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Power Game in the South Caucasus and Iran-Armenia Relations

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Introduction

The 2020 Second Karabakh War reshaped the South Caucasus security order, consolidating a Turkey-Azerbaijan axis and advancing the Zangezur Corridor—a potential land link that could sever Iran's territorial connection to Armenia and Eurasia. Simultaneously, Armenia's military defeat and Russia's waning security credibility forced Yerevan to diversify its foreign partnerships. Most analyses employ a "New Great Game" lens focused on great-power rivalry, thereby overlooking the deep security interdependence among local states. This study applies Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which posits that neighboring states' security concerns are so interlinked that they form a distinct complex. The central question is: *What consequences have the new security dynamics in the South Caucasus had for Iran–Armenia relations?*

Research Findings

The study finds that Iran-Armenia relations have shifted from a cultural-economic partnership to a "pragmatic security convergence." This structural response is driven by a shared existential threat: the Turkey-Azerbaijan axis, pan-Turkic narratives, and the Zangezur Corridor, the latter of which threatens to physically detach Iran from Armenia.

This Iran-Armenia convergence possesses a critical economic dimension. Joint projects like the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), trilateral cooperation with India at Chabahar Port, and expanded energy trade function as a "security anchor," directly countering the China-backed Middle Corridor and the Zangezur Corridor. These initiatives intertwine the two countries' geopolitical survival.

Structurally, the South Caucasus has moved from Russian hegemony to a fragile multipolarity. Russia's inability to protect Armenia and its withdrawal of peacekeepers in 2024 eroded its role as a security guarantor, pushing Armenia toward Iran. The first-ever joint military exercise in April 2025 institutionalized this security partnership. Patterns of amity and enmity have split the region into rival blocs: Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan versus Iran-Armenia-India. India's emergence as

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Armenia's top defense supplier has reduced Yerevan's reliance on Russia, balanced the opposing bloc, and elevated the Tehran-Yerevan axis into a multilateral network.

Extra-regional actors reinforce this dynamic. China's prioritization of the Middle Corridor bypasses Iran and Armenia, further incentivizing deeper INSTC cooperation. Meanwhile, Armenia's westward pivot—hosting EU monitors, signing a strategic partnership with the U.S., and pursuing EU accession—presents a dual reality for Iran. In this regard, Iran pursues a policy of cautious pragmatism.

Conclusion

The Tehran-Yerevan relationship defies traditional alliance categories. This “pragmatic security convergence” is characterized by five features: it is threat-based, economically pragmatic, non-exclusive, structurally constrained, and dynamically responsive to regional polarity shifts. RSCT effectively captures this meso-level security interdependence. The partnership serves as a balancing mechanism amid disputes like the Zangezur Corridor. Its future depends on sustained shared threats, the management of internal tensions, and the adept navigation of great-power rivalry. The South Caucasus thus represents a test of adaptive diplomacy, shaping both bilateral ties and the emerging regional security order.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Armenia, South Caucasus, Regional Security Complex Theory

The New Geo-Economics of the Caspian Sea: From Resources to the Corridors

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Introduction

The article argues that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea transformed from a “lake of peace and friendship” into one of the most important arenas of geopolitics and geo-economics in the 21st century. The contemporary significance of the Caspian is no longer limited to its vast energy reserves; rather, it primarily lies in its role as a central axis for the competition and cooperation of transit corridors. The author describes this as a “silent battle” in which ports, railways, and highways have become the main weapons used by regional and extra-regional actors to reshape the map of power, influence, and global trade in Eurasia.

The study is framed within neoliberal institutionalism (Keohane & Nye) and demonstrates that, despite an anarchic environment, states have managed to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation through institutions, regimes, and international agreements, such as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association and the North-South Corridor Agreement.

1. Caspian Energy Resources: The Grand Prize

The Caspian continues to hold significant energy reserves, totaling approximately 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (EIA, 2024). Key fields include Tengiz and Kashagan (Kazakhstan), Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (Azerbaijan), Shah Deniz (Azerbaijan’s gas), and Galkynysh (Turkmenistan). While these resources generate substantial revenue and serve as powerful diplomatic bargaining tools, the author emphasizes that in the 21st century, control over transit routes has become more strategically important than the resources themselves.

2. Corridors: The Heart of Geo-Economic Competition

The article provides a detailed analysis of three main corridors:

- **A) Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route):**
 - *Route:* China $\rightarrow$ Central Asia $\rightarrow$ Caspian Sea (ports of Aktau and Kuryk in Kazakhstan) $\rightarrow$ Baku (Azerbaijan) $\rightarrow$ Georgia $\rightarrow$ Turkey $\rightarrow$ Europe.
 - Its strategic importance surged dramatically after the Russia-Ukraine war because it bypasses Russia.
 - The ports of Aktau and Kuryk serve as critical chokepoints.

