit route linking the Caspian basin and Central Asia with Europe through pipelines, railways, and ports. Energy and transport infrastructures, such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, and the Southern Gas Corridor, have placed the South Caucasus at the center of Eurasian trade and energy politics. ² However, this geo-economic potential is constrained by unresolved conflicts—most notably the Armenia–Azerbaijan confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh and the territorial disputes involving Georgia’s Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the regional environment has entered a new phase of uncertainty. The conflict has disrupted the balance of power, eroded Russia’s traditional role as a “security guarantor,” and accelerated the competition among Turkey, Iran, and Western actors for influence in the South Caucasus. ³ As a result, economic stability, energy resilience, and trade diversification have become central components of security strategies.

The purpose of this study is to explore the interconnection between economic competitiveness and security resilience in the South Caucasus through the lens of *geo-economics*. By analyzing the ways in which economic modernization, business governance, and infrastructure connectivity contribute to national and regional stability, the study aims to clarify how the alignment with NATO’s governance and economic integrity standards strengthens security and sovereignty.

The significance of the research lies in its contribution to bridging two previously separate debates: economic reform and security alignment. In the 21st-century strategic environment, where hybrid warfare, sanctions, and supply-chain disruptions replace conventional aggression, *geo-economics* has emerged as the central arena of power competition ⁴. For the South Caucasus, whose economies are small, open, and highly vulnerable to external shocks, aligning economic and security strategies is crucial to ensuring long-term stability and integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Research Questions and Objectives - This study addresses four key questions:

1. How do geo-economic factors—energy, infrastructure, and trade—shape the security environment of the South Caucasus?
2. What is the relationship between business competitiveness and strategic resilience?

1 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W.O’Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

2 K.Kakachia, S. Meister, & B. Fricke, (Eds.). (2018). *Geopolitics and Security: A New Strategy for the South Caucasus*. Georgian Institute of Politics / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / DGAP.

3 F. Labarre, & G. Niculescu. (Eds.). *After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security*. Austrian National Defence Academy / PFP Consortium. (2023).

4 R. D. Blackwill, , & J. M. Harris,.. *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Harvard University Press. (2016)

3. How can alignment with NATO standards in governance and transparency enhance regional stability?

4. What policy pathways can link economic modernization with Euro-Atlantic security integration?

The objectives are to (a) develop a theoretical model linking geo-economics and security interdependence, (b) analyze economic competitiveness in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and (c) propose practical recommendations for integrating economic reform with NATO's partnership frameworks.

Main Part

Theoretical Framework: Geo-Economics and Security Interdependence

Geo-economics refers to the strategic use of economic instruments—trade, investment, energy, infrastructure, and sanctions—to advance geopolitical goals⁵. Unlike traditional geopolitics, which prioritizes military dominance, geo-economics emphasizes economic power as the decisive tool in statecraft.

In the South Caucasus, geo-economics captures the intersection between economic connectivity and strategic competition. The region serves as a corridor between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian spheres, where competing projects—the EU's Eastern Partnership, Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, China's Belt and Road Initiative, and Turkey's regional connectivity strategy—struggle for influence.⁶

Cornell highlighted that NATO's engagement in the region⁷ already reflected an understanding of this economic-security nexus. Security assistance programs, defense reforms, and infrastructure protection were not only military initiatives but also mechanisms for integrating the region into global markets.

Economic competitiveness enhances security by increasing national resilience to external shocks. As Tocci⁸ notes in the EU Global Strategy, resilience arises from robust economies, effective governance, and social cohesion. For the South Caucasus, where vulnerabilities stem from limited diversification and political instability, competitiveness is both an economic and a security imperative.

Georgia exemplifies how governance reform, anti-corruption policy, and market liberalization foster both economic dynamism and external credibility. Armenia's overreliance on Russia for energy and security illustrates the inverse: limited economic sovereignty reduces foreign policy flexibility and amplifies vulnerability⁹. Azerbaijan's oil-based economy provides fiscal strength but exposes it to price volatility and Dutch disease effects; thus, diversification and innovation are prerequisites for resilience.

While NATO remains a defense alliance, its 2022 Strategic Concept recognizes that “economic coercion and energy dependency” constitute security threats. Through initiatives like the

5 K. Kakachia, S. Meister, & B. Fricke, (Eds.). (2018). *Geopolitics and Security: A New Strategy for the South Caucasus*. Georgian Institute of Politics / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / DGAP.

