

# THE CHANGE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GLOBAL POLITICAL PROCESSES

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## **Abstract**

The security systems of the South Caucasus has undergone significant changes due to the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh and subsequent events. The policy of isolating of US president Trump was utilized by regional powers Russia and Turkey for transformations according to their own interests. Russia needed to ensure an alternative transit route for its energy resources before the invasion of Ukraine, while Turkey seized the opportunity to expand his influence in the region. Such a change has not only impacted regional but also global political processes. The Russian-Ukrainian war and the hybrid standoff between Russia and Collective West have found their reflection in the process of reshaping the security system of the South Caucasus.

**Key words** – Security, Region, War, Isolation policy, transformation, military balance, global processes.

The international security system is very sensitive as a result of global changes. Local conflicts now have the ability to grow to a global catastrophe in case the principle of the inadmissibility of using force for solving problems is violated. However, one could see the first examples of this violation after Trump started his "separate" politics during his presidency. First and foremost, it changed the security systems in local regions. Regional powers tried to establish their own interests in different areas and that fact confused both the regional and global security balance.

The main goal of this article is to discover separate features of the new security situation in the South Caucasus region after the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and to elaborate the possibilities of maintaining further stable and sustainable democratization development in the region. For the realization of this goal, I have studied the following points.

1. The security architecture of the South Caucasus.
2. The role of geopolitical centers in the security system of the South Caucasus.
3. The change of the security situation in the South Caucasus during Trump's "separate" politics.

4. The causes of the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh- conflict and the participation of the regional powers.

5. The impacts of the results of the 44-day war between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan on the regional and global security system.

6. The change of the regional security situation after the return of the American traditional policy.

In the article I have used several methods of political science analysis, such as comparative, discourse, situational analyses, etc.

The results of research include the vision of the South Caucasus security system's further stabilization and development via the opening of the communication directions and economic collaborations with the neighboring regions toward Asian and European areas. I conclude that this plan contains the potential to ensure the security and developing future on both regional and global levels.

### **Introduction**

In the South Caucasus region there is a new security situation after the 44-day war between the disputed province of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani-Turkish common army won that war. Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan signed a statement about the results of the war on the 9th of November. According to this statement, the Armenian army was obliged to leave the majority of the territories. As a result, the Azerbaijani forces moved toward the Armenian province of Syunik region and now are trying to obtain a road through that province. On the other hand, Russia has got a new area for its military presence. Russian peacekeepers appeared in the remaining Armenian territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, in September of 2023, the rest part also was given by the new administration of Nagorno-Karabakh and with the consent of Russia. All Armenian population was leave Nagorno-Karabakh. That has fundamentally changed the former security situation in the South Caucasus region.

### **Regional, local and ethnic conflicts**

There is a lot of research about different sides of conflict. Regional conflict poses a big challenge to the international peace and development. Certain conflict situations arise for different political, economic, social-cultural and other reasons. But a lot of regional conflicts date back to historical times. Historical memory of nations forms a persistent idea about themselves and their neighbors. "The nation, its borders, history, agendas, discourses, etc. are taken for granted without asking how they developed or what alternative forms of organi-

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sation and interaction exist"<sup>1</sup>. Thereby, conflict situations continue for several centuries, sometimes with acute or remission periods.

We are familiar with very acute conflicts in the Middle East region, and the South Caucasus is a part of this. The Armenian-Turkish, Georgian-Russian, Turkish-Kurdish and many other ethnic relations are rather complex. Furthermore, the USA, China, Russia, Europe and a number of other civil centers have geopolitical interests in this subregion. Each of them tries to provide their own approaches, which in many cases don't match with the interests of the other center. Therefore, the security situation in this subregion is very unstable.

Each conflict has both common and different features. But every regional conflict is itself a complex system, which consists of smaller parts such as national and local conflicts.

Local conflicts also have numerous types, but there is a type, which mostly has a potential to transform into a regional conflict or to impact the regional security system. That type is the ethnic conflict.

