ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY VISION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS REGION

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving geopolitical and security dynamics of the South Caucasus within the context of contemporary regional transformations and the intensification of competition among regional and extra-regional actors. The study analyses the strategic significance of the South Caucasus as a communicative and geopolitical crossroads linking Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. It pays particular attention to the shifting balance of power following the launch of the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) project and the broader consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the escalating conflict surrounding Iran. The article explores the security interests and foreign policy priorities of regional powers—namely Russia, Turkey, and Iran—as well as the strategic approaches of extra-regional actors such as the United States, the European Union, China, and India. It also examines contemporary security challenges affecting Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, including unresolved conflicts, communication projects, military-political alliances, and shifting regional security complexes. The research concludes that the South Caucasus is gradually becoming a strategic arena of multipolar competition, where communication routes, geopolitical sovereignty, and the regional balance of power take on decisive importance. The activation of extra-regional actors creates both new opportunities and new security risks for the states of the South Caucasus.

Keywords: Region, foreign policy, actor, power centre, international organisation, state, conflict, peace, stability, unity.

ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ԿՈՎԿԱՍԻ ՏԱՐԱԾԱՇՐՋԱՆՈՒՄ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿԱԿԱԿԻՑ ԱՆՎՏԱՆԳՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՏԵՍԼԱԿԱՆԻ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾԱԿԱՆ ԳՆԱՀԱՏՈՒՄ

ՄԻՔԱՅԵԼ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ

Երևանի պետական համալսարանի
միջազգային հարաբերությունների և
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Համառոտագիր

Սույն հոդվածը ուսումնասիրում է Հարավային Կովկասի զարգացող աշխարհաքաղաքական և անվտանգային դինամիկան՝ ժամանակակից տարածաշրջանային վերափոխումների և տարածաշրջանային ու արտատարածաշրջանային դերակատարների միջև մրցակցության սրման համատեքստում: Ուսումնասիրությունը վերլուծում է Հարավային Կովկասի ռազմավարական նշանակությունը՝ որպես հաղորդակցական և աշխարհաքաղաքական խաչմերուկ, որը կապում է Եվրոպան, Մերձավոր Արևելքը և Ասիան: Հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում «Թրամփի միջազգային խաղաղության և բարգավաճման երթուղի» (TRIPP) նախագծի մեկնարկից հետո ուժերի փոփոխվող հավասարակշռությանը և ռուս–ուկրաինական պատերազմի ու Իրանի շուրջ սրվող հակամարտության ավելի լայն հետևանքներին: Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են տարածաշրջանային ուժերի՝ մասնավորապես Ռուսաստանի, Թուրքիայի և Իրանի անվտանգության շահերն ու արտաքին քաղաքականության առաջնահերթությունները, ինչպես նաև արտատարածաշրջանային դերակատարների՝ Միացյալ Նահանգների, Եվրոպական Միության, Չինաստանի և Հնդկաստանի ռազմավարական մոտեցումները: Ավելին, ուսումնասիրվում են ժամանակակից անվտանգային մարտահրավերները, որոնք ազդում են Հայաստանի, Ադրբեջանի և Վրաստանի վրա, այդ թվում՝ չկարգավորված հակամարտությունները, հաղորդակցական նախագծերը, ռազմաքաղաքական դաշինքները և տարածաշրջանային անվտանգության փոփոխվող համակարգերը: Հետազոտությունը եզրակացնում է, որ Հարավային Կովկասը աստիճանաբար վերածվում է բազմաբևեռ մրցակցության ռազմավարական հարթակի, որտեղ հաղորդակցական երթուղիները, աշխարհաքաղաքական ինքնիշխանությունը և տարածաշրջանային ուժերի հավասարակշռությունը ձեռք են բերում վճռորոշ նշանակություն: Տարածաշրջանից դուրս գործող դերակատարների ակտիվացումը Հարավային Կովկասի պետությունների համար ստեղծում է ինչպես նոր հնարավորություններ, այնպես էլ նոր անվտանգության ռիսկեր:

Բանալի բառեր՝ տարածաշրջան, արտաքին քաղաքականություն, դերակատար, ուժային կենտրոն, միջազգային կազմակերպություն, պետություն, հակամարտություն, խաղաղություն, կայունություն,

միասնություն:

Introduction

From a geospatial perspective, the South Caucasus is practically divided into several local sub-regions, which conditions the interdependence of the region's political entities within the framework of communicative relations. A vital characteristic of the region is its distinct communicative profile, as it represents a highly accessible communicative opportunity. In this context, it becomes evident that to ensure effective control over the region, it is imperative to control the so-called "Great Cross" communications (Kocharyan, 2012, p. 317).