6 *ibid*

7 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W. O'Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

8 N. Tocci, (2016). *The EU Global Strategy: Shared Vision, Common Action*. European External Action Service.

9 F. Labarre, & G. Niculescu. (Eds.). *After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security*. Austrian National Defence Academy / PFP Consortium. (2023).

Building Integrity Programme and *Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP)*, NATO promotes transparency, efficient resource management, and democratic control of institutions.

These standards transcend the military sector. NATO's focus on governance, anti-corruption, and fiscal transparency directly enhances the investment climate and business competitiveness. As seen in Georgia's reforms under its Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), adherence to NATO-compatible principles improved governance indicators and strengthened international investor confidence.

Economic Competitiveness in the South Caucasus

The three South Caucasus economies share post-Soviet legacies of small domestic markets, dependence on external trade, and limited diversification.

- **Georgia** has pursued liberal market reforms since the 2000s, emphasizing open trade and tourism. It ranks highly in the *World Bank's Ease of Doing Business* index, yet remains exposed to external demand fluctuations and limited industrial capacity.

- **Azerbaijan** relies on hydrocarbons for over 80% of exports. While oil and gas revenues have financed infrastructure and social spending, the economy remains vulnerable to price volatility and limited SME development.

- **Armenia**, constrained by closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan, depends heavily on remittances and Russian markets. Despite a vibrant tech sector and diaspora investment, its economy remains isolated and dependent on imports.

These structural asymmetries translate into differing strategic orientations. Georgia aligns strongly with the EU and NATO; Azerbaijan maintains a non-aligned but pragmatic stance; Armenia remains tied to Russia's economic and defense architecture.¹⁰

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the foundation of competitiveness and innovation. In Georgia, government-backed innovation centers and e-governance reforms have facilitated entrepreneurship and digitalization. Armenia's "Silicon Valley of the Caucasus" reputation stems from its IT cluster and startup ecosystem, while Azerbaijan's innovation policy remains nascent but supported by the State Agency for Innovation and Digital Development.

Digital transformation is crucial for transparency and efficiency, both central to NATO's governance standards. E-government systems, open data, and digital procurement reduce corruption and improve institutional accountability—factors that also enhance resilience against hybrid threats.

FDI patterns reflect geopolitical orientations. Georgia's main investors include the EU, the U.S., and Turkey, consistent with its Euro-Atlantic trajectory. Azerbaijan attracts capital from energy multinationals (BP, SOCAR, Total), while Armenia relies on Russia and the diaspora. However, the post-2022 environment has reshaped investment flows: Western companies seek to diversify supply chains away from Russia, increasing interest in the South Caucasus corridor¹¹.

Attracting FDI depends on predictable regulation, transparency, and integration into global value chains—all areas strengthened by alignment with NATO and EU governance frameworks.

10 K.Kakachia, S. Meister, & B. Fricke, (Eds.). (2018). *Geopolitics and Security: A New Strategy for the South Caucasus*. Georgian Institute of Politics / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / DGAP.

11 F.Labarre, & G. (Eds.), Niculescu., *After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security*. Austrian National Defence Academy / PfP Consortium. (2023).

Business Governance and Strategic Alignment with NATO Standards

Effective business governance underpins both competitiveness and national security. Transparency and rule of law reduce systemic corruption, which Cornell identified¹² as one of the major destabilizing factors in the South Caucasus. NATO's *Building Integrity* principles—honesty, accountability, efficiency—align closely with international standards of good governance and market regulation.

Georgia's anti-corruption reforms since 2004 demonstrate how governance transformation can create a stable business environment. Armenia's ongoing judicial and procurement reforms, initiated after the 2018 "Velvet Revolution," indicate a gradual move toward transparency, though institutional independence remains fragile. Azerbaijan's implementation of the *ASAN Service* model has improved public service delivery but requires deeper accountability mechanisms.

Institutional capacity determines a state's ability to implement NATO-compatible reforms. Georgia's Ministry of Defense, for instance, introduced performance-based budgeting and internal audit mechanisms with NATO support. These reforms not only improved defense management but also established templates for civilian institutions¹³.

Similarly, Armenia's participation in the NATO–PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) has enhanced defense transparency, while Azerbaijan's partnership with Turkey under NATO frameworks has modernized procurement and logistics systems.

- **Baltic States' Transformation:** The experience of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania demonstrates that adopting NATO governance standards facilitates both defense modernization and EU market integration. Their "Baltic Defense College" model, suggested for replication in the South Caucasus by Cornell et al. (2004), remains a benchmark.
- **Georgia's Defence Institution Building (DIB):** Supported by NATO and the EU, this initiative integrated fiscal transparency and strategic planning mechanisms. The spillover effect improved the overall governance climate, boosting investor confidence.