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- *Challenges:* Limited port and vessel capacity, multi-modal coordination (rail-sea-rail), tariff harmonization issues, and tensions in the South Caucasus.
- **B) International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):**
 - *Axis:* Russia–Iran–India.
 - It consists of three main branches, with the Western branch (Rasht–Astara railway) and the Caspian Sea branch (Astrakhan–Anzali/Amirabad) being the most significant.
 - *Advantage:* It reduces distance by about 40% and costs by 30% compared to the Suez Canal route.
 - *Challenges:* International sanctions, underdeveloped rail infrastructure in Iran (especially the Rasht–Astara segment), and bureaucratic obstacles.
- **C) TRACECA and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):**
 - TRACECA was the European precursor to the Middle Corridor and laid its institutional foundations.
 - China’s Belt and Road Initiative serves as the overarching framework for these corridors. The author views the BRI as a mega-strategy that pursues both economic goals (new markets, energy security) and geopolitical objectives (reshaping the global order in favor of Beijing).

Comparison of Corridors

The article includes a table comparing the three corridors in terms of distance, operational capacity, geopolitical pressures, and international support. The Middle Corridor is presented as the main competitor to Russia’s Northern Route, while the North-South Corridor strengthens a vertical East-South axis.

Theoretical Framework: Neoliberal Institutionalism

Drawing on Keohane and Nye, the author shows that complex interdependence and institutions—by reducing transaction costs, increasing transparency, and creating a “shadow of the future”—enable states to cooperate despite ongoing competition. Corridors are thus understood not merely as physical routes, but as international cooperation regimes.

Conclusion

The Caspian Sea has evolved into the geo-economic pivot of Eurasia. Littoral states, particularly Kazakhstan with its ports of Aktau and Kuryk, are converting the “curse of landlockedness” into a “geographical blessing” by becoming key connectivity hubs. The future of the region will be determined not by choosing a single side, but by becoming an indispensable node in international transit networks.

The competition between the Middle Corridor and the North-South Corridor exemplifies a geo-economic game in which states and major powers use economic tools to gain influence and control over transit routes. This silent struggle is reshaping the balance of power in Eurasia. The author concludes that the Caspian’s value in the 21st century is increasingly defined by its central

geographical position in emerging trans-Eurasian transport networks rather than solely by its hydrocarbon resources.

Keywords: Caspian Sea, Neoliberal Institutionalism, Eurasia, corridor, ports, energy, transit

New Pathways to Integration: Linkages between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union



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Introduction

Geopolitical transformations and the economic pressures arising from great-power competition have given rise to new dynamics in the global order, particularly across the Eurasian space. In this context, the synergy between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is emphasized as a key mechanism for infrastructure development, connectivity, and multilateral cooperation. Against this backdrop, the main research question of this article asks: *What impact do the cooperative linkages and potential synergies between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union have on regionalization processes in Eurasia?*

The article's hypothesis is based on the premise that the synergy between the BRI and the EAEU—by strengthening transport infrastructure and supply chains, expanding digital cooperation, reducing interaction costs, and fostering political-security coordination—contributes to reducing regional tensions and enhancing member states' capacity to respond to external pressures.

Methods

This study employs a historical-comparative research method. Data were compiled through documentary studies and the analysis of credible sources, including academic articles, specialized books, reports, and official documents. The theoretical framework of the research is grounded in neoliberal institutionalism, which emphasizes the role of multilateral and regional institutions in shaping state behavior and facilitating cooperation.

Findings

The main findings of this research indicate that the synergy between the EAEU and the BRI extends beyond mere commercial interaction, giving rise to a multi-layered architecture of economic security in the region. At the economic level, this linkage—facilitated by the integration of transport and digital infrastructures (including the Digital Silk Road)—has reduced transaction costs and enhanced the resilience of supply chains against global shocks. Bilateral and multilateral

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agreements, especially those enacted since 2018, have consolidated the remarkable growth of trade between China and Russia.

At the political and security levels, the findings show that this cooperation has evolved into a strategic instrument for countering Western pressure, particularly sanctions. The creation of a more convergent regional order has not only mitigated destructive competition in the post-Soviet space but, by reinforcing intelligence and military cooperation, has also produced greater and more sustainable political stability. Ultimately, the results demonstrate that this three-layered model (economic, political, and security) within the EAEU-BRI linkage represents a paradigm for a “multipolar global order.” Through the institutionalization of non-Western interactions, the bargaining power of member states in the international arena has been enhanced, laying the foundation for peaceful development and reducing dependence on traditional global powers across Greater Eurasia.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research indicates that the synergy between the EAEU and the BRI is not merely an economic initiative but a “strategic model” for redefining power in Greater Eurasia. On the economic front, this linkage, by completing infrastructure, fostering digital development, and integrating supply chains, has guaranteed the region’s resilience against Western sanctions and global crises. At the political and security levels, this cooperation has stabilized the region by reducing traditional rivalries and strengthening defense-intelligence coordination, effectively becoming a tool for resisting external pressures.

Overall, the three-layered “economic-political-security” model of this synergy symbolizes the transition toward a multipolar world order. This collaboration offers a successful model of regional integration that, while enhancing the geopolitical weight of member states, institutionalizes peaceful development and economic independence within the Eurasian space, thereby paving the way for a new international order.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, Eurasian Economic Union, Economic Integration, Eurasia, China.

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Introduction

The Ukraine crisis is one of the most prominent geopolitical developments of the 21st century. Beginning with expansive attacks by Russian troops in Ukraine, this crisis led to a deep policy divide between Russia and the West, while simultaneously creating a new context for the boundaries of the global order. Among the global powers indirectly involved in this conflict, China occupies a particularly critical position. While China and Russia have strengthened their strategic partnership in recent years—especially in the political, economic, and security fields—Beijing has nonetheless attempted to avoid direct military involvement in the Ukraine war, maintaining a cautious and ambiguous diplomatic position. Beijing has repeatedly emphasized respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, while simultaneously criticizing NATO expansion and Western sanctions against Russia. This dual approach reflects China's broader strategic calculations in a changing international system.

