

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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RUSSIA-IRAN POLITICAL TANDEM IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

It is determined that the South Caucasus occupies an extremely important geopolitical place since, during the period of industrialization and increasing dependence on energy, the role of the South Caucasus in the global arena has significantly increased. It is noted that Iran, like Russia, is trying to contain and minimize the Western influence in the South Caucasus region as they see it as a threat to their regimes. They are trying to maintain maximum control over the vast reserves of energy in the Caspian Sea and the energy routes passing through Georgia. It is noted that Armenian-Turkish relations do not suit either Iran or Russia as it will reduce the influence of Russia and Iran on Armenia, Turkey is a member of NATO, and the strengthening of the region creates an automatic threat to the national interests and goals of Iran and Russia in the region. It is proved that the regional policy of the South Caucasus determines a number of factors, both domestic and foreign.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, South Caucasus, geopolitics, conflicts.

For centuries, large countries such as the Roman Empire, the Arab Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and the Russian Empire fought to gain control of the South Caucasus. Since the time of the Great Silk Road, the South Caucasus has played a major role as the shortest land link between China and Europe. It also serves as the gateway to connect the region to the Middle East and Central Asia, making the region an important geostrategic site.

During the period of industrialization and increasing dependence on energy, the role of the South Caucasus has increased significantly on the world stage. The strategic importance of the region is brilliantly described in his book *The Great Chess Board* by Zbigniew Brzezinski¹.

Contemporary politics in the South Caucasus is quite complex, and it represents the wrestling arena of the great states, such as the Russian Federation, the US, European countries, China, Turkey and Iran. And the countries in the region: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia have a growing interest in gaining political influence, both through diplomacy and through the use of force, such as the Russian Federation. In the so-called Bermuda Triangle, which is represented by the South Caucasus region in policy formulation, Azerbaijan's oil and natural gas play a major role, causing giant energy companies to enter the region such as BP (UK), amocco (US) "unocal" (US), etc.

Therefore, the South Caucasus and the entire Caucasus region remain an arena of difficult political developments, where the Russian Federation is strongly represented by its energy, national and strategic security interests, further complicating the situation in the region. Because the Russian Federation attaches global importance to the region and perceives any actor as a threat.

Following the collapse of the USSR, Iran's main rival in the region disappeared from the political map, increasing Iran's role in the region, and the South Caucasus created a sort of "buffer zone" between Russia and Iran. Given the growing dangers of the Russian Empire's aggressive foreign policy, Iran recognizes the importance of independent states in the South Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia), and this "buffer zone" is vital to it. Opened the prospects for European routes through the South Caucasus.

In the modern and globalization period, the concept and approaches of Iran's foreign policy towards neighboring countries are changing. Tehran understands that aggressive policy of expanding territories at the expense of neighboring countries is very unprofitable in the modern world, which will hurt both its

¹ Бжезинский, З. (1998). *Великая шахматная доска (Господство Америки и его геостратегические императивы)*. Москва: Международные отношения.

external image and exacerbate an already difficult situation inside the country that the Iranian state cannot cope with.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), Russia is trying to compete with the West, and hence Iran is trying to use its ties with Russia to reduce the increased Western pressure on it. Therefore, Iran strengthens its relations with Russia both diplomatically and in all fields of science, technology, military industry, etc., which is of strategic interest to Russia itself, as Iran represents a market for its products to Russia. Russia is also pursuing its foreign policy through Iran in the Middle East region, and the idea that the Russian Federation is the greatest friend of Muslim countries. Russia needs this, as well as this, to soften the pressure on the Russian-dominated Muslims in the North Caucasus and increase its political influence over Central Asia.

Iran, as well as Russia, are trying to contain and minimize Western influence in the South Caucasus region, as they see it as a threat to their regimes. They are trying to maintain maximum control over the enormous energy supplies in the Caspian Basin and the energy routes passing through Georgia.

Importantly, Iran's policy in the South Caucasus does not pose a threat to the Russian Federation itself, and Iran is doing its best to support Russia in pursuing its policy and acting under Russia's control. Both Russia and Iran are trying their best to hinder US empowerment in the region, but neither the US nor European countries are doing their best to bring in and strengthen international organizations in the region. As well as political and economic affairs The II¹. Eastern Partnership².

These programs are needed to reinforce Western influence in the South Caucasus and to reconstruct existing regimes in the post-Soviet space, which aim to increase its influence through the South Caucasus to Central Asia, which in itself will reduce Russia and Iran's influence in the region.