These cases underscore that NATO standards, while designed for defense, catalyze broader administrative and economic modernization.

Infrastructure and Connectivity as Security Tools

In the South Caucasus, infrastructure is far more than an economic asset; it is the physical expression of power, sovereignty, and alignment. Pipelines, railways, and digital networks do not merely connect markets—they connect political systems, supply chains, and security commitments. Cornell observed¹⁴ that the earliest phases of NATO cooperation with the region already viewed infrastructure protection as an integral part of security assistance, linking energy corridors and transport routes with wider efforts to stabilize post-Soviet states.

The region's geography endows it with exceptional strategic value: situated between the Black and Caspian Seas and bordered by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, the South Caucasus functions as a bridge between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian spheres. Control over infrastructure here translates

12 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W.O'Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

13 European Commission. (2017). *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*. Brussels: European External Action Service.

14 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W.O'Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

directly into geopolitical leverage. Energy pipelines such as the **Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC)** and **South Caucasus Gas Pipeline** have reduced Europe’s dependence on Russian resources while anchoring Azerbaijan and Georgia more deeply in Western networks. At the same time, they have intensified competition with Moscow and Tehran, each seeking to maintain influence through alternative routes and transit chokepoints.

Kakachia describe this phenomenon ¹⁵as “**competitive connectivity**”—a process in which external powers project influence not through territorial control but through the financing, regulation, and political conditioning of infrastructure. For smaller states such as those in the South Caucasus, participation in these projects becomes a mechanism for asserting sovereignty while balancing among great-power interests. Yet, because these routes often bypass one neighbor in favor of another, connectivity can also entrench divisions if not paired with inclusive regional frameworks.

Energy transit remains the most visible form of geo-economic infrastructure in the South Caucasus. The **BTC Pipeline** (operational since 2006) and the **Southern Gas Corridor** embody a deliberate strategy to integrate Caspian hydrocarbons into European markets without crossing Russian territory. These projects represent what Blackwill and Harris ¹⁶ call the “geo-economic use of infrastructure”—employing economic projects as instruments of strategic deterrence.

For Georgia, serving as an energy and transport hub provides both material and symbolic security benefits. The physical presence of Western corporate and governmental stakeholders—BP, the European Investment Bank, and U.S. development agencies—creates an informal security guarantee. As Cornell argued,¹⁷ the political cost of instability rises when critical Western energy infrastructure is at stake, thereby creating deterrence through interdependence.

Azerbaijan, in turn, leverages these corridors to enhance its geopolitical standing and fiscal autonomy. The revenues and partnerships generated by pipeline projects have strengthened Baku’s bargaining power and reduced Russia’s capacity to act as an economic gatekeeper. However, as Labarre and Niculescu note¹⁸, the war in Ukraine has exposed the fragility of such arrangements: Russia’s waning influence opens new corridors, but it also increases competition from Turkey and Iran, each seeking a greater role in the post-Russian logistics order.

Transport corridors such as the **Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK)** railway, completed in 2017, and the planned **Anaklia Deep-Sea Port** further embed the region into trans-Eurasian supply chains. They form the backbone of the **Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR)** or “Middle Corridor,” which links China to Europe via Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, and Georgia. According to Labarre and Niculescu ¹⁹, disruptions to northern routes through Russia after 2022 have dramatically increased the strategic importance of the Middle Corridor, positioning the South Caucasus as a central artery for sanctions-resilient trade.

Yet these same projects reveal the limits of unilateral connectivity. Armenia’s exclusion from major east–west transit lines perpetuates its economic isolation and deepens dependence on Russia

15 K.Kakachia, S. Meister, & B. Fricke, (Eds.). (2018). *Geopolitics and Security: A New Strategy for the South Caucasus*. Georgian Institute of Politics / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / DGAP.

16 R.D. Blackwill, & J. M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Harvard University Press. (2016).

17 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W.O’Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

18 F. Labarre, & G. Niculescu. (Eds.). *After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security*. Austrian National Defence Academy / PFP Consortium. (2023).

19 *ibid*

and Iran. The reopening of regional communications—foreseen in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire but still contested—could transform Armenia from an isolated state into a connector within a new networked security order. Hence, infrastructure development must be understood as a regional rather than purely national enterprise.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine redefined the security logic of connectivity. As European markets sought alternative energy supplies and as Russian transit routes became politically and physically risky, the South Caucasus acquired renewed strategic relevance. Labarre and Niculescu²⁰ emphasize that infrastructure now functions simultaneously as a security asset and a vulnerability: cyber-attacks, sabotage, and coercive investment have become tools of hybrid warfare.

