

## The Effects of Conflicts and Political Instability in the South Caucasus on Regional Security

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### Abstract

Geopolitical balances have a dynamic character and internal and external variables constantly target the current balance and direct the processes to establish a new balance. Thus, the evolution of the equations has become a stable trend leading to the development of a global geopolitical system. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the poles of the global power structure in the third quarter of the 20th century, global power relations and geopolitical structure have changed radically. As a world power, the United States of America (USA) remained unrivaled after the bipolar environment with the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and therefore the Eastern Bloc / Warsaw Pact from the scene and declared a new world order and continued to live this unrivaled and unipolar period for now by intervening in Iraq in 1991 and later in the civil wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria to control the world's affairs as a single power structure.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led by the USA, despite the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Warsaw Pact, instead of dissolving itself, grew and produced concepts that would create new enemies for itself. In other words, although the Warsaw Pact became obsolete with the end of the Cold War, NATO continued on its path by undergoing the changes and transformations it deemed necessary and expanding. NATO, which had 16 members during the Cold War, became a global security organization with 30 members as of 2022 after the Cold War. In the first expansion, the former Warsaw Pact members, the Central and Eastern European countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, joined NATO in 1999.

The South Caucasus is a region historically shaped by ethnic and political conflicts, and poses significant threats to regional security. This article aims to analyze the effects of conflicts and political instability in the South Caucasus on regional security. The study examines the main conflicts in the region, their connections with international relations, and the implications of this situation on security dynamics. In addition, the factors that cause political instability in the region to pose security threats at both local and global levels are discussed. The study also emphasizes the role of the geopolitical location of the South Caucasus and the influence of external actors on the security structure. In this context, an analysis of how conflicts in the South Caucasus create long-term and multidimensional effects on security is presented.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, conflicts, political instability, regional dynamics

## Вплив конфліктів і політичної нестабільності у південному Кавказі на регіональну безпеку

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### Анотація

Геополітичні баланси мають динамічний характер, а внутрішні та зовнішні змінні постійно орієнтуються на поточний баланс і спрямовують процеси на встановлення нового балансу. Таким чином, еволюція рівнянь стала стійкою тенденцією, що веде до розвитку глобальної геополітичної системи. З розпадом Радянського Союзу, одного з полюсів глобальної структури влади в третій чверті 20 століття, глобальні відносини сил і геополітична структура радикально змінилися. Як світова держава, Сполучені Штати Америки (США) залишилися неперевершеними після біполярного середовища з виходом Радянського Союзу і, отже, Східного блоку/Варшавського договору зі сцени, та проголосили новий світовий порядок і продовжували жити в однополярному періоді шляхом втручання в Ірак у 1991 році, а потім у громадянські війни в Іраку, Афганістані та Сирії, щоб контролювати владні структури. Організація Північноатлантичного договору (НАТО) на чолі зі США, незважаючи на розпад Союзу Радянських Соціалістичних Республік (СРСР) і Варшавського договору, замість того, щоб саморозпуститися, виросла і створила концепції, які створили б собі нових ворогів. Іншими словами, хоча Варшавський договір застарів із закінченням холодної війни, НАТО продовжувала свій шлях, зазнаючи змін і трансформацій, які вона вважала необхідними, та розширюючись. НАТО, до складу якої під час холодної війни входило 16 членів, станом на 2022 рік після закінчення холодної війни стала глобальною організацією безпеки з 30 членами. Під час першого розширення колишні члени Варшавського договору, країни Центральної та Східної Європи, Чехія, Угорщина та Польща, приєдналися до НАТО в 1999 році. Південний Кавказ є регіоном, історично сформованим етнічними та політичними конфліктами, і створює значні загрози для регіональної безпеки. Ця стаття має на меті проаналізувати вплив конфліктів і політичної нестабільності на Південному Кавказі на регіональну безпеку. Дослідження розглядає основні конфлікти в регіоні, їхній зв'язок з міжнародними відносинами та наслідки цієї ситуації для динаміки безпеки. Крім того, обговорюються фактори, які спричиняють політичну нестабільність у регіоні, створюючи загрози безпеці як на локальному, так і на глобальному рівнях. У дослідженні також підкреслюється роль геополітичного розташування Південного Кавказу та вплив зовнішніх гравців на структуру безпеки. У цьому контексті представлено аналіз того, як конфлікти на Південному Кавказі створюють довгостроковий і багатовимірний вплив на безпеку.