Ethnic conflicts are the most complex and hard solvable problems, which can last a very long time and have the ability to destruct the security system of countries and regions. The sides of ethnic conflicts are usually different ethnic communities, which dwell in the same or neighboring areas. In the South Caucasus region there are a lot of ethnic communities. One of these communities is the Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which gained informal independence through the war against the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, after the collapse of USSR.

### **The South Caucasus security system**

Russia traditionally positions itself as the impact center of the political processes in the South Caucasus. After the Georgian-Russian war in 2008, the extent of the Russian participation in Georgia has become unprecedentedly weak. But now Russia continues to try to maintain and develop its influence on the region: "Russian Federation has been trying to revive its past influence on the region that know it a part of its close exterior area"<sup>2</sup>. For it, before aggression against Ukraine in 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, Russia signed an agreement with Azerbaijan about strategically partnership. It was necessary for ensure continued sell of Russian energy recourses during the war also. But there are other players, which have their interests in the South Caucasus region, countries and impact centers such as the USA, Iran, Turkey, China, India and Europe. Jansiz

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<sup>1</sup> Ansorg 2011, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Jansiz Reza 2015, 90.

and Reza Khojaste offer the following factors, which construct the South Caucasus security system:

- Extensive changes in many concepts of international relations especially the West's redefinition of the concepts of security and threats after the end of the Cold War;
- Political and economic turmoil of Russia and its impacts on domestic and international standing and foreign policy of this country, e.g., inactivity and inefficiency of Russia's policy toward Caucasus;
- West-orientation and being affected by the Western models in the South Caucasus Republics, especially Azerbaijan and Georgia;
- Enhancing the role of energy and transport equations in the Caucasus which is also a product of opening political, economic and security atmosphere<sup>3</sup>.

A scrupulous analysis of this factors discovers radical changes of their basic perceptions after the start of Trump's presidency.

Firstly, Trump changed the American approaches to security systems. Regional security and threats began to be viewed as part of business interests: "Trump's rhetoric is closely associated with the grand strategy of neo-isolationism which is theoretically based on "defensive realism"<sup>4</sup>. The USA delegated its partners to solve several problems, something that had been its exclusive right before. The paragon of that behaviour is the problem of ISIS. As a result, regional powers obtained more freedom to push their own interests further in the regional areas. The West's redefinition of the concepts of security and threats changed again.

The South Caucasus region is known for closed borders and complex relations. As a result, the economic development of the region has been inhibited by several circumstances related to the closed borders between Armenia and Turkey, conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian-Russian problems, sanctions against Iran, etc. Furthermore, these circumstances have had continuous negative impact on the regional economic and political security systems.

In the mid 2010s the situation of Russian domestic and foreign policy became stable, and Russia got a chance to expand its Eurasian projects and to muse about the return of its imperial power. As a result, the Russian policy regarding the South Caucasus region has become more stubborn, and the Russian-Turkish relations have become more cordial.

After the "Velvet" revolution in 2018, Armenia began to democratize its domestic institutions and social processes, which became a concern for Russia:

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<sup>3</sup> Jansiz, Reza Khojaste 2015, 87.

<sup>4</sup> Cakir 2020, 22.

"Even though the Velvet Revolution has not challenged the basic parameters of Armenia's foreign policy, it has caused a readjustment in relations with Russia"<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's authoritarian regime was more acceptable for the Russian power, because the orientation towards the West and democratization in general, are basically problems for Eurasian projects. On the other hand, Trump's "separate" politics were a chance for the convergence of the Russian-Turkish approaches. The cooperation between Russia and Turkey stretched from Syria to Libya. Azerbaijan tried to take advantage of this situation and was able to use it for its interests.

Ultimately, other factors formed characterizing the South Caucasus security system:

- New concepts of international relations after the start of Trump's presidency, especially the "separate" politics and the rise of importance of regional powers in the global security system.
- The stability of Russian hybrid power and its role in the regional and global political processes, especially the deepening of the Russian-Turkish collaboration.
- The "Velvet" revolution in Armenia and the attempts at democratic transformations following the Western example troubled the Russian hybrid power. Azerbaijan became the main and more credible center for the Russian influence in the South Caucasus. Moreover, the Russian and Turkish interests began to coincide in the South Caucasus, too.
- The decrease of international political processes' intensity due to the Coronavirus, and the closure of the majority of borders.