Question and Hypothesis

This study aims to answer the following question: *How has China reacted to the Russia-Ukraine war?* The study hypothesizes that China has adopted a multifaceted approach guided by a policy of ambiguity and duality. This policy of strategic ambiguity enables China to achieve several objectives simultaneously. First, it strengthens China's geopolitical cooperation with Russia in areas such as energy, trade, technology, and security. Second, it allows Beijing to present itself as a responsible global actor advocating for peace and diplomatic negotiation. Third, China uses the crisis to challenge Western narratives about the international order and to weaken Western political unity. Consequently, China's approach can be interpreted as a calculated strategy designed to maximize national interests while minimizing international risks.

Theoretical Framework

An examination of China's approach to the Ukraine crisis is conducted through the lens of defensive realism. According to this theory, states avoid unnecessary conflicts and attempt to preserve the balance of power to protect their national interests. Moreover, defensive realism suggests that major powers tend to cooperate when facing a common rival. In this context, the strategic partnership between China and Russia reflects a shared concern regarding the expansion of American influence in global politics. Therefore, the Ukraine crisis has accelerated the development of closer political and economic ties between Beijing and Moscow.

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Methodology

This study employs an analytical-explanatory framework based on qualitative data collection from library and online resources. Content analysis enables the identification of major themes, strategic narratives, and policy patterns in China's official discourse regarding the Ukraine crisis. This method also allows for the examination of China's diplomatic statements, media narratives, and foreign policy documents to understand the underlying logic behind Beijing's actions. In addition, this study compares China's official positions with its practical economic and diplomatic behavior during the conflict. For example, while China officially emphasizes neutrality and peace negotiations, it has simultaneously increased economic cooperation with Russia across several sectors. Therefore, this analytical-explanatory framework helps reveal the inherent contradictions and complexities within China's foreign policy.

Research Findings

The findings of this study indicate that China has adopted a pragmatic and strategic approach toward the Russia–Ukraine war. Rather than taking a completely neutral position, China has attempted to balance supporting Russia with avoiding direct confrontation with the West. Beijing has criticized Western sanctions against Russia and opposed NATO expansion, while also calling for ceasefire negotiations and peaceful solutions.

Another important finding is that China has significantly expanded its cooperation with Russia during the war. Economic relations between the two countries have increased in the energy, technology, banking, and trade sectors. Russia has become a vital supplier of energy resources for China, while China has provided Russia with economic alternatives to reduce the impact of Western sanctions. This growing cooperation reflects a clear strategic convergence between the two powers. Ultimately, China uses the Ukraine crisis as an opportunity to challenge the United States in the Asia-Pacific, weaken the Western alliance, and expand its strategic partnership with Russia across multiple domains.

Overall, the findings suggest that China's policy toward the Russia–Ukraine war is driven by strategic calculations related to the balance of power, economic interests, and geopolitical competition with the United States. China's ambiguous and flexible approach enables it to benefit from the crisis while reducing potential risks to its national interests.

Keywords: China's policy, Ukraine crisis, Russia's strategy, the balance of power, multifaceted approach.

Introduction

Environmental crises have, in recent decades, extended beyond the local level to become a global threat to human security and ecosystem sustainability. In this context, Central Asia—as an arid and semi-arid region—faced a dual challenge following the collapse of the Soviet Union: economic reconstruction in the shadow of political independence, and the absence of coordinated managerial structures for the preservation of shared resources. The legacy of water-intensive agriculture and centralized Soviet-era management, alongside the nationalistic rivalries of post-Soviet states over the vital Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, has led to environmental catastrophes such as the desiccation of the Aral Sea, widespread pollution, and soil erosion.

These crises have not only posed a fundamental obstacle to the region's sustainable development but have also jeopardized regional security by exacerbating geopolitical tensions between upstream and downstream countries. Given the heavy reliance of local communities' livelihoods on water resources and the detrimental impacts of climate change on glaciers, a scientific examination of the current situation is essential for charting a path toward the future. This research, aiming to analyze the causes and consequences of these crises with a focus on uncoordinated resource management, seeks to address how the environmental situation in Central Asia can be explained, and what theoretical and practical solutions exist for transitioning toward a desirable order and achieving sustainable development in this region.

Methodology

Utilizing a qualitative method and a descriptive-analytical approach, this research is based on the theoretical framework of Thomas Spragens' four-stage methodology. This methodological model provides a coherent tool for organizing political and social science analyses, enabling the researcher to move step-by-step from diagnosing the current situation toward presenting prescriptive solutions. The four stages of this method include:

1. Diagnosis of the crisis or observation of disorder;
2. Explanation of causes or historical and structural root-tracing;
3. Reconstruction of an ideal order; and
4. Prescription of normative and practical solutions.

