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ELENA DMITRIEVA. THE IMPACT OF THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN UKRAINE ON THE GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION IN THE CASPIAN REGION.
Condensed abstract.

Keywords: Russia, security, Caspian region, post-Soviet space, geopolitics, Special military Operation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, national interests, USA.

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Dmitry A. Belashchenko, PhD(Hist.), Associate Professor and Vladimir V. Sikirazh, undergraduate, Institute of International Relations and World History of Lobachevsky University [1], analyzing the situation in the post-Soviet space in the 21st century, note its significant change associated with both the development of internal processes and the influence of external factors. The authors believe that the region is faced with fragmentation and a de facto split based on the confrontation of European and Eurasian integration projects (the “dilemma of integrations”), with numerous color revolutions, with the escalation of frozen conflicts and the emergence of new “hot spots”, with territorial changes and other serious shocks.

According to the authors, with the development of the crisis in Ukraine and the new stage of the “dilemma of integrations”, Russia's space for maneuver in the post-Soviet space was seriously narrowed and it faced the choice of a further model of behavior in the region. In the first variant, ignoring the constant interference of non-regional actors in the traditional geopolitical and geo-economic spheres for Russia (the Caucasus, the Caspian region, Central Asia, etc.) would eventually lead to the “resignation” of Russia without the prospect of their further

restoration. The second option assumed active resistance to the expansion of the collective West.

Russia's actions demonstrated that a bet was placed on the gradual implementation of the second option. However, this process was significantly complicated by the impact of the crisis in Ukraine, which aggravated the split of the post-Soviet space, and also affected the positions of the leadership of Moscow's key partners – Belarus and Kazakhstan. First of all, it concerned the perception in these countries of the events in the Crimea and Donbas, since the elites of the post-Soviet states have traditionally been wary of any geopolitical changes in the region.

In general, there are two key areas in which Russia has intensified its activities in the post-Soviet space. The first was directly related to the Ukrainian crisis, in which Moscow acted as one of the main actors, while not formally being a party to the conflict in the Donbas. The second direction of Russia's policy in the post-Soviet space was the implementation of the Eurasian integration project with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union. The intensification of the construction of the Union State of Russia and Belarus at the end of 2020 also deserves special mention. In addition, Russia has strengthened cooperation with its strategic non-regional partners within the SCO and BRICS, which also contributed to strengthening the status of the leader of the post-Soviet space.

Based on the analysis, the authors conclude that with the beginning of the Special military operation of the Russian Armed Forces on the territory of Ukraine, the “stakes in the game” in the post-Soviet space were maximized. Both the future status of Russia and the balance of power in the post-Soviet space and in the current system of international relations as a whole largely depend on the outcome and final results of the current stage of the Ukrainian crisis. The prospect of the existence of the post-Soviet space as a single region depends precisely on the results of the SMO.

The article by Vladislav V. Kondratyev, Post-graduate student, Astrakhan State University. [2] dwells on the key aspects of the impact of the current events in Ukraine on the geopolitics and security of the Caspian region. The author believes that with the beginning of the Special Military Operation (SMO) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, the global world order that developed after the Second World War entered the stage of radical restructuring. Russia is moving from words to deeds, gradually increasing its activity to defend national interests along the perimeter of its borders. The first serious step in this direction was the 2008 operation in Georgia, and six years later Moscow did not allow the hostile political regime in Kiev to establish its presence on the western Russian borders. In 2020, Russia provided support to the leadership of Belarus during an acute political crisis. And in January 2022, the CSTO forces led by Russia did not allow destabilizing the situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan, with which Moscow has the longest land border in the world. In this regard, the actions of the Russian side in Ukraine in 2022 are a logical and predictable step in response to the hostile actions of the Ukrainian authorities.

In the emerging realities, according to the author, it is important to understand how the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will affect the situation in the Caspian region – one of the most important and complex from the point of view of geopolitics and geo-economics. If from the middle of the 18th century to the 1990s of the 20th century. Russia, and then the USSR, together with Iran, actually “controlled” the Caspian region, then as a result of the appearance on the world map of “new” independent Caspian littoral states – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – the transformation of the Caspian geopolitical space took place. The Caspian countries faced a number of unresolved problems: the international legal status of the Caspian Sea, a complex of national and regional problems of political, economic, social and environmental nature, an increase in the conflict potential of the

region, the processes of militarization of the Caspian Sea due to the active rearmament of the naval forces of the Caspian states.

The new stage of hydrocarbon production in the Caspian Sea, which began in the first half of the 1990s, aroused geopolitical interest among the world's leading countries. American companies were among the first to come to the Caspian region. Further, the European Union, China, India, Turkey, Arab countries, etc. showed interest in the region.