**Ключові слова:** Південний Кавказ, конфлікти, політична нестабільність, регіональна динаміка

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**Introduction.**

First of all, let us note that the second expansion continued with the participation of seven countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). These countries were first invited to accession talks during the 2002 Prague summit and joined NATO on March 29, 2004, shortly before the 2004 Istanbul summit. Albania and Croatia became NATO members in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in 2020, respectively. The successor countries of the USSR established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) under the leadership of Russia.

The European Union (EU); As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the Central-Eastern European countries (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia) were rapidly incorporated into its structure and integrated with them in the EU's Fifth Enlargement Wave, expanding and extending its political, economic and security borders to the Black Sea, that is, to Russia's sphere of interest and influence. Russia's only remaining connection in Europe was the Kaliningrad region, formerly known as Prussia, in the Baltic.

The end of the Cold War was a real turning point for the European continent. The end of half a century of division was celebrated enthusiastically throughout Europe, and the Central and Eastern European countries that were left out of European integration without their own will, such as Malta and the Greek Cypriot Administration, began applying to become EU members. However, the fifth enlargement process was very different from previous enlargements in terms of both the quality and quantity of candidate countries and the depth that European integration had reached, which was quite painful for both the candidate countries and the EU. The geographical areas that the Soviet Union governed or influenced in the South and West faced a power vacuum and a competition model. In addition, instability and conflict occurred within and among the countries in this region.

Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Baltics, and Eastern Europe are regions that experienced some forms of stability and relative peace (the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and NATO) after a period of instability. However, the UK left the EU in 2020 with Brexit. This caused an estimated 15% decrease in the EU's budget and 40% security/military loss. In fact, in 2021, a French and British fishermen's crisis broke out in the territorial waters of the island of Jersey in the English Channel, and British and French warships came face to face (Fenton, 2023).

To balance the US, NATO, and the EU, new military/security, political, economic, and sociocultural organizations (Shanghai Cooperation Organization/SCO, Collective Security Treaty Organization/CSTO),

Commonwealth of Independent States/CIS, Eurasian Economic Partnership and Eurasian Union, etc.) were formed in the Asian continent under the leadership of Russia and China. The collapse of the bipolar system led to two waves of regional instability in the world: The first wave was associated with the early 1990s and affected the southern and western geographical regions of the former Soviet Union, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and the former Yugoslavia. This wave began to be brought under control and the areas in question regained a relative and fragile (frozen potential conflict zones) calm.

The second wave destabilized the Middle East and North Africa, especially in the early 21st century, and instability (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Palestine) continues to increase. This instability is the result of the conflict between two main actors, namely the trans-regional actor and especially the regional actors (Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia) including Russia, the US, and the coalition states formed under the leadership of the US, as well as terrorist organizations (ISIS, PKK/PYD). It is not necessarily consistent and unified with each other and this phenomenon partly reflects what Samuel Huntington called the "clash of Western and Islamic civilizations".

The result of this conflict and conflict is the development of the crisis in the Middle East and even the spread of the range of competition and struggle to the periphery and the development of geopolitical processes in West Asia, Eurasia, and Central Asia. These processes are; Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq crisis, Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and the conflicts in the Caucasus especially in the South Caucasus, Central Asian issues and conflicts, and the tensions and insecurities of the countries of the region regarding the Afghanistan issue, Pakistan security crisis, conflict, crisis between Iran and the US. The legitimacy problem of governments, the spread of fundamentalist beliefs, and the development of the Turkish, Iranian, and Arab gaps defined as the "triangle of emptiness", insecurity, and terror crises are clear examples of this.