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In the first stage, the current state of the region's environment is described. In the second stage, the causes of the crisis—including the Soviet historical legacy, post-Soviet structural border demarcations, nationalistic behaviors, and the pressures of climate change—are analyzed. The third stage is dedicated to reconstructing regional rationality and explaining the principles of sustainable cooperation. Finally, the fourth stage maps out the path for transitioning from dissonance to regional cooperation through legal, technological, and diplomatic instruments. Data collection was conducted via library resources, international reports, and credible scientific documents to offer a comprehensive framework for managing shared resources while critiquing policy gaps.

Results and Discussion

The research findings indicate that the environmental crisis in Central Asia is the product of the convergence of four key factors:

- **First**, the legacy of monoculture development and centralized Soviet management, which severely weakened the region's ecosystem.
- **Second**, the post-collapse geopolitical divisions that established a logic of “national ownership” over transboundary resources instead of institutional cooperation.
- **Third**, the competitive behaviors of states that have turned water into a political lever (hydropolitics), thereby hindering data exchange and joint management.
- **Fourth**, climate change, which has drastically reduced the resilience of this fragile system by causing a significant decline in glacial volume.

The research argument centers on the necessity of a paradigm shift from “competition-based national security” to “interdependent regional security” to exit this structural disorder. From the perspective of this study, the ideal order entails the establishment of a “Regional Water Charter” with executive authority to manage water, energy, and agriculture in an integrated and equitable manner. Furthermore, transitioning from traditional management toward data-driven management and utilizing modern technologies for resource monitoring are essential prerequisites for realizing this order. Green diplomacy and adherence to international conventions will facilitate the convergence of national policies in alignment with collective ecological interests.

Conclusion

The present study emphasizes that the critical environmental situation in Central Asia is not an accidental phenomenon, but rather the logical consequence of institutional and structural breakdowns in resource management following independence. The continuation of the status quo, given the accelerating pace of climate change, could lead to ecosystem collapse and irreversible security crises. The research's ultimate solution is a transition from national governance to “regional network governance,” in which each country's water security is defined through an organic nexus with the security of the entire region.

The realization of sustainable development in this geography necessitates the institutionalization of transnational cooperation, joint investment in renewable energy, and the elevation of environmental diplomacy to a cornerstone of the regional states' foreign policy. By replacing

competitive hydropolitics with a model of coordinated hydropolitics, the Aral Sea basin can be transformed from a symbol of global catastrophe into a model for ecological cooperation. This shift will not only alleviate geopolitical tensions between upstream and downstream countries but will also make the region resilient against future climate shocks and guarantee sustainable development for future generations. Ultimately, Central Asia's progress depends on linking the political will of governments with technological innovation to preserve a shared natural heritage.

Keywords: Central Asia, environment, sustainable development, water crisis, regional cooperation, Spragens' methodology.

Introduction

Western economic sanctions have become one of the most significant instruments of geopolitical pressure in the contemporary international system. Over the past two decades, the United States, the European Union, and their allies have increasingly relied on sanctions to influence the political, economic, and security behavior of targeted states. Countries such as Russia, China, and Iran have faced extensive restrictions in the fields of banking, energy, technology, trade, and international finance. However, beyond their immediate economic consequences, these sanctions have also contributed to the strengthening of regional and transregional cooperation among non-Western powers, particularly within frameworks such as BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

This study examines the impact of Western sanctions on the strengthening of BRICS and the EAEU, focusing on the political and economic responses of Russia, China, and other member states. The research is based on a descriptive-analytical approach and uses historical data, comparative analysis, and international academic sources to evaluate the relationship between sanctions and regional economic convergence.

Analysis of Sanctions Objectives and Effects

The findings indicate that Western sanctions have pursued several strategic objectives. First, they aim to alter the behavior of target states in areas such as foreign policy, security, and nuclear activities. Second, they seek to weaken the economic and strategic capabilities of sanctioned countries by restricting access to international capital markets, advanced technologies, and global financial systems. Third, sanctions function as political signals intended to deter other states from pursuing similar policies. Finally, they are used as tools to increase domestic pressure on governments through economic decline, inflation, and reductions in living standards.

The case of Russia demonstrates the broad scope of Western sanctions. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and especially after the outbreak of the Ukraine war in 2022, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and their allies imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia's banking, energy, defense, and technology sectors. Russian banks were partially removed from the SWIFT financial system, the foreign reserves of the Russian Central

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Bank were frozen, and exports of advanced technologies and industrial equipment were restricted. In addition, sanctions targeted Russian energy exports through oil embargoes and price caps. These measures significantly disrupted Russia's access to international finance and technology, contributing to inflationary pressures, currency instability, and reduced economic growth.

Despite these pressures, sanctions did not lead to the economic isolation or collapse of Russia. Instead, Russia redirected a substantial part of its energy exports toward Asian markets, particularly China and India, and intensified efforts to reduce dependence on Western financial institutions. Bilateral trade using national currencies, such as the ruble and yuan, expanded considerably. Furthermore, Russia accelerated import-substitution policies and strengthened cooperation within the EAEU and BRICS.

Institutional Evolution of BRICS and EAEU

The study demonstrates that BRICS has gradually evolved from a loose grouping of emerging economies into a more coordinated platform for economic and political cooperation among non-Western powers. Through initiatives such as the New Development Bank and efforts to promote local currency transactions, BRICS members have attempted to reduce reliance on the US dollar and Western-controlled financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In addition, cooperation in energy, digital infrastructure, transportation, and technology has increased among member states.

