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CASPIAN REGION IN US FOREIGN POLICY

Abstract

The South Caucasus region, one of the strategically important regions of the world, is surrounded by regional powers such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey and provides Europe's access and security to Asia. With the independence of the republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new gaps began to emerge in the political arena for the power struggle. At that time, one of the main goals of regional countries, in addition to resolving military conflicts, was to ensure economic security in newly established states, and to establish healthy mutual relations in the globalizing world. On the other hand, mutual relations between the South Caucasus and global powers have entered a new phase with the independence of the countries in the region. The South Caucasus, which came into the interest of the US political elite after gaining independence, was seen as a region of strategic importance in terms of preventing Russian influence in the region and ensuring the energy security of the European Union (EU). As it is known, it is always important to examine the bilateral relations of countries with global influence, including the USA and the South Caucasus republics. Therefore, in this article, the position of the USA in the Caspian region and its impact on the countries located in the South Caucasus have been investigated.

Keywords: *USA, foreign policy, Caspian region, energy, oil strategy, South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran*

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ABŞ-ın xarici siyasətində Xəzər regionu

Xülasə

Dünyanın strateji əhəmiyyətli regionlarından biri olan Cənubi Qafqaz Rusiya, İran və Türkiyə kimi regional güclərlə əhatə olunub, Avropanın Asiyaya çıxışını və təhlükəsizliyini təmin edir. Belə ki, Sovet İttifaqının dağılmasından sonra Azərbaycan, Gürcüstan və Ermənistan respublikalarının müstəqillik əldə etməsi ilə siyasi arenada hakimiyyət uğrunda mübarizə üçün yeni boşluqlar yaranmağa başladı. Bu zaman regional dövlətlərin əsas məqsədlərindən biri, hərbi münaqişələrin həlli ilə yanaşı, yeni yaranmış dövlətlərdə iqtisadi təhlükəsizliyin təmin edilməsi və qloballaşan dünyada sağlam qarşılıqlı münasibətlərin qurulması olmuşdur. Digər tərəfdən, Cənubi Qafqazla qlobal güclər arasında qarşılıqlı əlaqələr region ölkələrinin müstəqillik qazanması ilə yeni mərhələyə qədəm qoyub. Müstəqillik əldə etdikdən sonra ABŞ siyasi elitasının maraq dairəsinə düşən Cənubi Qafqaz regionunda Rusiyanın təsirinin qarşısının alınması və Avropa İttifaqının (Aİ) enerji təhlükəsizliyinin təmin edilməsi baxımından strateji əhəmiyyətə malik region kimi qəbul edilmişdir. Məlum olduğu kimi, qlobal nüfuza malik ölkələrin, o cümlədən ABŞ və Cənubi Qafqaz respublikalarının ikitərəfli münasibətlərini təhlil etmək vacibdir. Buna görə də məqalədə ABŞ-ın Xəzər regionunda tutduğu mövqe və onun Cənubi Qafqazda yerləşən ölkələrə təsiri araşdırılmışdır.

Açar sözlər: *ABŞ, xarici siyasət, Xəzər regionu, enerji, neft strategiyası, Cənubi Qafqaz, Azərbaycan, Rusiya, İran*