As such, under the new regional conditions established by the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) project—jointly announced on August 8, 2025, by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, U.S. President Donald Trump, and the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev—new opportunities for a balance of power emerged in the South Caucasus (Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2025). This has been accompanied by significant shifts in the roles of key regional and extra-regional power centres in communication and connectivity.

Regional and extra-regional "power centres" perceive the South Caucasus as a distinct security vector through varying lenses. Conflicts currently unfolding in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central and South Asia—driven by global political processes—pose new security threats to the maintenance of the security equilibrium in the South Caucasus. The burgeoning influence of hybrid threats from the Middle Eastern region is inevitably extending into the South Caucasus. Within this context, significant security risks are emerging concerning the long-term preservation of geopolitical sovereignty for the three South Caucasian states. Furthermore, in view of their respective foreign policy priorities, each state conceptualises the South Caucasus within the framework of different security complexes.

The Russo-Ukrainian war, ongoing since 2022, as well as the large-scale U.S.-Israeli operations surrounding Iran that commenced on February 28, 2026, exert a profound impact on the geopolitical situation of both the European and South Caucasian regions. Situated within a zone of strategic friction between Russia and the West, the South Caucasus is becoming one of the primary arenas for political, economic, and energy interests under these new realities. While European Union and American policies in the South Caucasus were previously centred on democratic reforms and economic cooperation, current engagement of extra-regional actors is taking on an increasingly strategic character.

Consequently, competition in the South Caucasus has never ceased; however, in recent years, it has taken on a more radical character, driven by fundamental shifts within and around the region. The objective of this research article is to examine the interrelations between extra-regional actors and the countries of the South Caucasus, and to analyse the observed characteristics of security policy and

predictable developments within the process of future political reconfiguration.

Theoretical and Methodological Bases

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in geopolitical theory, regional security complex theory, and the concept of multipolarity in international relations. The South Caucasus is examined as a strategic geopolitical crossroads where regional and extra-regional actors compete for influence over communication routes, political processes, and security mechanisms. The study particularly relies on Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory, according to which geographically proximate states develop interdependent security relations that shape regional dynamics.

Methodology and Methods

The research is based on qualitative methodology and utilises a combination of comparative, historical, geopolitical, and content analysis methods. The comparative method enables the examination of similarities and differences in the foreign policy priorities and security strategies of regional and extra-regional actors operating in the South Caucasus.

Security Interests of Regional Actors in the South Caucasus

Following the intensification of West-Russia antagonisms, the regional "power centres" of the South Caucasus—namely the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Iran—regard the area as a region falling within the domain of their vital interests. Moreover, since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the significance of their South Caucasian agendas for strategic cooperation has increased further. Since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the primary actors have secured a series of agreements of strategic importance. These include, specifically:

- The alignment of positions among the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Iran regarding the Syrian conflict within the framework of the Astana format in November 2022;
- The signing of the Russia-Iran energy sector treaty;
- Cooperation on the establishment of the "North-South" International Transport Corridor (INSTC) involving Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan;
- The conclusion of the Russia-Turkey grain export agreement;
- The agreement on the development of transit transport between Iran and Turkey.

In this context, the trends toward deepening cooperation among regional "power centres" are naturally reflected in the South Caucasus. Consequently, a primary priority—particularly for the Russian Federation and Iran—is the containment of the growing influence of extra-regional power centres within the South Caucasus region.

To maintain its influence in the South Caucasus and preserve its status as a

distinct pole within the emerging multipolar world order, the Russian Federation (RF) is attempting to establish new formats of geopolitical cooperation. Because it perceives a scarcity of geopolitical influence, the RF has begun to prioritise deepening of cooperation with states that demonstrate "strategic autonomy" within the multipolar system. Strategic cooperation with Turkey and Iran, as well as the opportunities to access Persian Gulf ports via the "North–South" International Transport Corridor, are being re–evaluated with renewed significance for the RF.