These crises provide the necessary potential for developing instability, insecurity, and change. The conflicting powers in this region have different functions in terms of their interests and often oppose each other due to their interests (religious/sectarian, racial/ethnic, ideological, energy resources and terminals/pipelines and routes and water resources, etc.). The collapse of the Soviet Union divided the Caucasus into two politically, not geographically. Thus, the states of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia in the South Caucasus and the lands that remained as the North Caucasus were included within the borders of the Russian Federation.

The North Caucasus region is located in a remote and underdeveloped region and has strategic importance. This region has served as a protection for Russia against the Muslim world and the West, and in fact has the role of a buffer zone, outpost, and defense line for Russia.

Each of the peoples of this region has their own historical background, language, ethnicity, traditions, culture, and social structure and, except for the Ossetians, are generally Muslims (Can, 2021).

The collapse of the old order along with the independence of the Caucasus countries and Central Asia has led to geopolitical irregularities in the region and global geopolitics has changed somewhat accordingly. These transformations are accompanied by elements and factors that make the situation in the region more complicated due to the coexistence of these republics in the Soviet Union. This situation in the newly born independent states is faced with threats that could lead to instability in the region and fractures due to deep fault lines.

The internal situation and foreign relations of the Caucasus countries could change the balance of power in the region. Any change in the relations and balance of power in the region will also affect the neighboring countries of the region, especially Russia, Iran and Turkey, and this limited circle will be expanded with the participation of a number of other countries (USA, EU, UK, China, Israel and even India) and global/regional organizations (NATO, EU, OSCE, EC, CSTO, SCO).

#### Literature review.

Barry Buzan's "People, States & Fear" and Barry Buzan and Ole Waever's "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security" have contributed greatly to this article from a theoretical perspective. Although these books are a continuation of recent studies in the field of international peace and security, they are also particularly important in terms of regional studies.

Buzan and Waever clearly show the relationship between security processes and the formation of regions in their books. They believe that the end of the Cold War has increased the importance of the regional level in terms of international security, but this does not mean that the regional level is superior to the local or international level in terms of security in all regions.

These books develop the idea that regional security models have become more prominent in international politics and relations since the decolonization period. The authors combine an operational theory of regional security with an empirical application to the entire international system. The main focus is on the post-Cold War period, but the history of each Regional Security Complex (RSC) dates back to its beginning. By relating regional security dynamics to current debates about the global power structure, the authors present a distinctive interpretation of post-Cold War international security that is both an oversimplification of the unipolar view and a new world disorder.

Their framework reveals the radical diversity of security dynamics in different parts of the world. According to Buzan, since many types of threats can move more easily over short distances than long distances (for example, the separatist movements of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia in the South Caucasus), security interdependence tends to cluster in regional formations, which are ontologically and analytically different from the system and state levels. Buzan sees Russia, a major power in the CIS, as the center. In the event of a relative decline in Russian power, the CIS could transform into a standard Regional Security Complex. The security situation in this region is relatively complex: the security regime is a strange combination of conflict formation and efforts for a hegemonic regime (Arslan, 2024).

On the other hand, Birthe Hansen, Peter Toft and Anders Wivel examined the security importance of Russia's border regions in their 2009 book *Security Strategies and American World Order: Lost Power*. In their view, Russia's soft balance with the great powers since the mid-1990s was supported by this country's regional strategy in the border regions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow lost most of its influence in the border regions.

However, in late 1992, Russia demonstrated its approach to the border based on the preservation of its influence. These border regions have long been important for military/security, social, cultural and economic reasons. These countries have played a role in the field of security objectives, such as preventing the spread of instability from the South Caucasus to Russia.

Moreover, these regions and especially military radar stations play an important role in the optimal functioning of the Russian air defense system. These areas contain the human and material resources necessary for Russia to regain its superpower status. Therefore, it is important to understand Russia's strategy in the border regions. In these regions, Russia generally uses dependency and



Picture 1. Ethnic Groups in the Caucasus.

