
PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

IGOR DOBAEV. THE CAUCASIAN MACROREGION
IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

*Keywords: Abkhazia; Azerbaijan;
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North Caucasus; Islamism; geopolitics;
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Abstract. The article examines the geopolitical processes in and around the Caucasian macroregion, identifies the interests of the world and regional centers of power in the Caucasus in historical retrospect and at the present stage. The significance of the region for Russia in the past centuries and at the present time is analyzed. The dynamics of foreign and domestic policy in the post-Soviet period of sovereign and

partially recognized states of the South Caucasus is considered. Groups of conflict-causing factors in the North Caucasus are identified, the role of the federal center in overcoming them is determined.

The important strategic and commercial position of the Caucasus (North and South) put it at the center of the struggle between the great powers from earliest times: Ancient Greece and Persia, Rome and the Bosphorus kingdom, Sassanid Persia and the Arab caliphate, the Khazar Khaganate and Byzantine Empire.

In the 14th-17th centuries the Caucasus turned into an object of rivalry between the Persian Empire and the Ottoman one and its vassal – the Crimean Khanate. Russia, being in a weak military and economic state, built its policy in the Caucasus, playing on Persian-Ottoman contradictions. A qualitative change took place at the beginning of the 18th century, during the Caspian campaign of Peter I in 1722. During this period, the Caucasus turned into the most important foreign policy problem for Russia, and the task of joining the Caucasus to Russia came at the fore.

For Russia, the Caucasus has always been an entity, first of external and then of internal geopolitics, but at the same time it was an extremely controversial conglomerate of peoples and territories with various socio-economic and cultural levels of development, polyconfessionality, mentalities, and the severity of social intra-ethnic and interethnic struggle.

The Russian-Ottoman wars of the second half of the 18th century led to the annexation of Crimea to Russia, the transition to the sphere of influence of Russia of part of the Caucasus and the Northern Black Sea region. The victorious Russian-Persian and Russian-Ottoman wars for Russia and the Patriotic War of the first half of the 19th century predetermined for the Russian Empire the status of a superpower of that time. The conclusion of peace treaties with Persia and the Ottoman Empire (Bucharest – 1812, Gulistan – 1813, Turkmanchay – 1828, Andrianopolsk –

1829) secured the transition of the Caucasus under the jurisdiction of the Russian Empire.

The furious reaction of Great Britain to the annexation of the Caucasus pushed Russia to the forced establishment of control over the region and the introduction of military and civil administration of the empire here. This became one of the reasons for the Caucasian War (1817–1864), in which Russia had to militate not only against the imamate of Shamil and the Adyghe of the North-West Caucasus, but also the intervention of the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, Polish, Hungarian and other European revolutionaries and adventurers. The situation was especially aggravated during the Crimean War of 1853–1856, when external forces sought to use the Caucasian issue to implement plans to dismember Russia. However, the goal, despite the military defeat of Russia, was not achieved, which was reflected in the decisions of the Paris Congress of 1856, which recorded the belonging of the Caucasus to Russia as an international legal reality. Another attempt by the Ottomans and the British supporting them to solve the Caucasian issue by force (1877–1878) ended in failure for their initiators. Thus, the Caucasus issue for Russia has shifted from a foreign policy problem to a state of domestic geopolitics. This was contributed by the successes of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus.

In 1783, Tsar Kartli and Kakheti (the eastern territories of present-day Georgia) Heraclius II signed the treaty of Georgievsk, calling Russia for help in the fight against Persia, thereby ensuring the protectorate of the Russian Empire. In 1801, this kingdom was abolished. Other territorial entities in Georgia became part of the Russian Empire on their own, including Abkhazia. Gradually, the entire territory of Georgia became part of Russia as the Tiflis province.

As for Azerbaijan, it should be noted that in the 18th–19th centuries a number of state entities appeared on the territory of modern Azerbaijan, Armenia and Persian Azerbaijan (mainly khanates with Turkic dynasties). Totally there were 24 of

them, including Baku, Derbent, Karabakh, Nakhichevan, Erivan and other khanates.

After the accession of parts of these khanates to Russia (except for the Persian province of Azerbaijan), Baku, Elizavetpol and Erivan provinces appeared on the territory of modern Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The revolutions of 1917 and the ensuing civil war changed significantly the geopolitical situation in the Caucasus. In Transcaucasia in 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was proclaimed (mainly on the lands of the Baku and Elizavetpol provinces and the Zakatala district), the Armenian Republic, the Georgian Democratic Republic. Nationalists came to power: Musavatists in Azerbaijan, Dashnaks – in Armenia, Mensheviks in Georgia. During the same period, British troops intervened in the region.