### **The Coronavirus, war and their influences on the South Caucasus security system**

Security policy has two stages. The first stage involves the process of bringing out alternative basic concepts and affixing them in the security strategy. The second stage selects ways to realize those concepts and ensure the stability of political processes for it<sup>6</sup>.

The South Caucasus conflicts, parallelly depending on ethnic and cultural mosaics problems, have also a geopolitical context. If Georgia's choice of development following the Western concepts has become a reason for the Georgian-Russian war in 2008, then Armenia and Azerbaijan were a zone of Russian-Turkish influence. Both Armenian and Azerbaijani armies were reinforced with Russian weapons: "Despite Russia acting as a leading mediator in the conflict

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<sup>5</sup> Shirinyan 2018, 148.

<sup>6</sup> Krebs 2018.

between the two countries, in 2011-2020, it accounted for 94 percent of Armenia's imports of major arms and 60 percent of Azerbaijan's"<sup>7</sup>. The balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan was mostly maintained via the Russian political authority. Whereas Armenia is a member of Russian Eurasian programs and its security system includes the potential of "Collective security treaty organization", the other members of that organization have had closer relations with Azerbaijan since the collapse of USSR. It is not surprising that Russia had sold more than \$5 billion modern weapons to Azerbaijan until autumn 2018<sup>8</sup>.

Trump's "separate" politics, the Coronavirus and the crisis of global political concepts formed the new regional situation, which had potential to collapse the regional security system. On the one hand, the Russian Eurasian projects required to grow towards former imperial areas, including the South Caucasus. On the other hand, Turkish power allowed for an active participation in the regional political processes and for attempts to develop Davutoglu's doctrine of "the strategic Depth"<sup>9</sup> in the real time. Armenia's persistent refusal to adopt "Lavrov's plan" and to hand over the territories around former NKAO obstructed both Russian and Turkish plans.

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 was the result of the following terms:

- The regional security system underwent the influence of the Russian-Turkish collaboration.
- The closed borders limited human mobility.
- The unblocking of communications was of importance to the Western energetic and business interests,
- Further democratization processes in Armenia were unpredictable for the Russian power.
- Ultimately, Azerbaijan was able to mobilize the international opinion about its right to war.

### **The new system of the South Caucasus security**

The results of war cardinally changed and destabilized the South Caucasus security system. Azerbaijan got 80 percent of the territories that it had demanded, and in September of 2023 year got last 20 percent; Russia placed its army already in the second spot in the South Caucasus; Turkey established and enlarged its political and cultural influence on the region; Iran became concerned about its geopolitical positions, especially about its eastern border with

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<sup>7</sup> Kuimova, Smith, Wezeman 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Turan News Agency 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Davutoğlu 2009.

Armenia; Georgia started to worry about the continuity of its Western-orientation transformation processes and about the increase of Russia's regional role. After the defeat, Armenia fell into internal political turmoil, and the instability continues until today.

At the same time, the new president of the USA, Joe Biden, returned the Western traditional strategic vision to the international relations. Moreover, Biden softened the Western attitude toward Iran and declared Iran as a friendly state for the USA. Accordingly, that fact changed the regional security situation again. China, India, the UAE and more other states announced about their interest to restore "the Silk road" through Iran, Armenia and Georgia. In contrast, Turkey started the attempts to build its "Turanian road" project, which would stretch from the central Asia to Istanbul through the Armenian southern province of Syunik. This project also involves Russian and Azerbaijani interests. Its realization requires not only open communications in the region, but a sovereign road through Syunik, which would be controlled by Turkey or Russia.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 and 13-14<sup>th</sup> of September of 2022 groups of Azeri's militaries entered the Armenian border and refused to leave the territory. Armenia's application to the "Collective security treaty organization" both time was ignored per se by its partners. On the contrary, the other two co-chairs of Minsk Group – the USA and France – began to actively offer their participation in the problem solving process.