“divide and rule” methods instead of direct military invasion or full-scale threat. In addition, Russia applies the “Nearby Region” doctrine towards the region (Arslan, 2024).

#### **Geopolitical characteristics of the South Caucasus region and its position in the international system.**

The Caucasus is a large geopolitical region located on the border of Europe and Asia. The region, which has rich energy resources in the south, is in a strategic position in terms of the transportation of Caspian oil and natural gas. On the other hand, the South Caucasus is under the influence of instability, hostilities and unresolved conflicts in terms of security, as well as ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, socio-political and economic problems that emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this context, the South Caucasus is mostly remembered today with armed conflicts that prevent peace and stability and fault lines that are ready to break.

Although these disputes are described as “frozen” and the region as “frozen conflict zones”, the “five-day” war between Georgia and Russia over the South Ossetia region in August 2008 and the “44-day” war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 are indicators of the fragility in the region and that conflicts can easily turn into conflicts. Moreover, there are still no diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the two important states of the South Caucasus region, the peace is temporary and the people of the region are directly harmed as a result. Therefore, it is extremely important to ensure a secure environment in the region and to work for peace and stability. The Caucasus is generally a mountainous region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The Caucasus Mountain Range divides the region into two as the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia (South Caucasus).

While the North Caucasus is completely under the control of Russia, the South Caucasus is home to the states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. When the geographical location of the Caucasus is evaluated in general; it is located at the meeting point of the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, and with this feature, it controls the transportation lines and approach directions connecting the three continents. The connecting roads from Turkey to Central Asia and from Russia to the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf pass through this region. Due to their historical past and the emergence of a new political atmosphere in the region and the world, the South Caucasus republics have made many attempts to gain a new position in the region and organize their international relations after independence (Kara, & Bayramoğlu, 2022).

#### **Security approaches of countries in the South Caucasus and regional and trans-regional actors towards the region.**

The existence of certain economic opportunities and security threats in this region has caused the security of the South Caucasus to turn into a heated political debate

since the early stages of independence. In fact, energy resources, the potential of regional experiences and the spirit of separatism and insecurity in some areas of this area are among the reasons that show the importance of the security debate in the Caucasus. On the other hand, the attempts of regional and trans-regional powers to dominate the political and social situation of the South Caucasus and to seize the management of energy resources in this region have led trans-regional and neighboring countries to provide various security plans to maintain their existence.

The two most important factors that make the South Caucasus Region have a different appearance compared to the North Caucasus are: “the region has an appearance that cannot be unified in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and culture” and “the countries in the region are separated from each other in terms of system and integration preferences”. For example, after the “Rose Revolution”, Georgia made its choice in the international system primarily in favor of the USA, NATO and the EU; Armenia, due to historical, political, military/security, geopolitical and economic reasons, has evolved into Russia's ally and strategic partner in the South Caucasus and has entered into close cooperation with Iran. Azerbaijan, which is not dependent on Russia in terms of energy resources and projects and can even be said to have entered into a secret competition with this country, is trying to maintain a balance between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic World.

However, when the Turkish factor and economic reasons are taken into consideration, it can be said that Azerbaijan stands much closer to the Euro-Atlantic Alliance. Azerbaijan is implementing a balancing policy between the West and Russia. Russia, Turkey, Iran, the EU, the USA and NATO are among the countries and organizations that are trying to strengthen their presence in the South Caucasus region by offering various security designs (Erdem, 2020).

#### **Azerbaijan's South Caucasus policy and security strategy.**

Among the three South Caucasus countries, the Republic of Azerbaijan is in a very favorable position in terms of wealth and resources. However, due to the war with Armenia and the loss of some of its territories in terms of security (this issue was not fully resolved in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war) and the problems it has with other ethnic minorities such as the Talysh and Lezgi, it is trying to attract the attention of extra-regional powers in the Caucasus against Armenia and change the balance of power in its favor. According to the nature of its foreign policy, Azerbaijan is more willing to increase the presence of extra-regional powers in order to ensure the security of the region.