Similarly, the Eurasian Economic Union has sought to deepen regional economic integration through the establishment of common markets, tariff reductions, and coordinated trade policies. Cooperation between the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative has further strengthened Eurasian connectivity, providing opportunities for alternative economic corridors outside Western-dominated structures. Russia has played a central role in promoting these initiatives and expanding trade relations with Asian and Middle Eastern partners.

The research findings suggest that Western sanctions have indirectly accelerated the process of economic convergence among BRICS and EAEU member states. Increasing restrictions on access to Western markets and financial systems encouraged these countries to develop alternative mechanisms for trade, finance, and regional cooperation. As a result, economic relations among member states intensified, and efforts to establish independent payment systems and financial institutions expanded.

Structural and Geopolitical Limitations

Nevertheless, the study also identifies several structural and political limitations facing BRICS and the EAEU. Significant economic asymmetries exist among member states; China and India possess far larger and more diversified economies than countries such as South Africa, Armenia, or Kyrgyzstan. These differences complicate policy coordination and reduce institutional cohesion. In addition, many member states remain economically connected to Western markets and financial systems, limiting their ability to fully detach from the global dollar-based order.

Geopolitical rivalries among members also create obstacles to deeper integration. Tensions between China and India, as well as political disagreements within the EAEU, have hindered the development of fully unified economic and strategic policies. Moreover, despite efforts to establish independent financial structures, BRICS and the EAEU still lack the institutional capacity to replace major Western-led institutions and payment systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study argues that Western sanctions have produced outcomes that extend far beyond their original objectives. Although sanctions imposed substantial economic costs on targeted states, they also encouraged the expansion of regional and transregional cooperation among non-Western powers. BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union have increasingly emerged as platforms for economic coordination, financial cooperation, and resistance to Western economic dominance. While these organizations continue to face major internal and structural challenges, ongoing geopolitical tensions and the persistence of sanctions are likely to further strengthen efforts toward a more multipolar international economic order.

Keywords: Western sanctions, BRICS, Eurasian Economic Union, regional organizations, economic cooperation, foreign policy

Energy and the Republic of Azerbaijan's Relations with the European Union

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Introduction

This article examines the role of the energy strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan toward the European Union in consolidating the country's geopolitical position and strengthening its domestic legitimacy. The main research question asks how Azerbaijan's energy strategy has simultaneously enhanced its international standing while serving as an instrument of domestic legitimacy and political-economic cohesion. The study argues that Azerbaijan has successfully used energy not merely as an economic commodity, but as a strategic instrument through which it has strengthened its role in the Eurasian and European energy order while reinforcing the legitimacy of its ruling system.

The research is conducted within the theoretical framework of realism in international relations. From a realist perspective, energy is considered a strategic tool for increasing national power, ensuring state survival, balancing external threats, and preserving domestic legitimacy. The article adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical method based on secondary sources, including academic studies, international energy reports, statistical data, and policy documents published up to 2025.

Research Findings

The findings are organized around three major dimensions:

- **First**, the study highlights the geopolitical role of energy in Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Due to its strategic location on the Caspian Sea and substantial hydrocarbon reserves, Azerbaijan has emerged as an important actor in European energy security. Major infrastructure projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor, have enabled Azerbaijan to bypass Russia and supply oil and gas directly to European markets. These projects are strategically significant because they diversify Europe's energy imports and reduce dependence on Russian transit routes. In 2023, Azerbaijan exported nearly 11.8 billion cubic meters of gas to the European Union, with plans to increase exports to 20 billion cubic meters annually by 2027. Azerbaijan has therefore become an increasingly important supplier within Europe's diversification strategy. Beyond hydrocarbons, the country also seeks to position itself as a future hub of

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renewable and green energy through projects such as the Black Sea electricity cable and offshore wind development in the Caspian Sea.

- **Second**, the article examines the role of energy in strengthening Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union while contributing to Europe's efforts to reduce dependence on Russian energy after the Ukraine crisis. As Russian gas supplies to Europe declined, Azerbaijan expanded its exports and promoted itself as a reliable strategic partner. At the same time, Baku has maintained a pragmatic balancing policy toward Russia. Although Azerbaijan has supported Ukraine diplomatically and through humanitarian assistance, it has avoided openly joining an anti-Russian bloc. This balancing strategy reflects Azerbaijan's broader effort to manage relations simultaneously with both Europe and Russia, while enhancing its own national security and geopolitical flexibility. Despite tensions between Azerbaijan and the European Union regarding democracy and human rights, energy cooperation has remained the central pillar of bilateral relations.
- **Third**, the study analyzes the domestic role of energy revenues in strengthening political legitimacy, social cohesion, and economic development. Oil and gas revenues have enabled the Azerbaijani government to finance large infrastructure projects, welfare programs, transportation networks, and reconstruction efforts in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur. The State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ) has played a significant role in stabilizing the economy and reducing vulnerability to fluctuations in global energy prices. Energy revenues have also supported investments in education, healthcare, tourism, logistics, agriculture, and industrial development to promote economic diversification beyond hydrocarbons.