Introduction

The USA has long seen the region as an integral part of its Middle East policy and has evaluated the South Caucasus in the context of weakening the regional power of Iran and Russia. The economic and political preferences of the countries in the region have given a new direction to the relations, and as a result, the political preferences of all three countries have determined their foreign policy strategies. The USA, which is among the main states actively fighting for its interests in the region, acts mainly in line with its global geopolitical power claims and economic interests. The basis of the US's South Caucasus policy is the preservation of regional stability, preventing the revival of frozen conflicts, supporting democratic changes, as well as encouraging regional cooperation and integration between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia in the post-Second Karabakh War period. As for the factors that are effective in shaping the US's South Caucasus policy, the first factor is Russia's foreign policy in this region. This policy course precludes actions involving NATO expansion. The second important factor is Iran's ability to influence the region as a regional geopolitical player. Third, the existence of separatist conflicts in the South Caucasus region – outside the control of the United States – creates room for maneuver for the United States' geopolitical rivals. In addition to all this, having an important strategic position in the fight against international terrorism determines the priority of the South Caucasus direction in the US's foreign security policy. In the modern era of radical changes on a planetary scale, the geostrategic importance of the Caspian region, which is part of the "Eurasian Balkans", according to the opinion of Z. Brzezinski, a former adviser to the US president on national security issues and now a well-known expert in the field of geostrategy, has increased.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the Caspian Sea has again become one of the most important geopolitical factors with its rich hydrocarbon resources (Nazarov, 2015). The sharp interest in this region by many large near and far countries was not only due to the presence of rich oil and gas resources at the bottom of the Caspian Sea and the realistic prospect of turning it into the "gas station of the world" in the 21st century but also due to the location of the world's competing geopolitical forces being in the most important position. The geopolitical conflict between the countries has gradually moved from the East and the Mediterranean basin to the Caspian region. In such circumstances, the geopolitical imperatives of the United States and NATO, on the one hand, and Russia and Iran on the other, come to the fore. Since the positions of Russia and Iran regarding the Caspian region have been mentioned in the previous paragraph, let us now take a look at the policy of the United States related to this region. Among the countries showing political and economic interest in the Caspian region, the most active are the Western countries and the United States of America. The US's political interest in the Caspian region is felt more prominently in Azerbaijan. The USA is the main participant and defender of strategically important projects and processes implemented in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The US government has repeatedly declared that this region is within its sphere of vital interest. Even though the USA is located far from the Caspian region, after the fall of the USSR, it pursued geopolitical interests in the Caspian region. In recent times, he has become an influential actor in the Caspian Sea. The goal of the United States is not only to use the natural resources of the region but also to prevent Russia from becoming the only influence in the region from a geopolitical point of view. The US now has unrestricted access to this region, which was previously closed to the outside world. For this reason, in addition to its economic interests in the region, the United States pursues the economic interests of Europe and the Far East as well. Thus, the geopolitical power that the United States will gain will potentially give it a huge advantage. American official Sam Braumback stated that each of the states is independent and that the United States should treat them in this way, and stressed the importance of giving importance to this region to strengthen America not only politically, but also economically. For this, he stated that supporting Azerbaijan's position on the issue of the legal status of the Caspian Sea would be the most correct position for the West. The United States understands that the issue that will accelerate the economic development of the Caspian Sea is related to determining the legal status of the Caspian Sea. In addition, issues such as the division of

the Caspian Sea into sectors, determining the route of oil pipelines to be exported to world markets, and ensuring the environmental security of the region are also issues that can accelerate economic development. The USA wanted Caspian oil to be transported to the world market through the territory of Russia and Georgia. The position of the USA in the Caspian problem was also based on these factors. Oil consumption in this country is related to imports. Imported oil is cheaper than domestically produced oil (Hasanov, 2005).

The US wants to obtain oil imports from both the Middle East and the Caspian region. Moreover, there is also the issue of having political influence. Most of the most well-known specialists dealing with geopolitical issues also believe that the international system of the XXI century will mainly consist of 6 power centers – the United States, the European Union, China, Japan, Russia, and India. If this is the case, the distribution of world spheres of influence in a new format will take place precisely among these states, with their direct and indirect participation. Economically, militarily, and politically, the world's most powerful superpower, the United States' interest in the Caspian region consists of two main components: expanding its geopolitical influence and energy carriers (Hasanov, 2005).

Moreover, due to the unstable situation in the Middle East and to reduce energy dependence on one region, the US is forced to step up its activities to gain control over new energy sources and direct its attention to the Caspian region. In general, to ensure energy security, the "Greater Middle East" project was created. To implement these, the US should expand and strengthen its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, including the Caspian region, and Central and Central Asia. In general, the United States acted in the following directions to ensure its interests in the region: – To strengthen cooperation with the newly created states, and to help them implement reforms that will ensure the development of democracy in these countries. – Creation of new directions of the Europe-Asia transport corridor in addition to the traditional Russian route, taking into account that Russia's position on the status of the Caspian Sea is an obstacle to further development. The essence of the matter was that the Western countries already considered the security and free activity of their companies as the basis, as well as the preservation of peace and stability in the region and its importance for all countries because the policy of turning the Caspian Sea into a field of cooperation is important for the development of all states and the security of the region. had positive significance. All this was based on the provision of activity of each country independently in its sector of the Caspian Sea. It should be noted once again that in the last two decades, the Caspian region has become of great geopolitical importance for the Western world, especially for its irreplaceable leader, the United States.