To remain an independent pole in the developing multipolar world order, the RF must seek new vectors for expanding its influence, where it can be regarded as the primary actor in the formation of a given security complex. If forced to choose between the East and the West, the RF will be unable to function as the primary guarantor of regional security. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the RF has historically occupied the intersection of two socio–cultural archetypes: the European, where individual–centricity, freedom, and individual rights predominate; and the Asian (or socio–centric), where the rights of society, the collective, and the state take precedence (Baranov, 2016). Specifically, a European choice for the RF would necessitate membership in European security organisations—a prospect that is becoming increasingly unrealistic within the context of strained West–Russia relations.

Furthermore, as it seeks to expand its influence in the East, the RF faces the growing role of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The deepening of Russia–China relations carries significant long–term risks of the PRC's potential "absorption" of the Russian economy. Consequently, to maintain its strategic autonomy globally, the RF seeks to develop relations with states of the "Global South," while regionally it attempts to preserve its influence through the Eurasianist agenda.

Eurasianism is an ideology rooted in the intermediate geostrategic position the RF occupies between Europe and Asia, and in its "Eurasian choice"—characterised by cultural distinctiveness resulting from the fusion of Slavic and Turkic–Islamic peoples. By avoiding a "peripheral" geopolitical status in both Europe and Asia and by positioning itself in opposition to Atlanticism, the RF views Eurasianism as a "third way." While the West often accuses the RF of rebranding Marxist–Leninist ideologies and modernising "Sovietism" to pursue a new expansionist policy, the RF primarily promotes the ideology of Eurasianism to provide an ideological foundation for post–Soviet Russia's existing political order of post–Soviet Russia.

Consequently, the South Caucasus, emerging as a geostrategic region within the multipolar world order, is assuming heightened importance for the Russian Federation. By maintaining influence in the South Caucasus, the RF preserves its land connectivity with Turkey, Iran, and the ports of the Persian Gulf ports; deepening of cooperation with these entities is critical to maintaining Russia's strategic autonomy. Accordingly, the primary objective of Russia's South Caucasian

policy is not merely the deepening of bilateral relations with individual states, but the preservation of overarching regional influence.

The foundation of Russia's South Caucasian policy lies in ensuring the security of its Caucasian borders. Following the Syrian crisis and the spread of Islamic extremism in the Middle East, the role of Azerbaijan—specifically its political stability—has significantly increased for the RF. Azerbaijan is viewed as a buffer state that prevents the penetration of radicalism into Russia's Caucasian borders (namely Dagestan and Chechnya). Consequently, the strategy behind the deployment of Russian bases in the South Caucasus is also rooted in preventing the spillover of instability into the southern regions of the RF.

In analysing Iran's South Caucasian policy, it is essential to examine its foreign policy priorities. Iran lacks a formal conceptual document that explicitly outlines all its foreign policy principles. Instead, Iranian foreign policy is guided by Articles 152–155 of the Constitution. According to these provisions, Iran's foreign policy is based on the rejection of all forms of domination, non-alignment with the hegemonic policies of superpowers, and the establishment of a policy of Islamic solidarity (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989).

Iran's South Caucasian policy also derives from the directions outlined in the Iranian Constitution; however, its policy of establishing Islamic solidarity in the South Caucasus and Central Asia—unlike its Middle Eastern policy—has distinct characteristics. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has never presented a strategic document on its foreign policy specifically for the South Caucasian direction; therefore, these principles can be assessed of analysing the political positions of Iranian officials and the state's practical conduct of the state.

Iran's South Caucasian policy is based on the fundamental principles of the state's "neighbourhood policy," which aims to limit, as much as possible, the expansion of hostile states' influence in its vicinity and the emergence of new conflicts. Attaching great importance to the establishment of regional security and peace, Iran considers the South Caucasus part of its historical, cultural, and civilizational legacy. Iran regards the resolution of South Caucasian conflicts through the collective responsibility of regional states as a primary priority, based on the principle of excluding the presence of foreign forces (Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2022).

The issues concerning the Azeris residing in northern Iran and the local Armenian minority exert a significant influence on Iran's South Caucasian policy. The Iranian-Armenian community enjoys various privileges in religious, educational, and domestic political processes. In contrast, Azeris in northern Iran are not only not classified as a minority but also periodically face political contradictions with local authorities. Hostile states have repeatedly attempted to exploit issues related to the rights of Iranian Azeris to incite domestic political tensions within Iran.