However, already in 1920, parts of the Red Army entered the territory of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the process of Sovietization of Georgia began a little later, in 1921.

In December 1922, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia formed the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, which that same year became part of the USSR. In 1936, the TSFSR was abolished, at the same time union republics were formed – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Thus, the borders of all Transcaucasian republics were formed in Soviet times.

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet state in 1991, three sovereign states appeared in the South Caucasus – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. The region moved to the zone of foreign geopolitics of Russia, and the North Caucasus remained part of the Russian Federation. The total area of the states of the South Caucasus is a little more than 185 thousand square kilometers, and the total population is about 17 million people.

Nationalists come to power in the states of the South Caucasus. In Azerbaijan, after a short period of rule by the former communist functionary Ayaz Mutalibov, in June 1992, the leader of the nationalist Popular Front of Azerbaijan Abulfaz

Elchibey appeared, during this period of time there was a fierce Nagorno-Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time, Azerbaijan suffered a military defeat, and Nagorno-Karabakh and a number of Azerbaijani regions, wholly or partially, come under the control of Armenia.

In 1993, Elchibey was replaced by the former Soviet functionary Heydar Aliyev, in 1994 peace agreements on Nagorno-Karabakh were signed in Bishkek. However, under the control of Armenia, as it was already noted, not only the territory of Karabakh remained, but another 7 regions of Azerbaijan (2 of them partially), which amounted to 12% of the territory of this state. After the death of Heydar Aliyev in 2003, his son, Ilham Aliyev, became president.

In Armenia, the first president was the liberal-minded Ter-Petrosyan, then he was replaced by representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh – Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan.

In Georgia, the first president was the nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who held a course for the construction of a state – an ethnonation. As a result, in 1991–1992 the South Ossetian war, and in 1992–1993 the Georgian-Abkhaz war took place, which ended in the defeat of Georgia. In 1993, Gamsakhurdia was killed, and in 1995, the former Soviet functionary Eduard Shevarnadze became president. He, in turn, was overthrown in 2003 during the so-called “rose revolution,” and the pro-Western politician of the new formation, M. Saakashvili, became president. As a result of his military adventure against South Ossetia in August 2008, the Georgian army was defeated, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia finally seceded from Georgia, becoming partially recognized states.

Serious changes in the political systems of the states of the South Caucasus occurred in the second decade of the 21st century.

In Azerbaijan, since 2016, the top-down governance has been strengthened. The results of the referendum, held on September 26, 2016, allow the president to be elected an unlimited number of times. Several posts of vice president were

introduced, as a result, Aliyev's wife Mehriban (Pashayeva) became first vice-president. Thus, the alliance of the leading Azerbaijani Aliyev-Pashayev clans was strengthened. Even earlier, many Western and pro-Western NGOs and NPOs were liquidated, and their leaders went to prison, and then some of them were expelled from the country. All this, along with positive economic indicators, has improved the situation in and around Azerbaijan (relations with Russia, Turkey). However, relations with Iran were mostly uneven, once again they were complicated in the fall of 2020 due to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, initiated by Azerbaijan with large-scale and diverse support of Turkey. The Turkish Republic is the main partner of Azerbaijan, acting on the basis "one people - two states".

In Armenia, on the contrary, in recent years, the weakening of the top-down system has been marked. Serzh Sargsyan, hoping to keep power, started to change the form of government from presidential to parliamentary. As a result of this process, a "velvet revolution" took place in Armenia in 2018 and a representative of the non-systemic opposition, Nikol Pashinyan, who took office as a prime minister, came to power with the support of the West, primarily the United States. Given the unsatisfactory economic situation in the republic, social protests brewed up, there was launched a serious strike against country's armed forces. Therefore, Armenia's decisive defeat in the next war for Nagorno-Karabakh is not surprising. Russia's positions in Armenia are provided by a military base located in Gyumri. However, in general, we can talk about the turbulence and instability of political processes in this republic. The reasons for Armenia's defeat in the last war are diverse: political – including the leadership's orientation towards the United States, the deterioration of relations with Iran and to a certain extent with Russia, the military, economic ones, etc. It should also be mentioned the current effective system of power in Azerbaijan and the flawed in Armenia. The consequences of the defeat of

Armenia in the war for Nagorno-Karabakh may worsen in the near and mid term.