Consequently, NATO and the EU have begun to treat economic infrastructure as part of their “**resilience agenda.**” NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept underlines the protection of critical energy, transport, and digital networks as essential to collective defense. The Alliance’s cooperation with Georgia in cyber defense, crisis-response planning, and energy-security dialogue illustrates this shift from purely military assistance toward integrated resilience-building.

For South Caucasus states, participation in such frameworks offers dual benefits:

1. Access to technical expertise and best practices in infrastructure protection;
2. Enhanced credibility with investors who value predictable, rules-based governance.

This intertwining of infrastructure security and business climate highlights what Tocci called the “**resilience trinity**”—security, governance, and prosperity as mutually reinforcing dimensions²¹.

Economic interdependence, generated through shared infrastructure, operates as a stabilizing force by increasing the cost of conflict. Cornell²² anticipated that cooperative pipeline and transport projects could reduce incentives for renewed warfare in the South Caucasus. Two decades later, the logic remains valid: each kilometer of pipeline, fiber-optic cable, or railway represents a shared interest that constrains escalation.

Moreover, connectivity projects foster **functional integration** even in the absence of political reconciliation. Joint border posts, customs harmonization, and logistics partnerships cultivate daily cooperation among institutions and private actors. Over time, such practical interdependence can evolve into political trust—a dynamic already observable in limited Georgia–Azerbaijan cooperation on the Black Sea connectivity agenda.

Nevertheless, the stabilizing potential of interdependence depends on governance quality. Infrastructure that is opaque, monopolized, or corrupt can become a source of tension rather than peace. Here NATO’s *Building Integrity* programs and EU procurement standards provide crucial safeguards by promoting transparency, anti-corruption mechanisms, and civilian oversight.²³ When embedded in national legislation, these standards transform infrastructure from a possible vulnerability into a resilience asset.

20 F. Labarre, & G. Niculescu. (Eds.). *After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security*. Austrian National Defence Academy / PFP Consortium. (2023).

21 N. Tocci, (2016). *The EU Global Strategy: Shared Vision, Common Action*. European External Action Service.

22 S. E. Cornell, R. McDermott, W.O’Malley, V. Socor, & S. F. Starr (2004). *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

23 NATO. *Strategic Concept 2022*. Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2022).

The emerging concept of “**connectivity security**” in NATO and EU policy circles reflects a recognition that infrastructure is the new frontier of deterrence. For the South Caucasus, this implies moving from project-based cooperation toward institutionalized regional governance of corridors. Coordinated risk assessment, shared maintenance of transport links, and joint cybersecurity frameworks would turn infrastructure into a collective good rather than a zero-sum instrument.

Georgia’s proposal for a **Black Sea Submarine Cable** connecting the South Caucasus electricity grid directly to Europe exemplifies this evolution. Supported by the EU and international financial institutions, the project enhances both energy diversification and geopolitical integration. Similarly, Azerbaijan’s and Kazakhstan’s joint investment in Caspian shipping and port infrastructure demonstrates that economic cooperation can underpin regional security when managed transparently and inclusively.

In conclusion, infrastructure and connectivity constitute the **material foundations of strategic resilience** in the South Caucasus. They serve as deterrents, development drivers, and instruments of integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. The challenge for regional policymakers is to ensure that connectivity does not reproduce geopolitical fragmentation but instead embeds the region within a framework of cooperative security consistent with NATO and EU standards of governance, transparency, and sustainability.

Policy Implications and Strategic Recommendations

The foremost policy priority for the South Caucasus is to institutionalize transparency and accountability across public and private sectors. NATO and EU frameworks can serve as anchors for reform by linking financial assistance and partnership benefits to governance performance. National anti-corruption strategies should be integrated into broader security planning.

PPPs are critical for financing infrastructure and innovation. Regional governments should develop transparent concession frameworks to attract foreign investors to strategic projects like ports, renewable energy, and digital connectivity. NATO’s emphasis on critical infrastructure protection provides a complementary security umbrella.

NATO should expand its PfP activities to include economic resilience, supply chain protection, and cyber governance. For partner states, adopting NATO-compatible procurement, logistics, and corporate integrity standards can make domestic businesses globally competitive. Joint NATO–EU economic governance initiatives would further harmonize reform efforts and anchor the South Caucasus within a stable Euro-Atlantic framework.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the South Caucasus’ long-term stability depends on integrating geo-economic modernization with strategic alignment to NATO governance and integrity standards. Economic competitiveness—through innovation, SME development, and infrastructure connectivity—serves as both a security buffer and a development engine.