Unable to find a common language with Russia since the mid-90s, the United States focused on Caspian oil to gain control over the Caucasus and the Caspian region. During this period, the USA did not have the opportunity to actively intervene in the post-Soviet space, so it identified three favorite countries: Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. With this, he set the geopolitical task of defining the borders of the expansion of Russia's influence in three main directions: the Balkans (Ukraine), the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan). Over the past decades, the increase in US oil consumption and dependence on imported oil was one of the reasons why Washington focused on the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. With the arrival of the Americans in the region, the newly independent states became a battleground between supporters and opponents of the United States. The struggle for control of energy resources and their transportation routes began in the early 1990s. The weakness of the Russian government under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin has created a favorable opportunity for America to strengthen its influence in the region. In this regard, it should be noted that, by its strategic line, the US government supports the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project in the matter of the main oil pipeline, and in the matter of the legal status of the Caspian Sea, it defended the idea of dividing it into national sectors along the middle line between the five coastal states (Botta, 2019). Furthermore, after declaring a neutral position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the United States expressed its support for the sectoral division. In response to Russia's proposal to divide the Caspian into sectors on a limited basis, James Collins,

the special envoy of the United States for newly independent states, stated in his letter to President H. Aliyev that Washington "supports our investment companies and the idea of sectoral division of the Caspian Sea". The approach of the United States against Russia's position - the establishment of joint sovereignty in the Caspian Sea – was of great importance. As a result, changes in politics took place and the importance of the United States in the region began to increase.

The State Department in its report entitled "Energy Development of the Caspian Basin" (1997) defines the main four directions of the US policy in this region: 1. "Resolution of regional conflicts" (Aliyev, 2022). This paragraph is about the settlement of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the elimination of ethnic tensions in the Caucasus, as well as the cessation of the civil war in Tajikistan. According to the authors of the document, these conflicts create conditions for the intervention of foreign forces such as Iran. In addition, the prolongation of conflicts creates a favorable environment for the development of destructive Islamist movements; 2. The item "Increase and expansion of world energy supply" envisages the exploitation of energy resources of the Caspian basin as an addition and alternative to the Iranian Gulf, as well as to insure the energy interests of the West here; 3. "Independence and sovereignty of Caspian countries". The authors of the report believe that the main problem here is the elimination of dependence on the oil pipeline passing through the territory of Russia. Apart from the political problems, this dependence allows Russia to raise the cost of using the pipelines to an extraordinary level. It is necessary to have different and alternative energy-export ways to solve the problem. According to this logic, the idea of Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan is supported since the issue of trust in the oil pipeline that will pass through Iran has arisen. 4. "Isolation of Iran" (Aras, 2005). For this, it is required to limit the income of this country. Those revenues are spent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction, increasing the arsenal of destructive weapons, and supporting terrorism. The authors of the report see the best way to achieve this goal in preventing any Iranian involvement in the field of energy exploitation in the Caspian Sea. If we carefully examine this report of the US State Department dated 1997, we can see that the second Clinton administration aimed to create a new Caspian-centered world order (Ware, 2019). Since the end of the 90s of the last century, the West has strengthened its military and political influence in the region. This was because by using this region from a military-strategic point of view, it may be possible to deploy military forces from regions of important geostrategic importance, such as Central Asia, the Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf. Regarding the USA's attitude towards the Caucasus and the Caspian region as a whole, it should be noted that this country is trying to become a leading geopolitical actor in the region (Nazarov, 2015).

After that the Pentagon, taking into account the growing geostrategic importance of the Caspian region, removed its military forces located in Central Asia from the Pacific Command and placed them at the disposal of the United Central Command. This move was described by American analyst Michael Clare as "a rare example of changing military geography". In addition, since October 1, 2002, the jurisdiction of the US Military European Command (USEUCOM) has included a large part of the North Atlantic, the Caspian Sea, and Russia (Kurbanov, 2016).

According to I. Barnich, director of the Analytical and information center, "The struggle for influence in the South Caucasus region between Russia and the United States is determined not only by proximity to the strategically important oil fields of Azerbaijan" (Essen, 2023). The main reason is that the Caucasus is considered a strategic node where the interests of Russia, Turkey and Eastern countries intersect. The American publication stated that these countries are Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan and that the West can provide access to Caspian oil and gas through these countries (Aras, 2005).