Accordingly, the approach adopted by Baku to secure the region is the 3 + 2 + 2 approach, which represents the three countries in the South Caucasus region (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia), while + 2 indicates the

presence of two regional countries, Turkey and Russia, and the last number. It represents the United States and the European Union as two regional powers. Faced with the presence of Iran as a neighboring country, where it plays a more effective role in the regional security balance according to its special geopolitical situation, this country communicates and interacts with countries that oppose Iran and has extensive military and security cooperation with Israel, which will ignore Iran's influence and power in this region. On the other hand, this country, by accepting some of the MKO members from Iraq's Ashraf Camp and harboring terrorists to conduct and train terrorist operations in Iran, intends to tighten the security cordon against Iran and thus threaten Iran's interests. Azerbaijan pursues a balance policy. As a sovereign state, Azerbaijan has clearly defined its regional policy by formulating and implementing a National Security Policy aimed at addressing and eliminating threats in the current security environment and achieving the country's national interests using domestic and foreign policy tools (Smith, 2024).

As special and comprehensive relations with Iran. It seems that with the opening of a new chapter in Armenia-Turkey relations, the geopolitical pressures stemming from the deadlock on Armenia in the region will be eliminated and Iran's geopolitical value will be challenged and damaged by opening its borders with Turkey as the only way for this country to connect Armenia to international waters. Armenia is mainly trying to establish a balance with Russia and Iran against Turkey and Azerbaijan. While Armenia's anti-Azerbaijan and anti-Turkey stance continues, Armenia is also strengthening relations with Western countries in order to reduce Russia's influence on the country. This process was accelerated especially after Nikol Pashinyan came to power in 2018. The US and European countries generally support the Armenian thesis on the Armenian Issue and Turkish-Armenian relations, while officially defending Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Thus, since Armenia wants to include Karabakh within its borders, it is trying to justify itself in international politics, especially in Western countries. Armenia has now tripled its military contribution to ISAF since 2010.

After the end of the ISAF mission in January 2015, it has actively supported the NATO-led Resolut Support Mission (RSM); NATO also wants to include Armenia in its bloc against Russia and, in this context, increases its assistance to Armenia to adopt Western-style democracy and to implement political reforms. In addition, NATO is trying to increase its influence over Armenia by providing financial support in the fields of defense and security. Artur Baghdasaryan's announcement that two military bases in Armenia, the Gyumri military base and the Erebuni air base in the capital Yerevan, will be modernized after his meeting with Nikolay Bordyuja, Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, stands out as an indication that the Kremlin has not planned to leave the

area for many years. After Armenia occupied Karabakh, which is Azerbaijani territory, it has been receiving great support from Russia and, alternatively, from the diaspora in implementing its security policies, from states such as the US and France. The Armenian diasporas around the world and Russia make great contributions to Armenia's military budget. Such aid allows Armenia to spend large amounts of money on military matters. However, in return, Russia seizes infrastructure such as railways, water, electricity, telephone lines, internet and oil and natural gas lines within Armenia, and this prevents Armenia from separating from Russia and getting closer to the West (Yılmaz, 2021).

The geopolitical crisis in Georgia (the separatism of "South Ossetia" and "Abkhazia" and Russia's occupation and continuation of these territories under the pretext of defending the breakaway regions) and the dissatisfaction of the Georgian society towards the pro-Western government dominated the situation. This paved the way for the end of the Saakashvili administration. Georgia's goal of political, military, economic and other integration with the West is being pursued by the authorities of this country as a consolidated and institutionalized trend in political and security matters. The security model adopted by Georgia is the 3+1+2 model. In other words, the three South Caucasus countries + Turkey and the US and the EU as +2. Georgia's strategic stance is in favor of the West and its political goal is to fully integrate with the West in every field (Gündüz, 2023).