Theoretical analysis demonstrated that geo-economics bridges military and economic domains, while empirical evidence from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan illustrated diverse pathways of reform and alignment. NATO’s frameworks for transparency, integrity, and institutional resilience

provide a practical template for balancing sovereignty, competitiveness, and collective security.

Future prospects for regional integration hinge on transforming economic interdependence into political trust. If effectively coordinated with NATO and EU standards, the South Caucasus could evolve from a zone of contestation into a hub of stability linking the Black Sea, Caspian basin, and wider Eurasian markets.

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TÜRKIYE'S COMPLEX ROLE AS A NATO MEMBER AND REGIONAL POWER

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Abstract

Turkey occupies strategic location at the intersection of Europe and Asia. Since joining NATO in 1952, Türkiye has served as a cornerstone of the NATO's Southern flank. This paper shows that in the 21st century, Türkiye often creates tension as a NATO ally and focuses on its ambitions as an independent regional power. Nowadays, Türkiye is an ally that is deeply integrated into the military structures of the NATO and has the second largest standing army in the Alliance. Under the AKP, Turkey has become a confident regional power that views its NATO membership not as an identity but as one of the tools. After the Arab Spring events in 2011 and, especially, the coup d'état attempt, the new phase of Türkiye's foreign policy has begun, which was characterized as "assertive approach" relying on military means to achieve goals. Türkiye no longer sees its foreign policy as subordinate to the Alliance but rather sometimes competing. It cooperates with the Alliance when interests meet, and challenges it when core national interests are at stake. This dual identity positions Türkiye as simultaneously looking towards the Euro-Atlantic region on one hand and the Middle East, Caucasus, North Africa – on another.

This paper overviews the significance of Türkiye to the Alliance, the transformation of the foreign policy over the years, and points of disagreement with NATO and partner states on issues related to the Kurdish question, Türkiye's objection on accession of Sweden to NATO, the Russian S-400 acquisition and Eastern Mediterranean rivalry. On the other hand, the paper also discusses areas where Türkiye's regional power ambitions and NATO membership align, creating synergies that benefit both Ankara and the Alliance including managing the migration crisis, counter-terrorism cooperation and balancing Russia in the Black Sea and Caucasus.

Keywords: Turkey; NATO; regional power; alliance politics; Black Sea security; foreign policy; Turkish-Russian relations; NATO-Turkish relations.

Introduction

Historically, the Republic of Turkey (hereafter, Türkiye) occupies strategically crucial geographical location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Since its accession to the NATO in 1952, Türkiye has served as a cornerstone of the NATO's Southern flank, in the face of potential spread of communism after the World War II.

In the 21st century, Türkiye often creates tension as a NATO ally and focuses on its ambitions as an independent regional power. This dual identity positions Türkiye as simultaneously looking towards the Euro-Atlantic region on one hand and the Middle East, Caucasus, North Africa – on another.

Since NATO faces security threats from Russia, in light of the war against Ukraine, and growing instability in the Middle East, it is important to realize how Türkiye balances its national interests with collective defense commitments. This paper overviews the significance of Türkiye to the Alliance, the transformation of the foreign policy over the years, and the points of disagreement with NATO and partner states.

Main Part

Türkiye's Strategic Value to the NATO

Türkiye's value to the NATO is rooted in geographic facts as it is neighboring instable regions.¹ After the World War II, the USSR imposed territorial claims on Türkiye. Considering the threats emerging from the Soviet Union, Turkish leaders and Western powers realized the inevitability of countering the danger from Moscow. Eventual accession to the NATO in 1952 enabled security guarantees to Türkiye and the entire nation. The NATO membership not only ensured the feeling of safety and stability but also accelerated modernization of Turkish army.

Nowadays, Türkiye holds the second largest standing forces in the NATO, a tough force that provides significant contribution to the Alliance's collective defense posture. The Incirlik Air Base in Türkiye, built in 1954 with US assistance, has been a critical logistic hub for numerous NATO operations since the Cold War, deterring potential Soviet enlargement and dealing with crises in the Middle East, including operations during the First Gulf War, as well as Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and anti-IS allied coalition operations.²³ Apart from the Turkish forces, the Incirlik Base hosts US, UK and Germany troops. In addition, Türkiye's early warning radar in Kürecik, operated by the US forces under NATO Command, is intended to protect the allies from threats emanating from the Middle East. The radar, located in Malatya province, close to Iran's western border, plays a key role in tracking missile launches from Iran, and provision of early warning data critical to NATO's missile defence network.⁴ This infrastructure underscores Türkiye's deep integration into NATO's defence architecture.