Ukraine also had a certain influence on the geopolitical situation in the Caspian region. After the aggravation of Russian-Ukrainian relations in 2013–2014, the well-established transport and logistics ties between Ukraine and its trading partners in the post-Soviet space were disrupted. Ukraine was no longer able to use Russia's transport infrastructure to supply goods to the Central Asian and South Caucasus countries, and its trade with Iran was also significantly hampered. Kiev was forced to step up the search for new areas of trade with its partners that would exclude the need to use Russian territory. At that time, Ukraine had high hopes for relations with Iran, from which a number of sanctions were lifted at that time. The trade turnover between Iran and Ukraine has started to grow steadily. Transport, energy and agriculture have become the most dynamically developing spheres of cooperation between the states.

With the participation of Ukrainian and Iranian transport companies, the development of a number of promising international transport corridors (ITCs) has begun. As an example, the South-West corridor created by India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Poland can be cited. This project is a direct competitor to the North-South ITC passing through Russia. At the same time, the Ukrainian side took measures to become a member of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which involves the development of trade and economic ties between China and the European Union countries by transit through the territory of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, bypassing the Russian territory. Ukrainian officials

have begun work on cooperation between the railways of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine to develop a railway route from China to Europe via the Caspian Sea. With the help of Azerbaijani ferries in the Caspian Sea and Ukrainian ferries in the Black Sea, it was supposed to develop a single route and send all cargo from the Caspian Sea through Ukraine.

The Ukrainian side also pinned certain hopes on cooperation with Turkmenistan, whose leadership in recent years has been actively working on the development of transit transport infrastructure designed to deliver goods to the countries of Central and South Asia, primarily to Afghanistan. However, the SMO, which began in February 2022, nullifies in the foreseeable future all Kiev's efforts to integrate into the scheme of transport and logistics routes on the Caspian Sea.

Another important issue in the context of Russia's conduct of the SMO in Ukraine is the prospects for the development of relations with partners in the Caspian region. The economic sanctions imposed on Russia will contribute to the deepening of relations between Moscow and Tehran. The spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, indirectly expressed understanding and support for the motives that prompted Moscow to make the decision to conduct the SMO in Ukraine. And following the results of the Iranian President's visit to Moscow at the end of January 2022, it should be expected that Russia and Iran will significantly increase trade in the near future.

As for Russia's immediate neighbors in the region, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, further cooperation should also be expected here. Moscow's recognition of the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics did not become an obstacle for the head of Azerbaijan to sign a Declaration on allied cooperation with Russia. Kazakhstan has taken a neutral position in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but the country's authorities do not refuse further cooperation with Moscow in the Caspian Sea in the field of extraction and processing of Caspian oil and gas resources.

When analyzing the impact of Ukrainian events on the situation in the Caspian Sea, one should also take into account the factor of the US regional policy, which is likely to be used to enhance cooperation with the countries of the region in the trade and economic sphere, as well as on security issues. A few days after the start of the SMO, on the initiative of the American side, a high-level online meeting was held in the C 5+1 format with the participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan M. Tleuberdi, the heads of the Foreign Ministries of Kyrgyzstan R. Kazakbayev, Tajikistan S. Mukhriddin, Uzbekistan A. Kamilov and US Secretary of State E. Blinken. The details of the discussion were not covered, however, according to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, the parties discussed topical issues of the international and regional agenda, including the situation in Ukraine and its impact on the Central Asian region. It is possible to get an idea of the tone of the negotiations based on the assessments given by American experts on the Caspian region. A former American diplomat, and now a member of the Board of Trustees of the Caspian Political Center R. Hoagland said that the independent countries of the Caspian region are in danger of extinction, need immediate protection and the moment has come when the US government should show them support and, against the background of the events taking place in Ukraine, should take real actions to strengthen its political and economic positions in the Caspian.

Summing up the above, the author of the article draws the following conclusions:

Firstly, the armed conflict in Ukraine draws a line under Kiev's efforts to gain a foothold in the Caspian Sea as a trading partner of the countries of the region.

Secondly, the events in Ukraine are likely to contribute to a significant deepening of Russian-Iranian cooperation, both in the Caspian region and in other areas.

Thirdly, Russia's traditional partners in the region – Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan – can benefit from the large Russian business that has fallen under sanctions, which will

be interested in new major economic projects with the Caspian countries.

Fourth, it should be expected that the United States, in order to preserve the geopolitical positions created in the Caspian Sea over the past three decades, will intensify contacts with the countries of the Caspian region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia on economic cooperation and security issues to prevent their transition into the sphere of influence of Russia.

VALENTINA SCHENSNOVICH. SOCIO-POLITICAL
INSTABILITY IN KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN.
Condensed abstract.

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