Consequently, the activism of Iran's South Caucasian policy is also conditioned by the degree of domestic political stability; providing unconditional

support to one of the parties in Armenian–Azerbaijani relations could pose risks to the preservation of Iran's domestic political solidarity. In other words, while Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East is largely predicated on Islamic solidarity—specifically the protection of the rights of Shia Muslims—in the South Caucasus, Iran does not provide unconditional support to Shia Azerbaijan. Instead, it adopts a balanced perspective and practice in its cooperation with regional states.

In the context of contemporary regional developments, Iran's primary concern is ensuring that the process of unblocking regional communications does not turn the Armenian–Iranian border into an extraterritorial corridor, and that Iran's northern border does not fall entirely under Turkish–Azerbaijani control. From a geopolitical standpoint, unblocking of regional communication routes benefits Iran, particularly of restoring the Yeraskh–Sadarak section; this would allow Iran to establish rail connectivity to both Armenia's and Georgia's maritime ports.

The evaluation of Turkey's foreign policy priorities is based on a regional division. Turkey does not officially publish formal documents regarding its foreign policy concepts; therefore, its priorities can be assessed through the publications of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unlike the Russian Federation and Iran, Turkey categorises its foreign policy priorities by region. Accordingly, the European region, the Balkans, the South Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, among others, are considered primary.

According to official publications, Turkey's South Caucasian policy is predicated on supporting the independence and sovereignty of regional states and their efforts toward integration into Euro–Atlantic structures (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). As noted, while the RF and Iran view the South Caucasian region as a single entity—grounding their cooperation with regional states of preserving holistic influence—Turkey bases its South Caucasian policy less on expanding influence across the region and more on deepening of separate bilateral relations with regional states.

A clear illustration of this is Turkey's vested interest in deepening relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, a commitment it does not demonstrate in the normalisation of Armenian–Turkish relations. Turkey's caution regarding the normalisation of diplomatic ties with Armenia and its consideration of the "Azerbaijani factor" does not, in reality, strengthen Turkey's position in terms of increased regional engagement. On the contrary, it underscores that Turkey remains far from achieving the kind of dominant role the Russian Federation maintained for a significant period.

Turkey's South Caucasian policy is anchored in its economic, political, and military relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Turkey–Georgia–Azerbaijan regional trilateral partnership, initially rooted in economics, developed a robust military–political component in subsequent years. This demonstrates that, after a century–long hiatus, Turkey is formally establishing a military presence in the

South Caucasus, fundamentally altering the established regional balance of power.

Following the 44-day war in 2020, the alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan was further consolidated; Turkey provided unconditional guarantees regarding the preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Consequently, the existing legal-contractual framework between the two nations was substantially augmented. A milestone in this direction was the signing of the "Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey" on June 15, 2021, by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Ilham Aliyev (Sevencan & Zorlu, 2021). This declaration includes clauses on bilateral military, economic, and other sectoral cooperation, addresses the "Zangezur Corridor," and specifically References the 1921 Treaty of Kars.

In contrast to the regional "power centres," the West views the South Caucasus as part of the "Eastern European-Black Sea" security complex. This is evidenced by the fact that the European Union (EU) cooperates with South Caucasian states within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) project. The project's primary objective of this project is to support economic and political reforms in the states of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, emphasising the priority of alignment with EU rules and standards. (European External Action Service, 2022)

As regions, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus serve as theatres for the Russia-NATO strategic competition. Furthermore, various analyses suggest that the primary arena for U.S.-Russia competition lies within the states of the EU's Eastern Partnership; with the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian war, this competition is poised to intensify. Renewed tensions in West-Russia relations will inevitably affect the security systems of the states in the South Caucasus.

For the West, the geostrategic significance of the South Caucasus's geostrategic significance is further amplified by its proximity to Iran. Contradictions arising from the Iranian nuclear deal and Iran's aspirations to expand its Middle Eastern influence increase the importance of the South Caucasus in the efforts to contain Iran. Accordingly, Iran's primary adversaries—Israel and the United States—are further deepening their cooperation with South Caucasian states, thereby attempting to impose new constraints on the expansion of Iranian influence in the region.

The military conflict surrounding Iran, ongoing since February 28, 2026, is gradually evolving into a broader geopolitical process, the consequences of which will be felt not only in the Middle East but also in adjacent regions. Under these conditions, the South Caucasus inevitably feels the impact of the conflict. Any major shift in the region can reverberate through the security environment, especially given that the balance of power remains sensitive and volatile. Although the states of the region attempt to maintain neutrality and avoid involvement in the hostilities, geographical and political factors prevent complete isolation from the unfolding processes. In recent days, several incidents have been reported involving the downing or crashing of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and missiles

within border areas (Jégo, 2026). Such occurrences heighten the risk of the conflict spilling over into the South Caucasian theatre.