1 Flanagan, Stephen J., F. Stephen Larrabee, Anika Binnendijk, Katherine Costello, Shira Efron, James Hoobler, Magdalena Kirchner, Jeffrey Martini, Alireza Nader, and Peter A. Wilson, Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2589.html

2 Cagri Özdemir, What you need to know about Incirlik air base. Deutsche Welle, May 17, 2017. <https://p.dw.com/p/2d5eW>

3 Incirlik Air Base History, Incirlik Air Base, November 2018. <https://surl.li/yvsnfd>

4 News About Turkey – NAT, Kürecik Radar Station at the Center of Turkey's Israel Debate Amid New Baykar-Leonardo Defense Deal, News About Turkey, August 2025. [Kürecik Radar Station at the Center of Turkey's Israel Debate Amid New Baykar-Leonardo Defense Deal – News About Turkey | NAT](https://www.newsaboutturkey.com/news/kurecik-radar-station-at-the-center-of-turkeys-israel-debate-amid-new-baykar-leonardo-defense-deal/)

Due to geography, Türkiye controls the so called Turkish Straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, which link the Black Sea and Aegean Sea via the Sea of Marmara. They play a crucial role in world trade, making this area one of the busiest maritime gateways.⁵ The Black Sea itself provides access to global sea lines of communication to Russia. During the Cold War, this control over the channels was used for containing the Soviet Fleet. Even nowadays, this geography remains critical, as revealed for the duration of the current Russo-Ukrainian War, where Türkiye's application of the Montreux Convention has limited the movement of warships, effectively preventing escalation in the Black Sea particularly. The parties of the agreement, including Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, Yugoslavia, Türkiye, United Kingdom and Soviet Union, signed the Montreux Convention in 1936, as a result of which Türkiye obtained the right to control the passage of vessels through the straits in specific situations. Türkiye has been managing the convention work carefully and advantageously. In brief, in event of war, Türkiye is eligible to close the straits for foreign warships.⁶

In addition to military assets, Türkiye's role as a mediator between different civilizations has served to the NATO as a solid diplomatic channel. In the early 2000s, Türkiye followed a "zero problems with neighbors" policy and positioned itself as a mediator in conflicts involving Iran, Syria, and the Balkans. Even nowadays, when this policy is no longer valid, Türkiye frequently offers its mediation for resolving conflicts. Examples of Türkiye's mediation efforts include initiation of cooperation engaging Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia, facilitating of mediation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, efforts in resolving Iran's Nuclear Program and the most recent engagement in the Russo-Ukrainian War.⁷

Foreign Policy under the AKP's: From "Zero Problems" to Assertive Pragmatism

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) under Recep Tayyip Erdogan has governed the office for more than twenty years now. Over the years, the AKP party's foreign policy evolved, starting with a pro-European agenda and EU accession aspiration. In 2004, Erdogan's adviser Ahmet Davutoglu elaborated policy of "Zero Problems with Neighbors". The focus was taken to interact with the neighborhood on a cooperation basis, using soft power, cultural ties and economic interdependence.⁸ This approach appeared to be corresponding to the NATO interests, fostering stability in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East. However, in practice, it was not realistic as Türkiye had disputes with Greece over Cyprus, strains with Armenia over genocide, tensions with Iraq and Syria.⁹

After the Arab Spring events in 2011 and, especially, the coup d'état attempt in 2016, the policy of "Zero Problems with Neighbors" transformed into the new phase of Türkiye's foreign policy,

5 FP Explainers, Explained: Importance of Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits in Russia-Ukraine conflict and Turkey's role, Firstpost, February 2022. <https://surl.li/umghxe>

6 Rear Admiral Thomas A. Brooks, U.S. Navy (Retired), Turkey, the Montreux Convention, and Russian Navy Transits of the Turkish Straits, US Naval Institute, March 2022. [Turkey, the Montreux Convention, and Russian Navy Transits of the Turkish Straits | Proceedings - March 2022 Vol. 148/3/1429](https://www.usni.org/Proceedings/Proceedings-March-2022-Vol-148/3/1429)

7 Hüseyin Özdemir, Mediating Conflicts and Türkiye's Role as a Mediator for Peace, TRT TRAINING AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT, September 2024. <https://surl.lt/kmvxdx>