At the NATO summit held in Istanbul in June 2004, the organization's plans to become a "security guarantor" of the Central Asian and Caucasian countries were officially defined, and the Caspian region as a whole was declared a strategically important region for the alliance (Nazarov, 2015). The Caspian region began to be of such great importance for the United States that a separate direction was allocated to the problems of this region in the foreign policy of the country's

administration: a special department for the region, a special working group was established under the security council under the president, a special adviser to the president and the secretary of state on energy issues of the Caspian region. the position was established. American interests related to oil resources in Central Asia and the Caspian region are mostly characterized by the efforts of the United States to maintain its influence over its allies, especially in Western Europe and Japan. The United States is interested in keeping the Central Asian states away from Russia's sphere of influence, weakening this country's ability to interfere with the geopolitical plans of the United States. The increasing influence of the United States in Central Asia after the beginning of military operations in Afghanistan after the events of September 11, 2001, gave it a geopolitical advantage over not only Russia, but also China, Iran, Southwest Asia, and South Asia. In addition, the US's Eurasian strategy reflects the attempts of official Washington to connect the Central Asian region to the "geographic belt" that includes Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan by using the "Islamic fundamentalism and extremism" factor. However, without involving the Caspian region, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan in this process, the solution of the mentioned geostrategic task may be questioned (Ware, 2019). After the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, a new political situation is being observed, formed against the background of close relations of the United States with the Middle East, including Azerbaijan and Central Asia. The cooperation of the countries of the region within the framework of the GUAM (bloc is also established by the principles and interests of the United States, increasing its relevance in modern conditions (Ware, 2019). In addition, after the events of September 11, 2001, as part of the fight against terrorism, Washington concluded military pacts with some countries to maintain troops and establish military bases in the region, which has traditionally been under Russian influence. However, its military power in the region is not that strong compared to Russia. The main goals of the USA in the Caspian region are as follows: – To deter and isolate China, Iran, and Russia. – To control energy resources and ways of their delivery to international markets. – To cooperate with allies like Azerbaijan and Turkey. – Diversification of the Caspian energy export pipelines bypassing the territory of Russia through pipelines such as Baku – Tbilisi – Jeyhan (BTC – multi-billion dollar oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey through Georgia) and Nabucco (gas pipeline from the region to Europe) (Currently TANAP and TAP projects – N. M.). – Support liberal reforms and regime changes. – To strengthen its presence in the field of military and security (Aras, 2005).

In addition, the policy of the United States related to the region is to ensure the security of investments made by American companies, stability, accelerate the transition to democracy, ensure the effective functioning of the market economy, and strengthen commercial activities, regarding weapons of mass destruction. including eliminating problems that may arise and raising human rights standards. One of the main concerns of the United States regarding Central Asia is the control of the transportation of weapons of mass destruction collected in Kazakhstan and the development of nuclear weapons in the region. There are groups on the territory of Kazakhstan who want to have nuclear weapons left over from the USSR and wish the country to remain a nuclear-powered state. By April 1995, 1,040 SS-18 nuclear warheads were delivered to Russia. In exchange for the safe transfer of weapons to Russia, the US increased its support to Kazakhstan (Kurbanov, 2016). The US is wary of the threat of selling nuclear weapons to radical third-world countries or terrorist groups. At the same time, Kazakhstan is a country closely watched by the United States due to its long border with Russia and the number of Russian population in its territory. The fact that Kazakhstan receives the most economic aid among the countries of the region is an indicator of this attention. America supports the projects of transportation of Kazakh oil through the BTC pipeline to ensure the security of investments in Kazakhstan, and to prevent the transfer of energy pipelines to the Russian monopoly. Kazakhstan's access to the world market through alternative pipelines bypassing Russia means that it is free from Russian influence in a serious sense. However, Nazarbayev's government implements a balanced policy between the two powers, pursuing a policy with America in the economic, political, and strategic spheres with Russia. Another security concern of the United States is the threat of the spread of radical Islamist movements to Central

Asia (İsmayilov, 2022). The Islamic Republic of Iran is located at the intersection of the threat of nuclear weapons and the spread of radical Islamism. One of America's most important security goals is to surround Iran and prevent it from exporting its regime to the region.

Conclusion

Thus, as a result of political events at the end of the 20th century, the Caspian region, rich in hydrocarbon resources, began to attract the attention of the United States again. The main interests of the United States in the Caspian region are to strengthen its geopolitical influence in the region ahead of Russia and other strategic competitors, to exploit the economically important energy resources of the Caspian, to gain an advantage in terms of controlling the ways of transporting these resources to the world market, and to achieve security in the region by resolving conflicts and controversial issues and consists of ensuring stability. To achieve these goals, the United States is working towards accelerating the transition of the regional states to democracy, ensuring the effective functioning of the market economy, and promoting liberal reforms in those countries. It should be noted that currently the geopolitical importance of the Caspian oil projects for the USA is considered more important than the geo-economic importance. Thus, the control over the region can give the USA global domination over the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the continent.

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