Challenges and Limitations

However, the article also identifies several important challenges. Russia continues to perceive the South Caucasus as part of its sphere of influence and views independent energy corridors with suspicion. Azerbaijan also faces complex relations with regional powers such as Iran and Turkey. Moreover, the country remains highly dependent

Keywords: Energy, Republic of Azerbaijan, European Union, Realism, Energy Security

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Following the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the Central Asian states, each of these new republics faced severe socio-economic and political challenges inherited from the Soviet socialist system. These difficulties required external political support and long-term, constructive economic investment. Turkey was one of the first countries to redefine its vital interests in Central Asia by reassessing its general foreign policy considerations. Today, Ankara is recognized as an influential trading and political partner in Central Asia, having established and expanded various cooperation mechanisms. Expert consensus and empirical data indicate that, despite its lack of territorial proximity to the region, Turkey enjoys a highly influential position.

In this regard, the present study aims to explain the factors driving Turkey's success by relying on the theory of international social capital. It addresses the following question: *What was the role and position of international social capital in advancing Turkey's regional policy and securing its favorable position in the Central Asian region?* In line with the research hypothesis, an analytical model of international social capital is presented, yielding clear empirical results.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital is defined as an effective, multidimensional phenomenon comprising a set of norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, and civic participation that enhances cooperation among members of a society. The greater the volume of this capital, the easier it is to achieve collective goals, and the lower the transaction and communication costs become. International social capital—the product of interdisciplinary connection and dialogue—is generally understood to consist of assets encompassing values, connections, commonalities, capacities, and mutual expectations. These elements possess an obvious relationship with critical areas such as the international division of labor, competitiveness, skills, and national branding. In a specific operational definition, a metaphorical approach plays an irreplaceable role in its conceptual consistency. Extending the definition of domestic social capital, international social capital is recognized as a critical foreign policy component operating across three dimensions: cognitive, structural, and relational.

Methodology

This research employs the policy analysis method. Utilizing library resources and empirical data (such as domestic and international statistics and institutional reports), it seeks to assess the

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relationship between Turkey's favorable position in Central Asia and the role of international social capital in its foreign policy approach through qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Turkey's presence in Central Asia over the past three decades has taken on extensive dimensions, making it notable among other external actors in the region. To understand these new aspects of Turkey's regional policy, this research applies the theory of international social capital and its three core elements (norms, trust, and networks).

The findings indicate that Turkey, in line with its vital goals in the region, has established strong network relationships dependent on social capital while emphasizing and benefiting from normative affinities and trust-building. Consequently, Ankara seeks to sustain its regional interests and diplomatic success through these mechanisms.

Conclusions

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the five Central Asian countries, Turkey was one of the first actors to recognize their sovereignty and offer structural assistance. Expert verification and scientific data show that Turkey's continuous presence in Central Asia, despite its lack of territorial proximity, has brought desirable achievements. This study examined this issue based on the framework of international social capital to explain the factors affecting Turkey's success. Turkey's approach across various areas of cooperation was evaluated based on the three elements of the international social capital analytical model, leading to the following conclusions:

In the dimension of **relational social capital**, Turkey, by recognizing the vitality of normative structures, viewed the independence of Central Asian countries as an opportunity to demonstrate its capabilities and attract them through the development of common norms. Turkey's possession of relational capital (normative affinities) prompted Turkish statesmen to adopt extensive network mechanisms and trust-building strategies, responding to the demands of regional leaders by creating horizontal, intra-organizational relationships.

Consciously recognizing the possibility of exploiting opportunities and influencing trends, Turkish statesmen have continuously turned to partnerships, organizational initiatives, and the development of investment networks within the framework of "**network social capital**." By formulating long-term strategies and allocating substantial financial resources, Turkey has made sustainable investments in various fields, establishing banks and energy transmission networks across Central Asian countries. Turkey's network strategy and structure have significantly highlighted its position as a central network player.

In light of this strategic advantage, Turkey has been able to strengthen its **cognitive social capital** component (trust) among the countries of the region. Turkey has expanded its circle of relations through a pragmatic approach, utilizing its role as a facilitator and the element of trust. In this process, Ankara has targeted and advanced its political and identity-based influence with strategic

wisdom, leveraging all components of international social capital (relational, network, and cognitive) to improve its regional standing.

Key words: Central Asia, Turkey, International Social Capital, Network Actor, Influence.

Arash Sadeghi Seraji¹

Introduction

This article examines the evolving strategic cooperation between Russia and India within the broader transformation of the international system from a unipolar to a multipolar configuration. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States emerged as the predominant global power, shaping political, economic, and security structures through its leadership in international institutions and alliances. However, this unipolar moment has increasingly been challenged by structural shifts in the distribution of power, including the resurgence of Russia, the rise of China, and the growing influence of emerging economies such as India. Against this backdrop, the article argues that Russia and India have developed a pragmatic and multidimensional partnership aimed at enhancing their strategic autonomy and contributing to a more decentralized and pluralistic global order.

Foundations of Convergence

The central argument of the study is that Russia–India cooperation is driven not by ideological alignment, but by converging strategic interests rooted in their respective divergences with the United States. For Russia, the deterioration of relations with the West—especially since the early 2000s and more sharply after the 2014 Ukraine crisis—has reinforced its motivation to seek alternative partnerships and to promote a multipolar world order that limits Western dominance. Key sources of tension include NATO’s eastward expansion, the erosion of arms control regimes, economic sanctions, and geopolitical competition in regions such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East. These dynamics have led Moscow to reorient its foreign policy toward non-Western actors, with India emerging as a critical partner.