#### **Russia's South Caucasus policy and security strategy.**

Throughout the 1990s, Russia's South Caucasus policy has generally not been consistent and has been pursued on the basis of different strategic approaches. The approach supported by former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin gave importance to cooperation with commercial actors in the region. The strategy known as the "Monrovsy Doctrine" advocated a unilateral and harsher approach to problems. The Yeltsin administration also tried to legitimize its presence in the region by using "peaceful and defensive" discourses, while trying to keep regional countries under its control with economic, political and military tools. Aiming to increase its regional influence, Russia was closely interested in the developments in the South Caucasus during this period, did not stay out of these developments, and also tried to prevent non-regional actors from becoming effective powers in the region and thus harming its interests.

Having solved the Chechnya problem in the North Caucasus, the Putin administration tried to eliminate the risk factors threatening Russia's interests in the South Caucasus, and followed a tougher strategy that did not tolerate new losses, from energy investments in the region to the political dimension of regional policy. The Putin administration's South Caucasus policy is generally a part of the strategy it developed towards the CIS. Aware of the difficulty of establishing a new version of the

Soviet Union within the CIS and the damage such an effort would cause to the developing Russian economy, the Putin administration decided to consolidate its regional hegemony by taking control of certain strategic points in the CIS geography in line with the pragmatist approach. With the hegemony to be established, economic development would be sustained and stability would be ensured on the southern borders. In line with the program mentioned, Russia's energy companies increased their relations with the countries in the Caspian Basin from the beginning of 2002.

Russia's South Caucasus policy is generally defined within the framework of the "Near Neighborhood Doctrine". In this context, relations with the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, which declared their independence in the South Caucasus, are the main content of Russia's South Caucasus policy. One of the regions where there was an authority gap after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the South Caucasus. In the early years of its establishment, the Russian Federation preferred to follow a "Low Profile" policy towards its Near Neighborhood, partly because it was busy with its own political-economic transformation and partly with its efforts to integrate into the international system. During this period, the emergence of regional actors Turkey and Iran as potential actors in the region triggered Russia to follow a more active policy towards the region. The possibility that the possible dominance of the Turks in terms of ethnicity and Iran in terms of religion in the region could spread to the north of the region, namely the North Caucasus, could lead to a second disintegration for Russia (Fenton, 2023).

The USA, on the other hand, first tried to enter the region through Turkey and later entered the region itself. (Just like in Central Asia). Over time, Russia believed that it would best fill the gap in the region and defined the region as a "Sphere of Vital Interests." Its policy toward the region would have significant implications for Russia in terms of security, strategy, economy, and socio-cultural aspects (Frolova, 2020).

Russia's policies toward the South Caucasus are often unfocused and often contradictory. With its devastating counterattack on Georgia, it sent a message to Washington: red lines—such as opposition to NATO expansion, US military deployments to former Soviet territories, and attempts to resolve frozen conflicts that are against Moscow's interests—are important and only if one jeopardizes them. Russia defeated Georgia and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, but the war itself reflected the ineffectiveness of Russia's peacekeeping efforts. Russia maintained relations with Azerbaijan and kept Armenia as Moscow's regional ally, but it still has not been able to bring about a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is essential to fulfilling its ambition to be a guarantor of stability in the South Caucasus. Dugin, one of the leaders of Eurasianist thought, sees the Caucasus as the most fragile point of

the Russian geopolitical space, and attributes this to the fact that the region has significant social mobility and ancient geopolitical traditions, borders Atlanticist Turkey, strategically controls the border regions that topographically fall within the Caucasus mountain range, and is therefore an extremely important strategic junction.

The Caucasus has traditionally been the scene of violent military operations between the "Heartland" and "Rimland" countries. For Russia, controlling the Caucasus opens the way to access warm seas. However, today the region emerges as an important step for Russia to gain control over the East-West energy corridors and oil and natural gas pipeline routes to the West, and thus to access global agency. Therefore, Dugin believes that security in the Caucasus can be ensured through a quadruple (2+2) structure consisting of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia and Iran, which excludes all Atlanticist participants. Eurasianists see the Central Asian heartland as a geopolitical space that could lead Russia to the Indian Ocean. Moscow, despite its interest in Iran's role in regional developments, not only diminishes Iran's presence in the region but also ignores the role of America, Europe and even Turkey (Smith, 2024).