8 Nienke van Heukelingen & Bob Deen, Beyond Turkey's 'zero problems' policy, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, January 2022. <https://surl.li/lrasew>

9 Ali Askerov, Turkey's "Zero Problems with the Neighbors" Policy: Was It Realistic?, April 2017, Contemporary Review of the Middle East. <https://surl.li/nhdhbe>

which was characterized as “assertive approach” relying on military means to achieve goals.¹⁰

The transformation of the foreign policy has changed Türkiye’s relationship with the NATO. Türkiye’s military interventions in Syria, deployment of forces to Libya, and its maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean were undertaken with minimal consultation with NATO and often in direct opposition to the interests of member-states like Greece, France, and the United States. This demonstrates that Türkiye no longer sees its foreign policy as subordinate to the Alliance but rather sometimes competing. In September 2024, Türkiye formally applied to join the BRICS, an organization that was created to challenge the US and Western Europe. The BRICS stands for an abbreviation shaped from initial letters of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.¹¹ In this regard, President Erdogan stated that Türkiye should “simultaneously” develop connections with East and West.¹²

Recently, Türkiye has been investing in developing its own defence industry thus decreasing dependence on foreign suppliers and fostering its own capacity to become a competitor in the global defence industry.

Türkiye’s relation with Russia is worth mentioning since it is characterized by balanced and pragmatic maneuvering. Turkey and Russia were on conflicting sides of main regional conflicts, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Libya and Syria. Although they supported opposing flanks, Turkish and Russian leaders continued dialogue. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, on one hand Türkiye assisted Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid, preserved Montreux Convention provisions, but on the other - Türkiye maintained ties with Moscow, has not joined sanctions against Russia or closed its airspace to Russian aircrafts.¹³

Friction Points with the Alliance

The disagreement between Türkiye’s national ambitions and its NATO membership has caused significant friction, which revealed in several disputes.

The Kurdish Question

Syrian conflict has stood as one of the most serious point of tension, in relation to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in particular supported by US. The SDF are run by the People’s Protection Units (YPG), which in turn is recognized by Türkiye as a terrorist organization associated to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) that has supported insurgency inside Türkiye for decades. For the NATO allies, the YPG was the most effective ground force in the fight against the ISIS. This formed a straight dispute: the US saw a counter-terrorism partner, while Türkiye saw an existential threat on its border. Turkish military operations against the YPG in Northern Syria, such as Operations Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch, have brought Turkish and US forces into close and dangerous proximity.¹⁴

Türkiye’s objection on accession of Sweden to NATO

10 Nienke van Heukelingen & Bob Deen, Beyond Turkey’s ‘zero problems’ policy, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, January 2022. <https://surl.li/gqjdv d>

11 Turkish Minute, Turkey has formally applied to join BRICS, September 2024. <https://surl.lt/hdxeqy>

12 AP News, Turkey wants to join the BRICS bloc of developing economies, official confirms, September 2024. <https://surl.li/nfelen>

13 Steven A. Cook, Where Turkey Stands on the Russia-Ukraine War, Council on Foreign Relations, March 2022. <https://surl.i.cc/bfvqst>

14 Center for Preventive Action, Conflict between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups, Global Conflict Tracker, May 2025. <https://surl.li/yudkpi>

It was because of the Kurdish issue Türkiye objected on accession of Sweden to NATO. Main reason of opposition was related to Sweden's support to Kurds. Türkiye demanded from Sweden to extradite some Kurdish fighters and coup-supporters. Since NATO accession requires unanimous consent from member countries, getting Türkiye's approval took months of tense negotiations, US mediation, and, thus, concluding in concessions to Türkiye.¹⁵

The Russian S-400 Acquisition

Another point of disagreement with NATO was related to Türkiye's decision to acquire Russian S-400 air defence system in 2017. According to the US officials, the Russian systems are not compatible with NATO defence systems and pose a security issue.¹⁶ Experts believed that Russian side would have been able to access vulnerabilities, hitting US pilots under additional risk. Despite these concerns, Türkiye received the first components of the S-400 system in 2019. This crisis led to Türkiye being removed from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program.¹⁷ Türkiye's decision was an indication that it prioritized its desire for strategic autonomy over Alliance interoperability and solidarity.