As for modern Azerbaijani-Iranian relations, the Azerbaijani side is focused on Turkey and the United States, and the impact of Iran's foreign policy is minimal here. At the time, when the "Contract of the Century" was signed, which provided for the supply of Azerbaijani oil and gas to Europe, the political balance in the region had significantly changed. Western influence in the region increased, reducing the influence of Russia and Iran³.

For its part, Iran is trying not to push its ideological policy to the level of foreign policy, as Iran recognizes that such a policy is unprofitable to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia and is pragmatic in its foreign relations.

There is a mutual alertness between today's Iran-Azerbaijan relations. In its neighborhood, Baku sees first of all a potential regional threat: a radical Islamic state bordering the country that can activate Shiite populations in the south of the country. And for Iran, Azerbaijan is a dubious secular state, friendly with Israel and the West, and backed by the Iranian population living in the northern part of the country. Given that both states have mechanisms of pressure on each other, it would be best for both sides to implement a restraint policy⁴.

Iran has the closest relations with Armenia from the South Caucasus. This again underscores the pragmatism of Iran's foreign policy. Last year, the Iranian ambassador to Armenia made some rather extravagant statements at a news conference, namely that he announced the possibility of expanding the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline to the Georgian territory (which in fact fits both Georgia and European Union countries in the interests of diversification) and also stated that Iran did not allow The deployment of peacekeepers from the BSEC to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, however, remained only words: Obviously, the statement served more populism than real politics. However, there is every reason to believe that if relations between Iran and the West are warmed, Tehran's economic ties with the South Caucasus region will be strengthened. In particular, we can talk about the construction of a railway that will connect Iran and the regions, which is a good incentive for the development of the economy. The Armenian Diaspora has a significant impact on the positive development of Armenian-Iranian relations. Iranian Armenians are considered to be a fairly loyal ethnic minority in the Iranian state and have traditionally

¹ Partnerships Radiate More – Partnerships and Ego Operations. *On-line library*. <<http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940110b.htm>>.

² აღმოსავლეთ პარტნიორობა 10 წლის იუბილეს აღნიშნავს. *European Commission*. <<https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/62199/>>.

³ Oil sector. *President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev*. <<https://en.president.az/azerbaijan/contract>>.

⁴ Иран и Азербайджан подписали договор о ненападении. *Газета Коммерсантъ*. <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/578236>>.

enjoyed the favor of the Iranian authorities. Despite the Islamic nature of Iranian statehood and the continued support and solidarity of Muslims with the "Karabakh" issue, Iran has a favorable attitude towards the Armenian (Christian) world. The Iranian authorities have published the principles of "equality" in the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem¹.

I would also like to point out that the warming of the strained Armenian-Turkish relations does not suit either Iran or Russia, since the warming of the Armenian-Turkish relations will reduce the influence of Russia and Iran on Armenia and is not in the strategic interests of the two countries and this process is deadlocked, since Turkey is a NATO member and The strengthening of the region poses an automatic threat Iran and Russia's national interests and objectives in the region.

As for possible participation in Iran's energy projects in the South Caucasus, such as the construction of a gas pipeline to Europe, we should not expect too much at this point. Of course, Iran ranks fourth in the world in terms of oil reserves and second in volume of gas, so most oil and gas corporations in the West expect the sanctions imposed on Iran to be lifted. However, the process of unifying Iran in the international trade system is long and problematic. Given its multilevel system of sanctions, sanctions imposed on Iran cannot be lifted at once, and Iran's energy infrastructure is currently weak because Iran has no access to modern technology because of sanctions. Even gas production is so inefficient that Turkmenistan is seeking to buy gas from Iran. This means that, in the first place, after the lifting of sanctions in the first period, almost all extracted energy sources will be consumed in the domestic market.

There is no doubt that the Iranian state occupies the most important geostrategic site in Western Asia. At the same time, Iran is a Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Caspian regional country, which is also surrounded by the Persian Gulf and Oman by the Indian Ocean. The Iranian state is a source of not only energy resources, but also an important transportation country, which is of course very important in world politics. It is also noteworthy that the Iranian state has one of the many armies in the world, which greatly influences Western Asian regional policy. Given this reality, the Iranian state is portrayed as a leader, especially given its ambitions. Also, when we discuss Iran trends in foreign policy and aspires to establish itself in the neighboring region is a national-psychological factor, because the current Iranian state of the ancient civilization of Persia successor which adds and encourages its imperialist ambitions towards its neighbors, and also trying to act as mediator Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict².

Iran has also become more active in recent years in cultural and humanitarian activities under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of about 70 cultural centers located in different countries of Europe, Asia and the Americas. Of course, one of the countries in the South Caucasus region is the subject of potential ideological-propaganda interest in Azerbaijan, whose population historically belongs to the Shiite branch of Islam. Their numbers are low in Christian Armenia and Georgia, reducing Iran's Shiite ideological-propaganda capacity in these two countries, but pure political thinking is on the forefront and Iran is strengthening diplomatic ties with Armenia³.