The United States, lacking vital security interests in the South Caucasus, predicates its policy not on the principle of providing military security guarantees to individual states, but rather on promoting the sovereign agency (subjectivity), institutional development, and economic, social, and energy independence of these nations. The security vacuum created in the South Caucasus—particularly under the conditions of a weakening Russian factor—and the prospects of an increasing Iranian role do not align with U.S. South Caucasian strategy. Therefore, as a counterweight to deepening Russia–Turkey–Iran cooperation, the foundation of U.S. policy in the South Caucasus will focus on facilitating, as much as possible, cooperation between regional states and Western institutions.

Extra-regional "power centres" in the South Caucasus—specifically the United States, the European Union, China, and India—do not possess vital security interests within the region. The expansion of their influence in the South Caucasus serves to balance the influence of regional "power centres" to some extent. It hinders attempts to adapt existing Middle Eastern conflict-management formats to this region.

With the activation of the policies of these extra-regional "power centres" in the South Caucasus, the Republic of Armenia gains new opportunities for manoeuvrability and the preservation of its geopolitical sovereignty (subjectivity). This, in turn, contributes to the processes of restoring the balance of power and reconstructing the security complex in the South Caucasus. Consequently, this creates a need to re-evaluate shifts in the policies of extra-regional "power centres" in the South Caucasus.

Current Security Challenges and Characteristics Surrounding the States of the South Caucasus Region

At the level of individual countries, the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict persists; beyond a territorial dispute, it also has a significant ethnic component. Furthermore, regarding security developments in the region, Turkish–Azerbaijani security and military cooperation cannot be viewed merely as a counterweight to the previously manifested—but currently somewhat frozen—Armenian–Russian cooperation.

In regional processes, Turkey unequivocally and overtly aligns itself with Azerbaijan and positions itself in opposition to Armenia. Conversely, the Russian Federation, in addition to its strategic allied relations with Armenia, maintains multifaceted and close relations with both Azerbaijan and Turkey that likewise bear the character of a strategic partnership. Moreover, Russia's political, military, economic, and other sectoral relations with these two nations continue to develop and show a clear trend toward further intensification.

In light of this, on August 8, 2025, in Washington, D.C., high-level representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan initiated the Washington Trilateral

Agreement (RA Foreign Ministry, 2025). According to the agreement, the parties concurred to move toward peace and the establishment of interstate relations; they recognised each other's territorial integrity, agreed to continue and finalise the process of border delimitation and demarcation, and pledged non-interference in one another's internal affairs.

As previously noted, pursuant to another document, the Republic of Armenia is commencing work with the United States and mutually determined third parties to develop the framework for the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) connectivity project within the territory of the Republic of Armenia (Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2025).

The core provisions of this agreement and its accompanying framework include mutual recognition of sovereignty based on 1991 borders and the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group as part of the normalisation process. Furthermore, it establishes the TRIPP project as a strategic transit route through southern Armenia, connecting mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan. Under this framework, the United States is granted exclusive rights to develop and manage the corridor for a period of 99 years, while all parties commit to security guarantees, specifically refraining from the use or threat of force.

In addition to these initial documents, the Armenian and Azerbaijani parties reached an agreement in April 2024 of delimiting the state border. According to the official communiqué, a meeting of the Commission on State Border Delimitation and Border Security between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the State Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, was held on April 19, 2024. The session was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia, Mher Grigoryan, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, Shahin Mustafayev (RA Foreign Ministry, 2024). As a result, it was decided to delimit specific sections of the borderline based on legally substantiated documents that existed at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, to align the boundary with the former inter-republican borders.

Within the context of the South Caucasian security vision, it must be noted that significant issues persist regarding Georgia's relations with Russia (Dickinson, 2021). On August 8, 2008, Russian forces invaded Georgia. Although the active conflict concluded within a few days, the consequences of the Russo-Georgian war continue to resonate years later, shaping the broader geopolitical environment. The August 2008 war significantly transformed geopolitical approaches in the South Caucasus. After the conflict, Russia recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, heightened tensions between Georgia and Russia, and challenged international norms on territorial integrity.