In Georgia, M. Saakashvili, after two terms of the presidency, as well as later in Armenia, decided to reformat the republic into a parliamentary state. However, in the 2013 elections, the United National Movement party led by him lost the parliamentary elections to the opposition bloc of Georgian Dream parties led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. In November 2020, the elections are again won by representatives of the Georgian Dream. In reality, the republic is led not by parliament with the prime minister and president, but by oligarchs led by Ivanishvili. The socio-economic situation in Georgia is complicated, and the leadership continues its course towards joining NATO and the EU. Accordingly, the main “ally” of Georgia is the United States.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, after the defeat of Georgia in the five-day war in August 2008, were recognized by the Russian Federation and then by a limited range of other states, thus becoming partially recognized states. The territories of these countries are small and the population is small. However, they have serious geostrategic significance. South Ossetia is a territory located in the central part of the South Caucasus, and Abkhazia has access to the Black Sea, occupying about 200 km of the coastline. The national security of these states is ensured by the Russian Federation, deploying its military bases here.

At the same time, the socio-political and socio-economic situation in the republics is far from ideal. This is especially true of Abkhazia. 14 years have passed since the recognition of this state, but the socio-political and socio-economic situation in the Republic of Abkhazia is still replete with turbulent processes. The main reasons, in our opinion, are as follows: a multi-ethnic population in Abkhazia, all the authority of political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of the Abkhazians. In turn, this indigenous people are divided by political preferences, economic interests, orientation towards certain

leaders, etc. As a result of the internal struggle of the Abkhaz elites, the political situation in the republic is not stable, and the violent, in fact, change of leaders does not lead to positive results. Thus, we can talk about the turbulence of Abkhaz domestic political processes. In addition, it should be borne in mind that for centuries Abkhazians adhered to pagan beliefs. Until now, there are priests in the republic who perform priestly (profane) rites. They enjoy authority in the Abkhaz environment and have a certain influence on the dynamics of political processes in this state.

It can be safely said that turbulence is an integral part of the political processes in Abkhazia. Relatively calm periods are accompanied by protest activity of opposition forces. One of the reasons for these shocks, in our opinion, is the archaic structure of socio-economic and political life, which is a factor in the self-regulation of Abkhaz society, since the "façade" power institutions cannot function effectively and ensure the well-being of the state.

In the South Caucasus, it seems that there is no leader state. In this regard, any regional integration is hardly possible here. The states of the region are not, and will not be able to become subjects not only of global, but even of regional geopolitics. In reality, they act as objects of ongoing geopolitical processes. There is a struggle for geopolitical dominance between global (Russia and the West, mainly the United States) and regional centers of power (Turkey, Iran, as well as an unconventional player in this field – Saudi Arabia and some Gulf monarchies in the footsteps of its foreign policy). Russia maintains allied relations with Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the United States is strengthening its influence in Georgia, for Turkey Azerbaijan is the main geopolitical partner. As for the KSA, it is trying to strengthen its position in the region by stressing on the Islamic factor.

Another part of the Caucasian macro-region is the North Caucasus, by which, in an abbreviated form, we will mean the

territories of the national republics that are part of the North Caucasus Federal District (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia) and the Southern Federal District (Adygea). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, separatist processes were recorded everywhere, the apogee of which was the famous events in Chechnya.

Currently, after the collapse of separatist projects supported by external forces, the situation in the North Caucasus has improved markedly. Nevertheless, albeit with less destructive potential, the following blocks of conflictogenic factors continue to exist: political (until the end, not resolved ethno-political conflicts, ethnoethatism and ethnoclanism, the presence of divided peoples, etc.), socio-economic (falling industrial production, high unemployment and, as a result, many social problems) ethno-confessional (politicization of ethnicity, outflow of the Russian population, the emergence and development of a radical Islamist movement that has grown into religious and political extremism and terrorism, hiding behind Islamic creed) and demographic-migration (as a result of increased demographic activity, there is an increase in migration flows, both within a particular republic and beyond the framework of the North Caucasus region). Of course, the potential of these conflictogenic factors in recent years, thanks to the policy of the federal center, has been steadily declining, but they have not disappeared anywhere, becoming only latent.

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KSENIA ATAMALI. RELATIONS BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND TURKEY: GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS.
Analytical review

Keywords: Turkey; Azerbaijan; Caspian region; foreign policy; post-Soviet space; regional policy, energy policy; conflict; pipelines; oil; gas; second Karabakh war; Contract of the Century.

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Abstract. The review primarily analyzes the relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey in the field of energy, geopolitics and economics.