In contrast, India’s relationship with the United States is characterized by a more complex mixture of cooperation and divergence. While New Delhi and Washington have strengthened ties in areas such as defense, technology, and regional security—particularly in the context of balancing China—India has consistently sought to preserve its “strategic autonomy.” Divergences arise in areas including trade policy, data localization, migration regimes, and differing perspectives on global governance and climate responsibility. India’s reluctance to fully align with U.S.-led initiatives reflects both its historical commitment to non-alignment and its contemporary aspiration to act as an independent pole in the international system. Consequently, India’s continued engagement with Russia, particularly in the defense and energy sectors, should be understood as part of a broader strategy of diversification rather than one of direct opposition to the West.

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A key contribution of the article lies in its analysis of how these parallel divergences from the United States create a foundation for Russia–India convergence. Both countries share an interest in reducing dependence on Western-dominated institutions and in expanding their influence within alternative multilateral frameworks. Institutions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) play a central role in this process by providing platforms for coordination among non-Western powers and by fostering the development of financial, political, and security mechanisms that operate independently of Western control. Through these institutions, Russia and India seek not only to enhance their own positions but also to reshape the norms and practices of global governance.

The Role of China

The article also emphasizes the importance of China as a critical variable in this triangular relationship. China’s rapid economic and military rise has significantly altered the global balance of power and contributed to the emergence of a more multipolar system. For Russia, China represents a vital strategic partner, particularly in the context of economic cooperation and as a counterweight to Western pressure. For India, however, China is both a competitor and a security challenge, especially given ongoing border disputes and Beijing’s expanding presence in the Indo-Pacific region. This dual role of China introduces a layer of complexity into Russia–India relations, as both countries must navigate their respective positions vis-à-vis Beijing. Despite these challenges, Russia has sought to maintain a balance between its relations with China and India, thereby preserving its role as a key intermediary within a multipolar framework.

Dimensions of Bilateral Cooperation

In examining the practical dimensions of Russia–India cooperation, the article identifies several key areas of engagement:

- **Defense Cooperation:** This remains one of the most significant pillars of the relationship, with Russia serving as a major supplier of military equipment to India and as a partner in joint development projects. This cooperation reflects both historical ties and India’s desire to maintain diversified sources of defense procurement.
- **Energy Sector:** Russia has become an increasingly important supplier of oil and other natural resources to India, particularly in the context of shifting global markets and Western sanctions affecting Russian exports.
- **Financial Cooperation:** Financial ties have expanded, with both countries exploring mechanisms to conduct trade in national currencies and reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar.
- **Technology:** Collaboration in emerging technologies—including space, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence—illustrates a shared interest in reducing technological dependence on Western systems.

From a theoretical perspective, the article draws primarily on structural realism to explain the behavior of both states, particularly their tendency to engage in balancing strategies in response to a perceived concentration of power. At the same time, it incorporates broader conceptual frameworks, such as the notion of a “multiplex” or multilayered world order, to capture the complexity of contemporary global governance. These perspectives help explain why cooperation

between Russia and India can coexist with their simultaneous engagement with other major powers, including the United States.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that Russia–India cooperation is both a product of ongoing structural changes in the international system and an active contributor to those changes. By expanding their bilateral ties and strengthening their participation in non-Western institutions, both countries are helping to redistribute power and influence more broadly across the global system. This process does not necessarily imply the immediate decline of existing institutions or the complete displacement of U.S. influence; rather, it points toward the emergence of a more fragmented and flexible order in which multiple centers of power coexist and interact.

In conclusion, the partnership between Russia and India represents a significant element in the transition toward a multipolar world. Their cooperation reflects a broader trend among emerging powers to seek greater autonomy, diversify their external relations, and participate more actively in shaping global norms and institutions. While this transformation increases the complexity of international politics and may generate new forms of competition, it also expands the range of strategic options available to states. The evolution of Russia–India relations thus provides valuable insight into the dynamics of contemporary global change and the future trajectory of the international order.

Keywords: Russian Federation' 'India' 'Multilateral World' 'Putin' 'Modi

Pottery and the Cultural Connection between Iran and Anatolia: A Study of the 2nd–8th Centuries AH

Mehdi Kazempour¹

Introduction

The history of Islamic ceramics reflects the extensive cultural and artistic interactions that connected different regions of the medieval Islamic world. Among these regions, Iran and Anatolia occupied particularly significant positions due to their geographical proximity and their location along major political and commercial routes. Between the 2nd and 8th centuries AH (8th–14th centuries CE), these two regions experienced substantial artistic and technical exchanges, especially in the field of ceramic production.

Ceramics during this period were not only utilitarian objects but also important representations of cultural identity, religious belief, technological achievement, and social status. Through the movement of merchants, pilgrims, craftsmen, and political elites, ceramic techniques and decorative traditions circulated widely, resulting in artistic forms that combined Iranian, Byzantine, Central Asian, and Anatolian influences.