Security concerns and the covert and overt dependence of the newly independent republics on Russia. Moscow is trying to rely on its power, Moscow is trying to play a unique role in the security of the Caucasus region. In the Russian plan, regardless of the influence of regional and trans-regional countries, only the existence of three countries in the Caucasus and Russia was mentioned. In fact, Russia traditionally knows the Caucasus as its security privacy and backyard and does not want the presence of another power in this region such as Iran, Turkey or the US, EU, NATO, etc. In this context, this model of Russia is a 3+1 model in which Russia and three South Caucasus countries are included within the framework of the Nearby Doctrine. This model does not include Turkey and Iran, which are regional countries (Cornell, 2020).

Turkey has a very old historical, cultural, lineage, language, religious, and geographical connection with the Caucasus, the presence of Turkish and Muslim communities living in this region, the region being the meeting point of Europe and Asia, and Turkey being the gateway to Central Asia and has been strategically interested in the region. The South Caucasus region is within Turkey's sphere of influence and interest. Turkey strives to establish good relations with regional countries by adhering to the principles of mutual respect and good neighborliness, respecting the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal affairs of regional countries, and to develop an environment of cooperation by observing common interests.

"The unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus, namely the Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts, pose a significant threat to the security of both this region and Eurasia. Turkey believes

that the peaceful resolution of all conflicts in the South Caucasus countries will contribute to the political stability and economic prosperity of these countries, and will also open new horizons for bilateral and regional cooperation.” (Cummings, 2020). In addition, Turkey strives to ensure that regional countries take an active role and become effective in the international arena by participating in international and global organizations.

Turkey is pursuing strategies to create a buffer zone with Russia in the South Caucasus, improve its relations with regional countries and thus ensure that it is included in the route of energy lines passing through the region, become an energy terminal, meet a portion of its own energy needs from this region and sell its own industrial products to these countries. In this context, Turkey is in competition with Russia and Iran in the region in terms of realizing its geopolitical, geoeconomic and military geostrategic interests in the South Caucasus. Turkey sometimes falls into a disadvantaged position in this competition due to its lack of its own energy resources and, unlike Russia, its weak military geostrategic influence mechanisms in the South Caucasus.

However, with the good relations it has established with Azerbaijan and Georgia in the region within the framework of military cooperation since 2010 and its “soft power”, Turkey is strengthening its geopolitical, geoeconomic and military-geostrategic position in Eurasia. After the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey, with the request of Azerbaijan, began its mission in Nagorno-Karabakh as of January 2021, together with the Russian Peace Force, to monitor the ceasefire agreement in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is a strategic step for Turkey towards the South Caucasus. Turkey has tried to increase its position and role in the region in terms of foreign policy principles by offering a model parallel to the elimination of the main roles of Iran and Russia, two countries in the region. The model proposed by Turkey, namely 3 + 1 + 2, includes the three countries of the Caucasus region together with Turkey as a regional power and accepts the US and the EU as members establishing the security of the South Caucasus.

In this context, despite the red lines it has in its government with Armenia on controversial issues, Turkey has taken some foreign policy steps to resolve relations between the two countries and to achieve the Turkic Crescent States of Central Asia and to implement expanding influence and Turkish-Ottoman policies. Turkey’s long jump towards playing a role in the region limits and challenges the interests of two important powers in the region (Iran and Russia). It supports Azerbaijan and Georgia and wants to make its weight felt in the region against Russia and Iran (Cummings, 2020).

#### **The USA'S South Caucasus policy and security strategy.**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA has continuously tried to expand NATO from Eastern

European lands to the Russian border. With this initiative, the USA aimed to both increase its influence in Eastern Europe, which controls the Heartland, and to surround Russia. These moves by the USA have turned into the most serious security problem for Russia over time. Today, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Poland, Romania, the Black Sea line (Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia) constitute the USA's line of surrounding / siege between NATO and Russia.