### **Conclusion**

The security system of the South Caucasus became more fluent and changeable. The results of Trump's "separate" politics in the region destroyed the former systemic correlations. The new security system includes both local and geopolitical problems. "Russia still maintains an important toolkit to harm democratic Armenia: a comprehensive hybrid warfare strategy and the use of Azerbaijan as a proxy"<sup>10</sup>. Nonetheless, the return of the USA deepened the uncertainty but hindered the Russian-Turkish plans to reshape the region according to their interests. That fact became a chance to continue the democratization transformations for Georgia and Armenia. Furthermore, Armenian society dreams about democratic state. "If you ask young people in Armenia, the dream of democratic, European Armenia is the unifying element and the great hope for the future"<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the possible cancellation of the sanctions against Iran opened new economic possibilities for the region, and the security system may become more comprehensive and stable. Communication directions will stretch

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<sup>10</sup> Kopalyan 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Röthig 2023.

from China, India and the Middle East to Europe through Georgia's ports and will ensure safe and secure development for the entire region. The stabilization of the situation in the south of Armenia is the major condition for the realization of this future.

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### ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ԿՈՎԿԱՍԻ ԱՆՎՏԱՆԳԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳԻ ՎԵՐԱՓՈԽՈՒՄԸ ԵՎ ԴՐԱ ԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԳԼՈՐԱԼ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԸՆԹԱՑՆԵՐԻ ՎՐԱ

Ռոբերտ Ղևոնդյան

Ամփոփում

Լեռնային Ղարաբաղում 44-օրյա պատերազմի և դրան հաջորդող իրադարձությունների հետևանքով Հարավային Կովկասի անվտանգային համակարգը ենթարկվեց արմատական փոփոխությունների: ԱՄՆ-ի նախագահ Թրամպի՝ մեկուսացման քաղաքականությունն օգտագործեցին տարածաշրջանային տերությունները՝ Ռուսաստանը և Թուրքիան, ազդեցության գոտիների՝ իրենց շահերին համապատաս-



խան վերաճնումներ կատարելու համար: Ռուսաստանին անհրաժեշտ էր Ուկրաինա ներխուժելուց առաջ իր էներգակիրների տարանցման համար այլընտրանքային ճանապարհի ապահովել, իսկ Թուրքիան առիթը բաց չթողեց տարածաշրջանում իր ազդեցությունը մեծացնելու համար: Այդ փոփոխությունը մեծ ազդեցություն ունեցավ ոչ միայն տարածաշրջանային, այլև գլոբալ քաղաքական գործընթացների վրա: Ռուս-ուկրաինական պատերազմի և Ռուսաստան-հավաքական Արևմուտք հիբրիդային դիմակայության հետևանքներն արտացոլվեցին նաև Հարավային Կովկասի անվտանգային նոր զարգացումներում:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** անվտանգություն, տարածաշրջան, պատերազմ, մեկուսացման քաղաքականություն, վերափոխում, ռազմական հավասարակշռություն, գլոբալ գործընթացներ:

## ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ СИСТЕМЫ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ ЮЖНОГО КАВКАЗА И ЕЕ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ГЛОБАЛЬНЫЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ

Роберт Гевондян

Резюме

Система безопасности Южного Кавказа подверглась серьезным изменениям в результате 44-х дневной войны в Нагорном Карабахе и последующих событий. Политикой изоляции, проводимой президентом США Трампом, воспользовались региональные державы – Россия и Турция. России необходимо было обеспечить альтернативную возможность транзита собственных энергетических ресурсов перед вторжением на территорию Украины, а Турция не упустила возможность расширить собственное влияние в регионе. Это повлияло не только на региональные, но и глобальные политические процессы. Российско-украинская война и гибридное противостояние Россия – коллективный Запад нашли отражение и в процессе реформирования системы безопасности Южного Кавказа.

**Ключевые слова** – безопасность, регион, война, политика изоляции, преобразование, военный баланс, глобальные процессы.