This study aims to identify the ceramic traditions commonly produced in both Iran and Anatolia and to examine the mechanisms through which artistic and technical knowledge was transferred. Using a descriptive-analytical method based on historical, archaeological, and art-historical sources, the research compares ceramic forms, decorative motifs, glazing methods, and production technologies in both regions. The study focuses particularly on the artistic developments associated with the Seljuks, Byzantines, Ilkhanids, Fatimids, and local Iranian dynasties.

Historical and Political Context

Political and cultural developments played a major role in shaping ceramic production. Between the 7th and 11th centuries CE, Iran and Anatolia experienced political instability caused by military conflicts and dynastic rivalries. In Iran, dynasties such as the Samanids, Buyids, and Ghaznavids encouraged the growth of ceramic production in major urban centers, including Nishapur, Rayy, Kashan, and Gorgan. These workshops produced a wide variety of glazed and painted wares that reflected both Islamic artistic traditions and pre-Islamic Persian heritage. In Anatolia, Byzantine artistic traditions remained influential, while contact with the Fatimids and eastern Islamic lands introduced new glazing techniques and decorative approaches. The establishment of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum further strengthened artistic connections between Anatolia and Iran.

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One of the most influential external factors in the development of ceramics in both regions was the arrival of Chinese ceramics through international trade networks. From the 9th century onward, Chinese porcelain and stoneware inspired Iranian and Anatolian potters to experiment with white-bodied ceramics, transparent and colored glazes, underglaze painting, and new decorative motifs. Floral scrolls, cloud patterns, and stylized vegetal designs derived from Chinese art gradually became integrated into Islamic ceramic traditions. However, local craftsmen adapted these foreign influences according to regional tastes and artistic traditions, producing distinctive hybrid styles.

Shared Ceramic Traditions

Several ceramic groups were commonly produced in both Iran and Anatolia:

- **Lusterware:** Especially associated with Kashan in Iran, this represented one of the finest ceramic traditions of the medieval Islamic world, utilizing metallic pigments to create brilliant golden and copper-like surfaces.
- **Mina'i Ware:** Known for its multicolored overglaze decoration and narrative imagery, it reflected the sophistication of Iranian ceramic art and influenced Anatolian workshops through trade and artisan migration.
- **Lajvardina Ware:** Characterized by cobalt-blue backgrounds decorated with gold and white motifs, it emerged during the Ilkhanid period and demonstrated the strong impact of Chinese blue-and-white aesthetics.
- **Painted Ceramics:** Turquoise-and-black painted ceramics, as well as sgraffito and slip-painted wares, also became widespread in both regions, indicating extensive commercial and technological interaction.

Mechanisms of Exchange

Trade routes played a central role in facilitating these exchanges. The Silk Road connected Iran and Anatolia with Central Asia, China, and the Mediterranean world, while maritime routes through the Persian Gulf and eastern Mediterranean enabled the circulation of ceramics, pigments, raw materials, and artistic ideas. The migration of artists and craftsmen also contributed significantly to cultural interaction. Political instability, Mongol invasions, and changing systems of royal patronage encouraged many Iranian artisans to move to Anatolia, where they introduced Iranian glazing methods, decorative motifs, and production techniques into local workshops.

Religious and symbolic themes strongly influenced ceramic decoration in both regions. Geometric patterns, vegetal ornamentation, calligraphy, and symbolic imagery reflected important aspects of Islamic visual culture. During the Ilkhanid period, Shi'i religious motifs became increasingly visible in Iranian ceramics, including inscriptions referring to the Twelve Imams, Qur'anic verses, and religious invocations. Similar motifs later appeared in Anatolian ceramics through the continued influence of Iranian artistic traditions. Mythical creatures, animal imagery, and symbolic decorative forms further reflected the combination of Persian, Central Asian, Islamic, and Anatolian artistic traditions.

Regional Distinctions

Despite extensive similarities, important regional differences remained visible. Iranian ceramics generally demonstrated more advanced glazing techniques and more intricate geometric compositions. Colors such as turquoise, gold, white, and black were particularly common in Iranian wares, whereas Anatolian ceramics more frequently emphasized green, cobalt blue, and earthy tones. Anatolian pottery also retained stronger Byzantine and local regional influences, especially in vessel forms and decorative organization. Nevertheless, both traditions shared similar technological methods and aesthetic principles.

Political transformations, especially during the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods, significantly affected ceramic production. Seljuk rulers encouraged artistic innovation through royal patronage and the establishment of urban workshops. Although the Mongol invasions caused destruction in many Iranian cities, they also expanded artistic interaction across Eurasia. Under the Ilkhanids, Chinese artistic influences became increasingly integrated into Iranian ceramics, leading to experimentation with new colors, motifs, and techniques. Anatolia likewise became a meeting point for artistic traditions from Iran, Byzantium, Syria, and Central Asia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that ceramics functioned as a major cultural bridge between Iran and Anatolia during the medieval Islamic period. Ceramic production reflected complex interactions shaped by trade, migration, religion, politics, and artistic exchange. The similarities between Iranian and Anatolian ceramics reveal the existence of a shared artistic language across the Islamic world, while regional differences highlight the importance of local cultural identities. Therefore, the study of ceramics provides valuable insight into the broader historical and cultural relationships between Iran and Anatolia and illustrates the important role of material culture in connecting civilizations across the medieval world.

Keywords: Central Asia, Turkey, International Social Capital, Network Actor, Influence.