Eastern Mediterranean Rivalry

Türkiye's claims in the Eastern Mediterranean led to conflicts with NATO members such as Greece, as well as Cyprus and France. The Turkish-Greek opposition is caused by disagreements over maritime boundaries, approaches to the Cyprus question and energy. In relation to France, the rivalry is due to Türkiye's "rise as an emergent power...in a region that Paris traditionally views as its sphere of influence." As Türkiye pursues to possess as an energy transport hub and decrease dependency from Russia and Iran, energy reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean were considered as an alternative. As a result, Cyprus mobilized a 'coalition' against Türkiye, ending in the establishing of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020. Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus, Greece, Jordan, and Italy were initial members, while France joined in 2021, and the United States is engaged as a permanent observer. The official goal of this platform is to enhance economic cooperation between the members. However, the Forum has been designated as an anti-Turkish coalition as all the members have concerns with Türkiye's increasing posture.¹⁸ These tensions challenge NATO's internal cohesion and divert efforts that could be used to address mutual threats, such as expansionist Russia.

Where Alliance and Ambitions Meet

Despite these deep strains, there are crucial areas where Türkiye's regional power ambitions and NATO membership align, creating synergies that benefit both Ankara and the Alliance.

Managing the Migration Crisis

In 2016, the EU - Türkiye agreement was signed, which allowed to reduce the amount of asylum seekers. According to the arrangements, migrants endeavoring to arrive to Greece would be returned to Türkiye, and Turkish side would take actions to stop opening new migratory routes. In return, the EU decided to simplify visa regulations for Turkish residents, pay 6 billion euros in

15 The Straitstimes, Why Turkey is still blocking Sweden's Nato accession, January 2023. <https://surl.li/ztqsgx>

16 BBC, US gives Turkey ultimatum on Russian missiles, June 2019. <https://surl.lu/ldsfyv>

17 Ata Ahmet Kokcu, S-400s, Russia, strained ties and sanctions: What happened to Türkiye's F-35s?, Türkiye Today, October 2024. <https://surl.li/rhrfmy>

18 Sapna Suresh, An Examination of the Growing Rivalry Between France and Türkiye, July 2025, Onero Institute. <https://surl.i.cc/cvtzcm>

assistance to Türkiye.¹⁹ Therefore, EU delegated overcoming critical European security challenge to Ankara. This arrangement emphasized that Türkiye's capacity to control its borders and manage populations within its sphere of influence is a direct benefit to its NATO partners in Europe.

Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence

Despite disagreements over the YPG, Türkiye remains a vital partner in the broader fight against terrorism. Turkish intelligence structures have understood how terrorist networks in Syria and its beyond work, which led to disruption of ISIS cells and infrastructure. Since 2016, Türkiye has been exploiting armed UAVs in counter-terrorism actions. In total, 405 terrorists were neutralized by UAVs in the first couple years of application. UAVs brought the coordinates of ISIS terrorists, which were then eliminated by Turkish warplanes.²⁰ Sharing intelligence remains a crucial component of transatlantic security.

Balancing Russia in the Black Sea and the Caucasus

Türkiye and Russia have multifaceted relationship. At one hand, Ankara cooperates with Moscow in energy area (the TurkStream pipeline) and has purchased the S-400, it has also directly challenged Russian influence. Most notably, Türkiye's support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute challenged influence of Russia, an Armenia's ally, and changed the regional power balance. In addition, the provision of Turkish drones to Ukraine has considerably boosted Kyiv's defensive capabilities against Russian forces. This is in line with NATO's goal of supporting Ukrainian sovereignty. This proves Türkiye's ability to act as an independent regional counterweight to Russia, which eventually serves the Alliance's interests.

Conclusion

Türkiye's role as a NATO member and a regional power is characterized by a persistent duality. The age of Türkiye being a predictable and subordinate ally on NATO's Southern flank is concluded. It is an ally that is deeply integrated into the military structures of the NATO, however, pursuing an independent foreign policy, which is occasionally antagonistic to its partners'. Its immense strategic significance - the geography, military reach and diplomatic ties - makes it an indispensable actor for the Alliance.

Under the AKP, Türkiye has become a confident regional power that views its NATO membership not as an identity but as one of the tools. It cooperates with the Alliance when interests meet, and challenges it when core national interests are at stake.

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¹⁹ Kyilah Terry, The EU-Turkey Deal, Five Years On: A Frayed and Controversial but Enduring Blueprint, April 2021, Migration Policy Institute. <https://surl.li/cc/zjubhu>

²⁰ Ali Burak Darıcılı, The Operational Capacity of Turkish Intelligence within the Scope of Use of High-Technology Products, Insight Turkey Summer 2022 / Volume 24, Number 3, Pages 135-150. <https://surl.li/yonqtp>

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