More recently, Georgia has experienced strained relations with the EU. Nevertheless, the EU remains effectively the largest provider of financial assistance to Georgia. From 2021 to 2024, the EU allocated €340 million in funding to Georgia.

Priority sectors include the economy, institutions, the rule of law, security, environmental and climate resilience, digital transformation, gender equality, and inclusive society.

The European Parliament has consistently served as a firm advocate for the European aspirations of the Georgian people. It emphasised the importance of implementing the relevant steps defined by the recommendation of November 8, 2023 (The Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2023), including measures regarding the fight against disinformation, alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy, improvement of parliamentary oversight, and efforts against political polarisation, de-oligarchization, and corruption. Additionally, on June 9, 2022 (European Parliament, 2022), the European Parliament adopted a resolution concerning the violation of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia. In this document, members condemned the "state capture" by the "Georgian Dream" party and its founder, the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili. They expressed regret over the significant deterioration of the media environment in the country.

In the context of assessing the contemporary security vision of the South Caucasus, it must be emphasised that the military clashes around Iran are gradually beginning to affect the region's security system of the South Caucasus as well. At the same time, the three states of the region—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—generally attempt to pursue a cautious policy, avoiding overt positions. Their primary objective is to maintain regional stability and prevent the conflict between major powers from spilling over into the intra-regional domain (Barseghyan et al., 2026).

For Armenia, developments in Iran are particularly significant. Iran is not only a vital economic and transport partner but also one of the few neighbouring states with which Armenia maintains an open border. Consequently, prolonged instability in Iran could directly affect Armenia's economic and security environment. These circumstances explain why Armenia currently pursues a policy of maximum balance and caution, attempting to preserve regional stability while avoiding participation in the escalation of the conflict.

Results

The research demonstrates that the South Caucasus is becoming an increasingly important arena of geopolitical competition among regional and extra-regional actors. Russia, Turkey, and Iran continue to view the region as a zone of vital strategic interests, while the United States, the European Union, China, and India are expanding their political and economic engagement.

The study reveals that regional communication projects, particularly the TRIPP initiative and the "North-South" corridor, are significantly reshaping the regional balance of power. At the same time, unresolved conflicts, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and the escalation surrounding Iran continue to generate new security risks for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

The findings further indicate that the growing involvement of extra-regional

actors creates additional opportunities to preserve the geopolitical sovereignty and strategic manoeuvrability of the South Caucasian states, especially Armenia, while also increasing regional competition and instability.

Conclusions

In the contemporary era, the South Caucasus faces the threat of expanding neo-imperialist influence from both regional and extra-regional "power centres." Amidst the Russo-Ukrainian war, the increasing importance of regional connectivity, and the deepening antagonisms and military hostilities between Russia-West and Iran-West, the security risks have escalated significantly. The South Caucasus faces a profound risk of becoming a new "object" of military-political competition between these power centres, with potentially irreversible consequences for the preservation of the Republic of Armenia's sovereignty.

Therefore, the Republic of Armenia must, to the extent possible, refrain from actions that deepen competition between regional power centres—which have vital interests in the area—and extra-regional power centres, whose interests are of a secondary.

The initialling of the document on August 8, 2025, represented a significant milestone not only in the normalisation process of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations but also in guaranteeing peace for the entire region. However, it is simultaneously necessary to recognise that in the event of a change in the U.S. administration, the initial agreements might not be further advanced. Armenia and the United States also continue to develop their relations based on treaties signed during the previous U.S. administration. Yet, the inverse of this issue is also observable: specifically, the policies pursued by the current and previous U.S. administrations regarding Ukraine differ profoundly.

Within the vision of regional security, it is emphasised that Georgia and Azerbaijan have not met their expectations through GUAM, nor has Armenia through the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation); thus, they find themselves in a certain phase of "exploration." In this context, NATO's activity in the region is logical. Furthermore, NATO's presence may serve to balance Armenia-CSTO relations as well as Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Armenia's decision not to withdraw from the CSTO is also conditioned by the fact that, by remaining within the organisation, Armenia retains the power to veto any decision.

In light of these developments, the emergence of a localised regional security structure—of which the region's states coexist within a single security framework—cannot be ruled out. However, prior to achieving such an outcome, the region faces formidable challenges. The South Caucasus remains a primary zone of interest for various power centres, and each actor seeks of secure a dominant position of influence within the region.

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