Lately, pragmatic political thinking has been more dominant in Iran's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus than religious. This also applies to recent developments. For example, Iran's support for Armenia, which has long been drawn to Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Iranian state is working closely with Armenia, reflecting Iran's supply of energy to Armenia, such as oil and natural gas, as well as building new links. That impedes Azerbaijan's rapprochement with the Iranian state, causing Azerbaijan's discontent.

Iran, for its part, accuses Azerbaijan of drawing closer to its established enemies, the US, Israel and Turkey. Iran claims Azerbaijan is setting up a springboard against Iran. Given that Azerbaijan purchased \$ 1.6 billion worth of Israeli arms from Israel and Tehran does not exclude that Baku will devote its military air bases to Israel to carry out air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, which I think is a very low probability and Iran's doubts.

Iran attaches great importance to Georgia's Caucasus policy. Tehran is very serious about strengthening relations with Georgia, both in terms of political, geostrategic and economic interests. Of particular interest to Iran is the North-South Transport Corridor. Georgia is an important link

¹ Посол Армении в Иране обозначил весь спектр двухстороннего сотрудничества. *ИА REGNUM*. <<https://regnum.ru/news/economy/2389315.html>>.

² Iran's role as mediator in Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. <<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0701.htm>>.

³ Посол Армении в Иране обозначил весь спектр двухстороннего сотрудничества. *ИА REGNUM*. <<https://regnum.ru/news/economy/2389315.html>>.

in this corridor and Georgia's involvement is very important for Iran. The way out of Georgia to the Black Sea is essential to deepen Iran-European trade ties. Energy problems also pose a ground for cooperation with Iran¹.

Georgia cannot ignore the Iranian factor in the region as Georgia needs to develop multilateral relations. Georgia, as the only country with access to the Black Sea, can play the role of a regional transport and communications center and thus realize its political ambitions. Iran, for its part, is trying to exploit Georgia's transit potential and export its products through Georgia to the European market².

We can call Georgia's relations with Iran as restrained, stable, but not conflicting, something so delicate. In addition to the political and economic interests of Iranian-Georgian relations, there is an ideological aspect. Iran's leadership is constantly concerned about the strengthening of the US military and political presence in the region as US anger over Iran's nuclear program. According to Tehran, Tbilisi is Washington's ally in the Caucasus and Georgia's cooperation with the West is directly linked to Iran's security. The main focus of Georgian-American cooperation is military political assistance and the presence of US military consultants and instructors in Georgia, which some experts call a "guarantee of Georgia's security and sovereignty." And according to other experts (often Russian experts), "the US wants to create a springboard in the South Caucasus region."

Under the circumstances neither Iran nor Russia does not want Georgia to cooperate closely with the US military in the field and also the US military presence in the territory, especially in Georgia in the agreement on cooperation in the field of security and the firm's decision to join the North Atlantic Alliance³.

Given the situation, it can be assumed that Georgia will have a major impact on US-Iranian relations. It is also noteworthy that the relationship between Iran and the three republics of the South Caucasus is vague and complex. But it also seems quite ambitious and consistent in Iranian politics. It should be noted, however, that external forces have a great influence on the development of relations.

That is why each of the South Caucasian regional policy vectors determines quite a number of factors, both domestic and foreign. Based on the specifics of bilateral and multilateral relations in different geometrical figures represents the Caucasian heptagon: Azerbaijan-Armenia-Georgia-Turkey-Iran-Russia-USA.

The increasing influx of Western capital and energy resources in the 1990s, which increased Western policy influence, threatened the Islamic Republic of Iran and its effects on the region, forcing Iran to strengthen ties with the Russian Federation. However, due to its aggressive policy, which has led to sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran is in a very disadvantaged position, and Iran is unable to achieve the level of oil production that would best meet its needs, which puts Russia itself in a very favorable position as Iran itself. It has a large competitor in the energy market on the Eurasian continent.

Historically known as Iran's interest is always higher in the South Caucasus and of respect, since the Georgia-based control through, he was allowed to take the North Caucasus and also to gain access to Europe via the Black Sea, Georgia its geographical location in Asia, Europe, Georgia and Iran has been the object of a military attack. From the geopolitical point of view, the South Caucasus region is of great importance. The South Caucasus is an important communication hub for Christian and Muslim civilizations, a strategic crossroads between Europe and Asia, and the South Caucasus region is a deterrent to radical Islam that impedes its flow into Europe.

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¹ Nabucco pipeline. *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabucco_pipeline>.

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