This means that the USA and therefore NATO have entered Russia's immediate vicinity from the Black Sea Basin - South Caucasus and the Caspian Basin and have entered its living space (Cummings, 2020).

In particular, there is a serious competition between the USA, Germany and Russia in terms of bringing Caspian Sea oil to the world market. Washington is looking for a solution to the ongoing ancient conflicts in the region, unlike Russia, in order to increase its regional influence. For the US, the South Caucasus is a very important region to control Iran. Washington is working to create political democracy and market economy institutions in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Basin states to strengthen democracy and independence. However, the US still wants to seize political priority in the region through oil wells.

As the US Secretary of State's special advisor on newly independent states, S. Sestanovich, said, "The reason why the US supports the independence of the South Caucasus states and makes efforts to make progress in their economies is because of oil and their strategic location." According to the words of Energy Minister F. Pebya, "What really bothers us is the increasing dependence on the Persian Gulf. The development of the Caspian basin will reduce oil dependency and provide energy security. American companies are thinking about the vital interests of the US in this region rather than their own material interests. Because this region is the only region that connects Asia and Europe without Iran and Russia.

The US also wants to take control of this region. As former Secretary of State J. Baker said, “In the 21st century, Caspian oil will be as important for industry as the current Persian Gulf.” The US has made numerous attempts to free this region from both economic and military dependence on Russia. In this context, the speech of Senator S. Braunbek, the advisor to the Congressional subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, upon the adoption of the Congressional “Silk Road” strategy is interesting: “The US should show its leadership in the South Caucasus and Central Asia even more actively. Up until now, US policy in this region has been perceived as US policy towards Russia. These states are independent and these states should be treated equally. Their geographical location is strategically very important. However, being located between Russia and Iran may create some problems in maintaining their independence (Ambrosio, 2023).

### Conclusions.

The US's basic policies for the region (Blaydes, 2022):

- Strengthening democracy, creating a market economy. Resolving problems between states;
- Developing energy resources and re-starting the road between the West and the East;
- Cooperation on security. (The Caspian Basin and Russia's interests, CIS Institute Report, 1998);
- Deterring extreme nationalist or extreme religious movements in the region, preventing destabilization in the region, especially in the North Caucasus;
- Protecting the independence and territorial integrity of the South Caucasus republics;
- Supporting Turkey's willingness and ability to serve as a sincere mediator in the Caucasus disputes. We can see this as supporting the commercial activities of American and other countries' companies in the region by keeping Tehran under pressure until it makes a regime change and adopts a Western-oriented foreign policy line. The US model for the region is 3+1+2. In other words, the three regional countries +1 are Turkey and +2 are the US and the EU. The path that the US has set for Turkey here is the communication and interaction of these three Caucasus countries with the West through Turkey, which is a NATO member, the security of the pipelines reaching the West, and the safe continuity of transportation lines through Turkey (O'Connor, 2021).

As a result, as long as the South Caucasus region constitutes a sub-security complex of the security complex of Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus countries will not be allowed to form joint security/defense pacts among themselves, nor to participate in joint security pacts with actors outside the region, or to become members of NATO and the EU.

If anyone insists on this - and the 2008 Russia-Georgia five-day war is the best example of this - it is a historical fact and experience that Russia will not hesitate to intervene in the country or countries in question, using ethnic, religious, ideological, economic, socio-cultural and historical-geographical fragilities, hostilities and sensitivities in the region, and will also support internal unrest/separatist movements.

This issue is Russia's red line and its name is the Nearby Doctrine. This is definitive evidence that the instability, insecurity, arms race and hostilities in the region will continue. The future of the South Caucasus countries will be shaped by Russia's future, especially in the North Caucasus.

The South Caucasus countries will not have any problems in their relations with regional countries and actors outside of Russia, as long as they do not disturb Russia in terms of military/security and politics and do not allocate bases, ports and airports on their territory to third countries (USA, UK, EU etc.) or organizations (NATO etc.).

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